

AGE EXCHANGE UK

INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTINA PAMMENT

I: Pamment

C: Pamment; that's because I was the wife of an Englishman, but it's a really rare name even for England. Well I was born in Croom, County Limerick, on 15th December 1929.

I: You were telling me about the one roomed?

C: Yes. We had what was called a labourer's cottage with an acre of land. But most of our neighbours lived in baked mud hut cottages, which had maybe one window, rather tiny, a fireplace, a mud floor, and that was it. And in some cases and in one I know in particular, we were quite friendly with there was a man and his wife, and twelve children in this tiny dark hall; the only light and heating was an open fire, and you had an oil candle, or whatever.

I: So they had to eat, sleep and cook and everything?

C: In one room, which didn't have a stone floor; it was made of pure baked mud, the walls were mud, and I think there was the odd landlord, I think they were priced about four pence a week, but they very rarely got the rent because nobody had any money anyway. So I think I was born in the Ireland just after self-government, and the poverty, I suppose, could be almost compared with the third world of today. Children walked a distance of maybe six to eight miles to school in bare feet in summer or winter, and I remember the lunch given out by the nuns was one currant bun. Now that was the survival rate, and the child might have left home about half seven in the morning and got home about five in the evening. I would say the staple diet of most of the people in that day was bread and butter and cheese with maybe a shilling's worth of boiling beef on Sunday, and the odd bit of veg. As I say, lucky we had an acre, so my father grew veg. But I'm still vegetarian because of that meat was really a great luxury in those days.

I: When you're speaking about the nuns, I'm told a lot of people at the national schools were taught by nuns?

C: Oh yes they were. I was educated at the national school by nuns. They did their best to the tiny Children; they used to give them hot cocoa; which was from three years old to about seven. Christmas time they might issue what they called a chemise in those days, which was a handmade garment; or they might give the poor family a pair of boots. Now I remember in my school because there were mixed children at the junior time that the richer children got toys, and I always thought why we never got toys. We always got a pair of boots or a useful jumper.

I: Was this from the nuns?

C: This was from the nuns, and it was the junior school that I went to up 'til I was seven years old. We were educated completely in our own language.

I: You mean the nuns - this was a national school?

C: That's right.

I: I suppose the nuns must have known the background of the families?

C: Oh yes.

I: And gave the rich children toys, and you?

C: What was more useful.

I: Which clothes did you fall into?

C: I fell in between, in between mostly. My father had been in the British army in the First World War, so he had a basic pension, which was very small. I think about five shillings a week. Which was our only income, apart from he did something which was called plucking, which is very old fashioned; he was known as Tom the Plucker, he went around in season and plucked some geese, which you need a ten bob start, and bought the down then sold it. So we had periods of the summer when we were quite well off. Christmas he would pluck the turkey, and in between we had this five shillings a week, which meant your only new clothes apart from these convent made awful garment was your first communion outfit, and your confirmation outfit.

I: Can you remember any specific?

C: I remember how I said the decorated Christmas tree in what was called First Class which would have been the seven years old and I remember we opening the presents given by the nuns, and I remember looking very enviously at the toys and the dolls given to the richer children, while I got a pair of hobnail boots; or if I didn't qualify for that, I got a homemade skirt, or something like. And I remember feeling terribly deprived. I know my parents did try to make some kind of Christmas, we had mottos and all, and perhaps jelly and custard, which was quite a big thing. I remember once, I said.

I: You had?

C: Little mottos; Happy Christmas, cost about a penny. And then the local grocers, whom you bought your groceries for the year, generally gave the poorer families some food for Christmas. I remember once, when it was Christmas time, somebody came, I said; "We're having a party with custard." I think that sums up the custard being a very rare treat in those days. It sums up the Ireland of my childhood. But amazingly enough, my father whom I was the eldest child, and he was 43 years old when I was born was able to read and write; it seems strange in those days.

I: Your father or your younger brother?

C: My father. And he didn't marry until quite late in life, because he was the only son of a widow, and I was his first child, the eldest of five children. But, taking all that in, I don't remember my childhood in Ireland as being unhappy.

I: You mentioned about communion; can you remember that?

C: I remember quite well. I had pneumonia and pleurisy twice as a child, which was almost a fatal disease in those days; I lost a brother with this. And so it was decided 'cause I'd had six months off school, I could have communion just after my sixth birthday which I remember quite well, I came out from hospital about three weeks before, and I got a new white dress and a veil, and the shoes. I don't know how my parents got these things, but I remember that for that one day you were dressed up.

I: A long white dress?

C: No, mine was short, and somebody.

I: Was it customary to have long or short ones?

C: Well, it depends on how much you could afford, really. But it didn't really matter because I thought I looked quite okay. And then such people as could afford it gave you pennies, which was part of the communion process. And the nuns gave you a sort of a breakfast on your communion day, which was cake and all that. So communion was great. It's not a religious memory for me; it's memories of new clothes, and a party, and the spending money a lot of which I gave to my mother, I remember, because don't forget I was the eldest of five children. But that was the high note.

I: Did you have a special communion cake?

C: No. The nuns gave us sandwiches and little cakes in the school after the communion, and that one time was a great leveller, because whether you were rich or poor, you had the same simple fare after your communion. And don't forget, this was when you were at that time only six years old I started school at three and I did very well at school.

I: Started at three; that was very young?

C: That was young. I went to school at three, so I was very bright pupil, and I was the best girl in the class, you know.

I: Was Irish very important?

C: We were educated entirely which I'm sorry it's not like that now in our own language; Irish, apart from English composition. So everything, arithmetic I still add up in Irish.

I: Do you think it was normal for kids to be educated through the medium of Irish?

C: Yes, all the schools were. You had no choice in those days: don't forget, we'd just come into self-government, and it was important we got our identity back. And I found no trouble learning tables, sums, arithmetic, or anything, in Irish, or even to go to whatever even our prayers were said with the nuns. I remember the nuns as being very kindly people; I had no bad memories of the nuns. And we were educated completely which I wish it was so today in our own language. We did have English composition, and English reading.

I: Did some kids find that difficult?

C: No, I don't think so. Like any other school you had bright or not so bright. You got on as best you could. The big problem was, in those days, of course, you had to buy your books. Now it meant that if you had a rich father and the first day of the new term he gave you five shillings which was the average for the whole term's books but if you were like me you had to hope to buy your books from someone from last year, or try and study without the books. It was sort of pennies and tuppence to try and get an Irish book, or whatever. I was very crafty; I used to be very good at school, and from the richer children I used to get an apple or a book or a penny for doing their homework. So I didn't do so bad in getting my books. They had no scholarship then. At the age of seven you went from the infants' school into primary school, where you stayed until your 14th birthday. And I was taught entirely by nuns. We didn't have any drama or music, or art. We did have art in the junior school. We had a very great nun who was a great artist. But we did have a good grounding, I think, in the three R's, and we were taught domestic science, and cookery. But even for that, you had to supply your own eggs for the sponge cake, so there was always this problem of not. And you had to supply the wool for the knitting or the material to make the dress. So again the poor people were at the lower end of the spectrum in all these talents at that time.

I: If you were very bright, then you had no chance of improving your education?

C: No. The only chance they had; there was a program given by the Dublin government at that time, which is supposed to be old stories of Irish folklore, and genuine Irish composition, and certain pupils were picked out to rewrite their essay in a big ledger in Gaelic, and I was the one, one children, was going to be sent to Dublin and kept for some reason 'twas very vague at the time it was a great honour to be able to write your composition into this. And the only other highlight of the year, which I suppose, doesn't sound bad for a catholic was the retreat. We had a three-week retreat, with the fathers giving us damnation! But you did get your meals in the convent grounds for the three weeks. So there for another three weeks we had meat and food and whatever, because we were walking around, supposedly, in silence all day, and listening to these sermons on hell and damnation and chastity, or whatever, for the three weeks. So then again, you looked forward to these meals prepared by the nuns, and served in their laundry, I remember.

I: Served in their laundry?

C: Yes, with sweets. And we had lamb sandwiches and cakes; again the famous jelly and custard. I remember this was another sort of treat. There were trees, which we walked around in the convent.

I: Do you remember any particular retreat?

C: Yes.

I: How old were you when you went on these retreats?

C: We started going when we were about eleven. And as you know, education, or sexual education, or adult education was an unknown quantity in those days. Nobody knew anything about what was going to happen. And me more than any. But all you went these retreats, and you heard these sermons about; you must never sit in a room alone with a boy, and all the rest of it. And I didn't know a word what they was saying. But I remember one particular retreat, somebody, obviously, who knew better than I did, tittered. And we were all punished. Every one of us got six slaps, because nobody would own up to laughed, and whatever this minister was saying which was completely over my head; I didn't know what he was talking about to start with but we were all punished because somebody gave a titter at this reference to a meeting between a boy and a girl. Now I remember in those days I wouldn't know what the word S.E.X. stood for, nor would anyone else where I came from. As a matter of fact I never knew anything like things like menstruation; neither my mother told me, neither did the nuns tell you. The only thing you were told was that you must never be alone in the same room as a boy. And I thought that's how you got pregnant. I remember when I got a bit older, and our only entertainment was going to the pictures which was on a Sunday afternoon so I'm a real cinema buff which was ha'pence to go in; and if it was a suitable film we were allowed to, Shirley Kennedy, Deanna Durban, and all the rest of it. And that when I was fourteen the fourpenny dance was the highlight of entertainment. And when I was younger, the matinee on Sunday afternoon. They mainly showed children's programmes: Shirley Temple, Diana Durban, that sort of thing. So somehow or other our parents would try and scrap, or we do errands to get this tuppence to go. And if we didn't have enough money, the owner was a very nice man called, Old Mr. Hurley, and he always sat in the front row, and he waited 'til the cinema began, and even if you only had a ha'penny then, he took all the children under his wing and we all had to sit near him. And he let us see the pictures. And that's the world I saw, the world of the cinema. The world of evening dresses, the world of musicals. There was only one car in the town, which was a white Rolls Royce, with a chauffeur, which arrived at the local church every Sunday. That was the only car in Croom when I was a child. Nobody else had a car of any kind. There'd be a horse and trap tied up, or the donkey, but there was this one car.

I: So how did you relate with that and the films?

C: Well the films was like a fairy story; it was a world I was never going to be part of. The evening dresses, taxis; it was a wonderment. And I think it did a lot for us. I remember the Sign of the Cross, or things like that. But we found it very entertaining; they were very censored, so we lost maybe half the story half way through censorship. And the other thing was the nuns ran a library. Which, although the books were very censored, it gave me what is still one of my greatest loves; my love of Charles Dickens. Now, in spite of the Anglo-English feeling at the time, I did remember we could get hold of Dickens. And the first book I remember getting from the library, which is still one of my favourites, is David Copperfield; I am born. And I used to read aloud to my father and my mother and a few others who couldn't read. So that was all culture we had. But thinking on, I don't remember my childhood as being unhappy.

I: Can you remember the first dance you went to?

C: I did because the war broke out when I was still a child, in 1939. In Ireland. It was announced on a Sunday morning at mass, and I was terribly frightened; I thought soldiers would come in and shoot us all. But it brought a great boon for the people who lived in

Croom in childhood, because the people who were mobilised for the army by the Irish government and the local security force, was stationed at Bruree, which was about three miles from Croom. And there they had dances on a Wednesday night for the soldiers. So I remember the war as one of the best periods of my life.

I: How did all this fare with the nuns saying that you mustn't be alone with a boy?

C: Well, the nuns didn't know you went to the dances, did they? I mean even your parents didn't know; they thought you were going through the revulsions, you know. But don't forget that during the war period, suddenly people became better off. A lot of men joined the British forces. The Irish government mobilised any able bodied men they could find for the army.

I: I thought Ireland wasn't in the war?

C: Oh yes, but they mobilised every my father was too old every man that was of army age was mobilised and he joined the Irish army. So their wives got an allowance, and they got paid. So everybody who had never had a job; suddenly everybody was working.

I: But what did they join the Irish army for?

C: Well I suppose to protect the ports.

I: Oh, in case of an invasion.

C: 'cause you know Churchill did say he was going to try and take them by force. So there was this big recruiting drive.

I: Was this army going to fight the British or the Germans?

C: I was too young really, I wouldn't know. But anyway, suddenly there was an influx of men from all parts of Ireland coming, and there was a big station at Bruree, which is very near

Croom. And then they had the local people worried, they're too old or too decrepit, would form the local security force. And then they had the younger ones under sixteen in some sort of a boy's army, and they got money. So with the money coming from England, the people who became evacuated back, and don't forget the British government they're paying for the evacuees; the women who lived in Ireland they're like I or you now well they were paid as evacuees in Ireland. There was the money coming from those who joined the British forces. Then there was the Irish soldiers. So suddenly people were a little bit better off.

I: When you say evacuees?

C: They'd pay an Irish woman married in this country at that time, and there was evacuation this country. They evacuated to Ireland, and the British government pay their parent as they would any normal evacuee?

I: To take the children, or whatever.

C: And then many of the young men joined the forces over here, as is well known, and then the rest joined the Irish army. So suddenly the war was a very good time; there was more pictures coming in; there was a lot more money, obviously.

I: More men!

C: And the Glengarry cap, which is what the soldiers wore, was fashionable. Actually, a lot of my friends actually married, so you see as you lived in a village where you knew every man, suddenly there was all these strange men in uniform. Don't forget, suddenly they all had a new army uniform.

I: Could you describe the Glengarry cap?

C: The Glengarry cap was this sort of I can't really say; it was a sort of, you know that one. And you could buy a duplicate for women as well.

I: Was that the one like a pillbox hat?

C: Not like a pillbox; sort of this shape a bit like the American thing, but smaller; called the Glengarry. So you see, suddenly things brightened in Ireland.

I: Can you remember your first dance?

C: Yes, very well. I wore my mother made me a skirt, and I knitted myself a green jumper in my class, and actually I was not bad looking in those days, and I was sort of pretty developed; I think I was thirteen; you would say you were fourteen. And I remember then I had this green, and I had long hair, which was curly; and I quite remember actually, I still have in this handbag a photograph of the boy who took me home. I have it in this handbag now! The band consisted of about three. I kept the picture ever since. He was about fifteen, and I was thirteen. And coming home, he was quite a good singer; he sang with the band, and he sang a song to me coming home, called, "Just a little love, a little kiss." I don't know if you know it. He was a very nice boy. It's a lovely song. I know him now at home, married and all that. I had a terrible broken heart when he got married, I can remember. But that was my first dance.

I: You must have been quite shy of boys in the beginning?

C: Oh yes, very shy. The girls sat one side of the room and the boys the other. And it took a great deal of courage for either sex to ask you to dance. And the band only knew two tunes, which was: "You are my sunshine." and "Cruising down the river." So we had two tunes being played all evening by three not very! But we thought they were great. So we sat all on one side of the room, and the boys on the other. And it wasn't until the girls danced together towards the end of the evening, anybody courage, because if somebody wanted to walk you home they had to ask you for the last waltz. See? So when it got to the end of the dance, that was the only time that you got to dance with a man, and this boy asked me. But anyway my first went off quite well.

I: So did you meet this boy at the dance?

C: Yes, I met him at the dance. He came from a different town, and he walked as near as he could. So that was the great highlight. Now that's all it was, just walking home. And we walked home, and to me that was Clarke Gable and all rolled into one!

I: Did you have to buy drink at the dance?

C: No, not really. It was a little hall amazingly enough, they blew it up. It was the British Legion Hall; it was a little hut thing, and two of the bands were belonged to the army from Kildare, and somebody else. They only knew two or three tunes, but it didn't really matter.

I: Was there any refreshments?

C: Nothing at all. You just had a wooden floor, two wooden benches, and this three-piece band, and anybody who could, like Johnny, would go up and sing a song in between. But I do remember, "You are my sunshine", and "Cruising down the river." And don't forget, they was always two dances in the soldiers, if you get away from your father's eyes long enough to go. But the highlight of my girlhood was the dancehall. Not everybody's, really, you know. The soldiers got paid on a Wednesday, so they came in to Croom; they had no shops or anything. So they either went up to Charlevilleer, or they came in to Croom. You see, that was pay night. I don't know what pay they got, but it must have been a lot in comparison to what anybody else had. So the war in Southern Ireland was a great time. I remember the war as being one of the best times of my life.

I: When you left school, what was your first job? It sounds as if it had been a few years later they would have given you a scholarship to get you into a secondary school?

C: Yes. I did very well. I still get the same accolade now when I go home from my sisters. No, my first job was working as a maid in Hull. It was amazing; I worked 72 hours a week for three shillings a week.

I: Did you want to do that or would you have preferred shop work or something?

C: Well, I would, of course, but that was only given to special people. That was only upper class job. A guard was practically a nobleman; a guard would have two maids. A bank clerk was beyond any bodies dream; and a shopkeeper, again. So this was the aristocracy of the village. A shopkeeper's daughter got a job in another shop. Or any kind of shop. But for people like me, or most of the people there was only one kind of job, and that was domestic labour.

I: Did they have Woolworths then?

C: No. I think they might have had them in Cork or Limerick. But don't forget Ireland had just got its freedom. I remember even, as a child, waking up one night and they were burning some effigy: I never found out what it was. I remember the Blueshirts; they were some sort of a political organisation I never knew what they were about but people were issued with a certain blue material. I think they were a some sort of an in between organisation. They could have been Marxist for all I know, but there was this period of Blueshirts going on. Which is in history. And you've got this piece of material, which my mother made me a dress from it. You just got this free, blue material. I never really know

what political party they were. I remember an effigy being burned at one time. And we even had a town crier. He was called John L. Sullivan after the boxer, John L. Sullivan. So it was a very different Ireland. The greatest sort of amusement my mother used to take us out; naturally children in those days didn't go to bed when they were parents with the idea of warmth and everything else. So you could go to a wake, go to a neighbour's house, or whatever. Weddings, in those days, for anyone who got married during the war, would borrow anybody who happened to have a real wedding ring, and wearing whatever somebody else might lend you. People had to borrow a wedding ring, 'cause you only had a few brass curtain rings. And you also borrowed some clothes to wear, if you had nothing suitable to wear. Because many of the girls took the opportunity to marry the soldiers. And new clothes were an unknown quantity. I mean we had loads of clothing coupons, but no money to buy the clothes with. But usually if you worked for a lady as domestic or something, she might buy you a dress to get married in.

I: How old were you when you started to work?

C: Was 14 years of age, and I worked a 72-hour week in domestic service. They had seven children; they owned a shop in the village, a shoe shop. And they had three servants. I remember it was sometimes eight or nine o'clock at night, they'd be working, waiting on these children, washing dishes. Remember I was only 14 years old at the time. It was 72 hours a week; from about seven o'clock in the morning to seven at night. Some of us didn't get much sleep.

I: You were living out?

C: Yes, I lived at home. And I got the princely sum of three shillings a week for those hours. And maybe some of their cast off clothes, or left over food.

I: What kind of work did you have to do?

C: Well, I was expected to do an awful lot. I helped them do the cooking, but I was expected to do the cleaning, make the bed, pick up after all their children: Be generally insulted by them; I was only the maid. I remember once, there was a knock at the door © and I remember this quite distinctly; there was a knock at the door, and the boss went opened the door, and said I was coming down the stairs; "Oh, it's only the maid." And I remember how demeaning it made me feel. It's only the maid what a nice way to say hello to me. And I remember once, I was holding the baby, because they'd gone out somewhere, and the husband and wife came back for something, and I sat holding the baby, and I was told off afterwards for sitting in front of the boss. Even though I had their six month old baby in my arms.

I: It was the boss's baby?

C: Yes. But because they came back and I didn't stand up when he was in the room, I stayed sitting holding the baby they'd forgotten something I was pulled up afterwards; how dare I sit down in front of the boss.

I: So those people you worked for, they weren't gentry were they?

C: No, they just had a shoe shop!

I: The new rich were they?

C: Well, yes.

I: Were they snobs?

C: Yes, I think there was a great deal of class distinction.

There were some very nice people in the shopkeepers, in as much as they helped the poor by giving them food parcels, and indeed, stuff on the book. I remember, this family of twelve I told you, their father worked for a farmer. Now he got a wage of seven and sixpence a week for a wife and twelve children in those days. I also remember we used to have the fair days, with cattle in the street. And a car used to come up the alley near where our cottage was. And one day a man came up with this big box for me, I was playing in the alley, and he says; "You can have these cakes, they're yesterdays." Now that will give you an idea how demeaning in some ways we were made to feel. For something that was none of our fault. I was lucky to have an intelligent father who I think instilled in me not only the history I'm a great expert of my own country but indeed his own love of Ireland. Because he'd been involved in the freedom struggle of Ireland. And I think that I learned more from my father than I ever did in school.

I: He probably gave you an understanding of why this was happening?

C: Yes, I have given many lectures and written pieces on Irish history, because from my father taught me his own love of Ireland, which I've never forgotten. And he told me a lot of the history.

I: When you was a maid?

C: And I used to be faced, maybe about half past seven or eight o'clock at night, in this horrible kitchen, with these masses of dishes and hardly any hot water, just washing soda to clean them with. And you went in the kitchen obviously because you were no good. And I remember how tired I used to feel, and kind of depressed, 'cause as I say, I was reasonably bright. But at least I had some money and they gave me maybe food or odd clothes to give my parents. I was the eldest and maybe bore a lot of the burden, in a way. So this went on, and I think I eventually the highest I ever earned in my childhood in Ireland, 'til I came to this country, was five shillings a week.

I: So you kept that job for how long?

C: Well, I stayed in that one for a year, then my father thought that I was being too overworked, and I got one with somebody else, who was the local sergeant of the guards wife, who did treat me an awful lot better. My father could see that I was being completely worn down; I was too tired to go the afternoon cinema, after all this. It was much too much for a child to do.

I: Did you have any time off?

C: Sunday. Only Sunday. So you were there all the time and you had to polish their shoes and find their socks, and you were running around, you could be shouted at.

I: Were you allowed to have any control over the children?

C: No, they had control over me. You were only the maid. You had to pick up their shoes, look for their clothes, and things like that. I was even asked to help them with their homework, my father went on the boat for the money for that; "Because no way," he said, "is my daughter going to do your children's home work" And I think that that was the most, I mean, somebody who'd been a maid with a family for eight years might get about eight shillings.

I: Did you ever feel you could do something better than this?

C: Not really, because don't forget I didn't really know anything else. You see the rest of the world was in the local cinema; that was all I knew. And I accepted it; I didn't think it would ever change. My idea of my future life was to get married; because if you weren't married by the time you were eighteen, you were really on the shelf. Get married at eighteen, which I might have done had I not come here and have a cottage, and an equal amount of children. My mother did a lot of the midwifery for the town; it wasn't a trained midwife, but she brought all the children into the world. So I have seen more dead people I'm afraid of them now, I wasn't afraid of them as a child, because we went to wakes and things; this is the only entertainment you had was going from house to house in the evening. I remember wakes very, very well indeed, and the stories, and I remember seeing them laid out you know they lay them out in their beds in white, and there'd be white linen, which was borrowed from somewhere or other. And the candles, and you would get a piece of sweet cake and bread and jam, and maybe relatives come up. It was quite exciting.

I: What stories did they tell at a wake?

C: They were always telling how good that a person was, and there was the usual gold boys who came in, 'cause there was some drink always at a wake. You had to say that you were a friend of the corpse, which when we were fourteen or fifteen we did that up to the hilt. If there was a wake at somebody's house, you'd go up and say you were friends of the corpse. Couldn't very well dispute it. But when I look back now because I've had an unexplained cut of myself I saw an awful lot of children laid out, and heard about the little angels going to heaven. Seems a lot of claptrap to me now. But I remember the nuns and their condolences to these mothers. They used to come up to the house to console the mother, but I think infant mortality rate must have been more. Judging by all the babies I saw laid out. And I took no notice of it whatsoever. I remember one mother. My mother going up to lay my mother laid people out. Consumption was rife. You was considered lucky in those days among the poor if you had a consumptive in your family, because the doctor came once a month from Cork or Limerick, and you were given a food voucher for the consumptive member, which meant the whole family could eat. So having a child, or a member of the family consumptive, again you got, it was a means of eating. It does sound terrible when you think of it now. And consumption because I had it when I came over here and my father never believed it; consumption was then meant to be fatal, and was almost always fatal, it ran rife in those days. But as I say, you did get the extra milk and the extra food. Which was shared between all the family, 'cause people shared everything. And in those days I think that the people in my social class, they shared

everything, and you didn't feel you had to keep up with anyone because nobody had anything anyway.

I: The wake?

C: They used to tell wonderful stories about the things they did. And also about the part they played in the Irish freedom struggle. And stories about their schooling and about the Black and Tans. I learnt. This would be a man or a woman, because men went to wakes; everybody had to go to a wake, or a funeral. And I think I learned the whole history of my homeland at wakes. And don't forget the very famous Eamon Devalera, who lived in Bruree and went to school in Charleville, which was very near my hometown, so he was a very familiar figure to me. And so political rallies of all kinds. So wakes were more or less people were clean. Those sons that I grew up with; revolution's sons don't forget I was in the aftermath. I even remember people saying we were better off under the English. Which meant nothing to me because I was born after that. But some people thought that we were better off under the English. But I think it's a condemnation for all time, on England, the society I was. I can see now the poverty that they walked out and left was unbelievable. There was no accommodation, I remember the first six houses being built in Bruree, and the argument went off that six families might get them out of these mud huts.

I: Because that time the Irish government had no money?

C: No. They built the house, which were two up and two down; they didn't have running water or anything, but at least they were solid. And they built six. You take the population; it's who you knew in the local townsmen that got the house. I didn't find it a bit unusual to go into these mud huts and there'd be twelve children were all sitting on the floor. Basic furniture was what they called butter-boxes and orange boxes. A butter-box was what butter came in. And orange boxes was the basic furniture. And beds were made of © you know threshing and binding, you could get fresh straw. People used to go up when they collected these. Well, people collected that and they filled their mattress covering, so once a year they renewed what they laid on. And in some of these houses I was quite appalled; the bed clothing was old coats and old rags. Now this is the Ireland I was brought up in. That was the way you kept warm. And as you all lived in one room, everybody sleep in one bed. We had one of these cottages with a two-bedder, that they called labourers' cottages. Which are very much in demand, I believe, these days, but in most cases, they had to sleep to keep warm. I do remember as a child, wondering a little bit about the marriage especially this family that had the twelve children wondering why the husband was always drunk and always beating her and she seemed to be always breast feeding a child, and I wondered why people stayed married: That was a great source of wonder to me; what on earth she wanted marrying this guy when all it was bringing was misery. I remember being young enough to realise that marriage wasn't much of a deal in this case. Because he was always beating her, and yet the next day you'd see them together and then maybe she'd have yet another baby. I wouldn't know a pregnant woman from an ordinary woman, because you were not allowed to stand up in a room if you were pregnant even up to the late '50's. If you were pregnant and a strange man came in, you sat in a chair, and you didn't what they call expose yourself in front of a man. Even though you were married. So I wouldn't know, until the child was born, I thought that my mother got them from somewhere. We just heard somebody had a baby. My mother used to make a lot of homemade clothes for them. My

mother used to always lay out the dead. She used to get requests from old ladies "Will you promise, Mrs Wills, to lay me out when I'm dead?"

I: That's why you went to so many wakes?

C: Yes. And the songs. I knew all about life under the English; I heard it all at that time. And I think it's given me a life long love affair with, might be a beautiful, but tragic, homeland.

I: Can you remember any particular story?

C: Not particular. Well I remember a story. My own father was involved in the -Dan Brain's release of Sean Holborn at Lough Lom Bases. My father was one of the people who took part in that. Sean Holborn was one of Dan Brain's friends. As you know, in 1920 they had ten thousand pounds in Dan Breen taken with a friend of my father, and he's mentioned in his autobiography. And my father comes from Tipperary, and he was being taken from Tipperary to Dublin.

I: Dan Breen?

C: No, Sean Holborn. To be incarcerated, or whatever. And Dan Breen and my father four men held up the train at Lough Lom Station. And they got Sean Holborn off; Dan Breen was terribly shot at that time. They went into the local butchers to get the handcuffs off Sean Holborn, and my father actually put Dan Breen in a donkey cart under some hay, and got him away from the people who were looking, and took them all out. It's in the book. Dan Breen's freedom, and took him out and got him away from being recaptured. And that was four men against the whole British armed train full of troops. They arrested him at Lough Lom. So my father was very much involved in the freedom of Ireland. And there was a lot of dissent in my childhood by people who think we should not have left England, I'm afraid. There were the well off people; the people who worked and had the government posts, or worked for the British government, they didn't really want to change status, because even if we got the north back tomorrow, I don't expect it's going to make the businessmen poor. So there were people in those days that I did have a picture here taken of my father were still involved in getting back the whole of Ireland. And during the war there was many threats. We were bombed a couple of times in the war: We got many threats from Churchill to take over the ports. And there was certain amount of fear that even when I went to this place I heard people talking during the war; there was fear that any day the soldiers might come and shoot us all down, because we heard about so much shooting in the battle that my idea of war was being dragged out of my bed and for some unknown reason, us all being shot. And I remember being quite frightened over these stories, because there was apparently some threat by Churchill to take over the ports at that time. I remember that day the war ended quite clearly. I was in Dublin that day. I remember they shot the doctor and there was absolute murder; chaos went on the end of the war, with the people who were celebrating the end of the war. A French restaurant in Dublin; they put up the flag. But they put up the French flag and then the Irish flag, and they did that in Trinity, and the doctor was shot in the grounds of Trinity. I remember being on a tram up there, and holy murder broke out by people wearing red, white and blue, and Irish supporters. So there was a lot of violence on the day war ended in Ireland. I remember that because I was in Dublin that day. I had an aunt up there and I happened to be in

Dublin on the day war ended. I was just visiting. But that's where I was at the end of the war, which didn't really mean a lot to me, but there was an awful lot of violence in Dublin that night, and I know a doctor got shot. And then Trinity put up the English flag and then the Irish flag. So I remember © don't forget there was a lot of Jews in Dublin some people were celebrating the war. And there was a great dissent because Eamon Develera went and gave condolences at the German Embassy. Now, this didn't relate to me personally, but I have very good memories of it just the same. Going back to my childhood, I was working at this very hard work, and my father thought that there was no future and there was no future for me in Ireland in those days.

I: Was this at the second job?

C: Yes. And it didn't seem to be, there was going to be no improvement. I had two young sisters and two younger brothers. And my father felt, well, he was afraid that I would get married and have twelve children.

CHRISTINE PANNETT: SIDE TWO

C: I was just sixteen. I left Ireland in 1946. I was born in 1929, so it was just after my sixteenth or seventeenth birthday.

I: You said it was your father's?

C: Yes, he made the decision. He thought there was no future and he didn't like me working so hard for so little. So I entered and advert in the 'paper myself, for a job as he wanted me to be a nurse, but I was too young to be a nurse but this was to be a sort of a hospital assistant in a private sanatorium, called Holloway sanatorium in Virginia Water in Surrey. Well I sent in my application and I duly got the job, and somehow or other my father found me the fare. It was hilarious my going. But anyway this was all done. My parents collected such clothes as weren't up to much but you can imagine me with my long hair and the ribbon in it, and my little cardboard case. And my mother made a bag with a string on it, to wear round my neck with my money in. And my father gave me they were really upset and he said; "I'm giving you your return fare, so if you don't like it you can come home." I remember being on the boat and taking out this string bag, and somebody was much more experienced, then I said "For God's sake, don't arrive in England getting your money from that." I mean I was too innocent to realise the implications of this. So I travelled from Limerick to Dublin, which was the only way you could go. You had to get a passport and a visa from the Guards in those days. This was in 1946, in September.

I: There must have been quite a few people going?

C: Oh, yes.

I: What was the kind of felling; bitterness, sadness, joy?

C: A few were a bit homesick. Some were looking the world at the picture palace, as it called in those days. Don't forget, that's what I was going to see; like these lovely luxurious houses and all. So I travelled by train directly from Limerick to Dublin, and found

my to Holyhead, where we had this endless queue of mothers, with babies, and people with bundles. And it seemed as if we queued there for hours. We eventually got on the boat.

I: Did you have to have your suitcases examined?

C: No. There was just this great big queue. Because everybody was getting on the boat. And so we went on the boat, but the boat was only a wooden ruin.

I: I wanted to know about that boat; this was the ferry to Holyhead?

C: That's right. We were just around there like cattle. There was a few benches; some mothers with young babies; some people from my own town had a young baby, who was going over to join her husband for a long time. But otherwise you stood in this dirty wooden boat, with your bundle or your parcel, or whatever, for this long, what seemed to be a forever journey.

I: You stood?

C: Yes. I didn't have anywhere to sit.

I: There was no lower deck; was there just upper deck?

C: Well, it seemed to be only all these wooden planks wherever you went. You just got on there don't forget we were frightened at first and there was men, women and children; and we were practically packed on there. There must have been some refreshments, for somebody to tell me not to keep taking this bag out to buy a drink. But I would think it was very limited, there was no facilities; I never wanted to go to the toilet not that you could find one. Whether there was one or not I don't know. But I remember it was a horrendous journey, in the dark, in the night.

I: Was it split into first, second and third class?

C: No, I think it was only one class. There was only one boat; there was only one route. You couldn't go from Cork; you couldn't go from Hook Head. There was only one way to go; it was Dublin. Otherwise Cork or Holyhead Head to Rosslare would have been nearer to me. There was only one way you could go and that was via to Dublin boat. Was no other way. And you went in the dark at night.

I: Was the sea very rough?

C: Yes. I don't know; I was so upset because, as I say, I came from a family, which at least there was some warm thing. There was some men singing Irish songs, and some people who had been there before, including the girl who told me take this home made handbag off of my neck. And if you can imagine, my hair had never been cut, fixed up with a ribbon, with my little suitcase, which, although it was new, my father's put loads of string round it as well. And he told me to keep the money. I still keep my fare home in a draw. My sons say; "Why do you keep this much money on you?" He said; "This is your fare; if you don't like it come home. We won't make you stay." And the wage I was going to get was enormous; I was going to get twelve pounds per month. That to me was an absolute

fortune. We eventually arrived in what I now know to be Holyhead I didn't know then and we were really packed coming off. And there I got the first note of dissent that has never left me. I heard the first English voice was what I now know to be a policeman. And he said; "Irish passports this way." And he went on to say, "If your passport has a harp on it you're Irish." Young as I was I realised that was some way of putting it. I have never forgotten that. It made me angry. And I remember that quite distinctly. And I thought; < Well, they obviously know I'm Irish. So there was this examining of passports and visas going on, by all these policemen. At Holyhead In the middle of the night.

Carting your suitcase, the little bit of money you had, your passport and visa in the other hand, the address of where you had to go to and you remember, I was sixteen year old; child, coming up. So I did feel there was this accent that sounded rather harsh to my ears, telling me that of what my passport would be. And I know that was wrong in some way, though I didn't realise the full implication of it. Eventually we were herded onto the train, which again was for seven and a half hours.

I: You stood on the train?

C: Packed as sardines. It was unbelievable.

I: Do you remember anything that happened on that train?

C: Well, not a lot. I remember a lot of singing and general people who had been there before. Apart from the incidents of me personally talking to people, and this incident about the bag, I don't remember. I just remember that it was really horrific. The first thing I remember was being told about the passport.

I: Were you able to get drink on the train?

C: I don't think well, I didn't have any; I just got inside the door and stayed put. It seemed an endless journey. I thought I was never going to get there. Seven and a half to eight hours. And I'd been travelling since I left home. And I arrived at Euston Station, I remember, about seven, maybe half past seven in the morning. Now, I travelled completely alone; not like a lot of some of the girls who went in groups. There was me and there was all these people speaking in a foreign language, at Euston. And went up to someone to ask the way to Virginia Water I had the address and they said; "You've got to go to Waterloo." Now, I thought it was like this was at home. So I walked from Euston to Waterloo with my bags, asking every step of the way. Most of them didn't understand what I was saying anyway. From Waterloo with my suitcase, and my money, and the address in my hand. And I do remember one rather kindly policeman saying to me; "Have you any bacon in that suitcase?" I didn't know what he meant.

I: The rationing.

C: Yes. And obviously my strong brogue. He said; "Are you sure you haven't got a bit of bacon tucked away in that suitcase." Eventually I managed to find Waterloo. And, following my father's instructions, there was a post office there, so it was to send a telegram to say I'd got that far all in one piece, because they would have been terribly worried. So then I had to get a train to this place, which was Virginia Water in Surrey, and I got in there, but there were some other Irish girls there. So I went in there and I shared a room with four other girls. And in the afternoon © of the same day, I remember I met,

which might have been the housekeeper, or whatever and she said; "You've got to go into Egham, and get your ration book." Well I didn't know what a ration book was, nor did I know where Egham was. So I was told to go out, take a train, go into Egham, and get a ration book. I asked one of the other girls, who told me to go down to the station, which I'd walked up with a suitcase remember I'd been travelling and walking, and was, by this time, dead beat.

I: Did you have a cup of tea, or any refreshments?

C: I had a cup of tea.

I: I mean on the journey?

C: No. I had this cup of tea somebody got me on the boat, because they didn't want me to take this money out. I was told immediately I arrived at where I was staying, to go and get a ration book. So I had to go about one stop into Egham. When I got there I didn't know where I was either. One thing that struck me when I did make this long journey from Euston to Waterloo was all the bombsites. Where was the London of the picture Palace? It was dust and bombs and broken down houses and crowds everywhere. There was nothing nice at all, I can remember seeing. I who came from the land of green trees. And suddenly, where was the wonderful London I was coming to. The whole around Waterloo was bombsites. Everywhere there seemed to be bombsites. It was almost worse than where I came from. It was really bad in those days. There was nothing like what they told me in the pictures, I can assure you, because London really was bad. Dust lying from rebuilding. And I got to Egham, and I didn't know where to go from there, and there were some men working in the road and it was pouring rain, and they happened to be Irish. And that too serves the memories, and I went up and asked. And they were working with no protective clothing, nothing, in all weather, rain pouring down on top of them, laying a new road or whatever, and they were all Irish, and they were working in appalling conditions. I went up to one who looked a bit younger, still got a picture of him as well, and his name was Joe. And he asked one of the guys if he could take me down to get this ration book. Actually, he became my boyfriend. Well, anyway, he took me down and he got the ration book, and he said to me; "You're a very nice young lady." You know in the Irish way. So anyway, I told him where I was staying, because obviously I was used to telling everyone my business in those days. And he was working as a labourer, and he lived in a lodging house; they had army beds and blankets. They had no sheets. And they had whatever washing could be done at the village laundry. And they worked about fourteen hours a day in the most appalling conditions. They had no safety gear and no helmets and no goggles, no nothing. It was just mud, and work and dirt and sand. I suppose they are the kind of conditions that nobody would work in. And then they had the Sunday suit, and their washing they had to have done at the village laundry. And they never had linen in those days, ever. They had army cots for two young brave men, and there were about six of them in a tiny room. Because he became my sort of boyfriend, and he asked me to an Irish dance and things like that. Eventually I settled down in the job. The job wasn't bad: It was a private sanatorium. The conditions were fairly good, and we got meals, and a lot of the other girls were Irish, a few from the north of England. So the job itself was in a nice place.

I: Were you doing domestic work?

C: Yes. I was in the wards helping with the team. The hours were very long, but you got a day off every week, and the people were, on the whole, quite nice. Don't forget, this was a private sanatorium. There not being national health about, still is, isn't it. It still is a private sanatorium in Virginia Water. There was even dances on Thursdays for the mental patients, which we were allowed to go. A mental sanatorium. And they all paid enormous sums of money for these private rooms. So they had entertainment for the patients, which we always joined in, and danced with.

I: Did you get anybody very odd there?

C: Oh no. We had some quite good dances and things. Some people had titles and that.

I: But was there anybody there who was a bit odd?

C: Well, I was too young to go on what they called the Number One Ward, where there was the really bad mental patients. I was too young for that. So they kept me on what they were kind of in between. Well they might've been odd, but to me I thought all the English people were odd anyway. But it wasn't without its laughs.

I: Do you remember any comic incidents there?

C: Well, I remember we used to go in, we used to finish at night, and then we'd go into the local pictures. And I always remember the winter of '47,'46. With the snow it was the worst winter England had ever known. But I mean I was young and there was young male nurses and that; I remember the snowball. And you had to carry your keys on the chain. To get in the main gate you even had a key, and of course, the thing was © I remember when I forgot to take my keys © climbing over the gate to get into the mental; most people wanted to get out of the mental institution. And I remember in what must have been appalling snow, playing snowballs, and there was no heating in any cinemas, or anything, but we still went. I mean it was marvellous: Egham was the nearest cinema, for a penny on the train, only a few coppers to go in, so we, after we were finished work, and then when we got our first months pay we obviously bought [style??] as they called it, after we duly sent half to your parents. You could go, and I remember buying a coat with my very first month's wages. The first new coat I ever had. It was a lovely coat in a lovely mulberry colour, though with my red hair it wasn't the right colour. But I thought it was the most beautiful coat in all the world. And I was told lipstick. I who had never even seen lipstick. And I think how much an orange lipstick and a mulberry coloured coat and red hair went together. Honestly, I thought I was quite beautiful. Well it's easy on the eye, you know! The lovely people from Ireland are blessed with fairly good skin anyway, so I didn't need the rouge. But my biggest fresh thing was this li. And we bought a stuff called Snow Fire for a penny in Woolworths, and the perfume was Ashes of Roses, which was a kind of a combination makeup, with your orange lipstick, and ghastly perfume called Ashes of Roses, and Wild Violets, which was in a little tiny bottle. And duly done up in all this, I felt I was I had a picture taken; with earrings and everything you know. I thought I looked really lovely, you know. Anyway this boy, who was working his name was Joe he took me on my, after I had enough money to buy a dress to go, and choose to go with the coat; he took me up to on my day off to London. He showed me Oxford Street and a little bit of better London than I'd seen in my tramp. And he took me to a place, which was under a cinema in Tottenham Court Road, which was an Irish club. A great big Irish dance hall. In Tottenham Court Road, it was on the left hand side, and you went down stairs, and I

thought it was the most luxurious and beautiful place I'd ever seen. It was full, of course, of Irish people, and it had a band going; oh, it was fabulous. And he took me and bought me a café tea. And had a wonderful time. He took me out.

I: Did they play Irish music?

C: All Irish music, and all Irish people, and it was really luxurious I thought. It was really large, and there were an awful lot of people. So I began to settle down. And I remember the first Christmas, the hospital gave a staff dance and I invited him in as my boyfriend. So I remember it being quite; it wasn't too bad after that. And I send 50% of my salary, which was monthly, back to my parents, and with the rest I gradually began to buy Stylish, you call it, and learned a little bit about fashion and lipstick. And I suppose I became aware that I wasn't too ugly on the eye. Because don't forget, when you work as a maid, you were made to feel you weren't even pretty. Because they were dressed up and you weren't, you had their hand-me-downs, or something, that didn't suit you. You were made to feel ugly as well. I then began to look in the mirror and the latest movie star hairstyles and things. And I realised the advantage of red hair. Because don't forget there are more red haired people in Ireland than any country in the world. So in Ireland it was looked down on, over here suddenly it was something to be admired. So what was so hated at home foxy hair suddenly when I went along I got the whistle for the long red curly hair and things, and I began to realise I wasn't the ugly duckling that I was made of my childhood; that I wasn't too bad on the eye. I remember going in a pub and drinking a glass I'd never been in a pub; father would have died, having glasses of orangeade, and lemonade, and things like that. And there were American soldiers about and Polish soldiers, and it was quite exciting.

I: Did you feel very naughty the first time you went into a pub?

C: Oh yes. Yes. I do remember it. And I remember quite clearly, actually, because there was a very nasty incident in there.

I: Did you go with the boys?

C: No, I went with two of the other girls, into Egham, you see. And we went into the thing and, I think it was maybe New Year's Eve, we went in there, and I remember there were some Englishmen in there, and I've still got a broad Irish accent, no makeup and the long hair, and I remember he caught hold of my bust like that; he just shoved me. I tipped his. I remember that quite clearly. I didn't know why it was wrong, but I knew it was wrong, so I just raised his glass of beer, and it went right over him. Ran. We ran out of that pub as quick as we could. I knew this was something he shouldn't do.

I: He lifted your breast?

C: He caught hold of it. I tipped it then I ran; we ran all the way to the train, then all the way home. Because there was a lot of English swear words. But I did feel that this was in some way demeaning, you know. You never get; we were terribly naive in those days. What we knew about education, gradually. We found it rather shocking in some ways. And terribly homesick. In spite of the affluence and the new clothes, I still, after about seven months, I must admit, I missed home so badly, and I was really, really sick. I went back, after eleven months I went home. And I was really ready to go back for a holiday then. I

was terribly homesick. It was all right the first two months, and then suddenly I missed the people. I mean, don't forget, I went along the streets and said hello to everybody. And then there were these strange people who didn't answer back, who were speaking a language I didn't know. And there was none of the friendliness that I was used to.

I: How did you find going back after being away?

C: Oh great; I loved it. Coming home full of style and all this. Really travelled the world! I had been to England. Well, I remember being terribly homesick, and I couldn't understand these strange people. I remember this man I worked with asked me into his digs once a week. And he handed me a cup of tea without any bread or jam or anything. I thought; < Really; fancy giving you a cup of tea with nothing to eat! Which was unknown in Ireland even now, you'd have to have a piece of bread and butter or a currant cake, you never drink tea on its own. There I was given this cup of tea, and milk. When I was married and my husband's sisters, and they said; "We're having our dinner in the kitchen." And we were shown in the sitting room. And I asked him how old they were, because where I came from, if somebody came in, whatever you were eating, they just drew a chair up and shared whatever you had. And suddenly I was part of this new society, which was so alien. And I didn't really like the English. I didn't like the English people at all.

I: How did you come to marry an Englishman?

C: Well, anyway, I changed jobs. I was old enough to start nursing. And I went to the Brook Hospital, which is in Shooters Hill in London.

I: How old did you have to be to start nursing?

C: Eighteen. And I went there and I lived in. I got a job to train as a nurse. The wages were less than I got as a domestic, funny enough. It was because of the training. That was the hospital for infectious diseases in those days. Again there was an Irish club in Woolwich, where we used to go to a dance, and had an Irish boyfriend. Actually I got engaged to the same boy I first met. Anyway one night I went to an engagement party of one of the girls, to an Englishman. And they were drinking and all that, but I didn't drink. I was very embarrassed; I didn't even know where half of them were staying. Well anyway, it designed that one, she was walking home with her boyfriend, and one man would walk me home. And he was an old man, actually 36 years old, but this old guy was supposed to walk me home. I wasn't nervous, because obviously I knew nothing of fear in those days. And he told me he was a widower you see. And I didn't take much notice of that, either. So that was just an incident. And then he said would I see him again; he lived in a prefab on Shooters Hill. And I used to go out and meet him then tell him I had to be on duty at nine o'clock, and go and meet my boyfriend. It was a great joke with the girls, me and the old widower. And there was me with the old widower, who had a daughter.

I: Where did you go?

C: Well, actually, it was funny; he used to go for a drink and he used to pay for me to go the pictures and we met coming out. Because I wouldn't go in pubs very much. Anyway, he used to talk to me, make me a cup of tea at his prefab. And he thought I was a rather strange person in many ways. And it was a great joke with the girls, me and the old widower. Me being engaged with my mother and father having my picture and all that. I

thought he was the last person in the whole world I would ever marry. And one night I went in and he told me he never wanted to get married again, either, because he lost his wife, she died during the war. And he said he had the perfect wife. He had one daughter who was only nine years older than I was! And she was living with the nuns. So it was just friendship. And then one day, I, the girls, and they wanted to hear all and the other, I said; "I'm going to marry this Englishman." They said; "Does he know?" I said; "Not yet." I told him all this afterwards.

I: So the daughter was nine years older than you were?

C: No, no, she was nine years younger. There was only nine years difference in our ages. So one day I said to the girls, for some reason; think I'll marry this Englishman." She said; "You must be mad, because you're engaged to Joe." I said; "I'll think." And you know why? Because he was a very old fashioned Englishman, like he helped me off the trams; he took my coat; all the things the Irishmen don't do. He carried your shopping; and I began to click on. He also was a very intelligent man. And so I decided, without his knowledge, that I would marry him. Much to the anger of my parents and everybody else there. So I did marry him, on the 5th of October 1948.

I: What did your parents feel about you marrying an Englishman?

C: My father came over. He won him over in the end, and we went back to Limerick to get married. Went back home to get married. But anyway, I married; and I told him afterwards about having the other boyfriend and all that.

I: How did other people react to you marrying an Englishman in Limerick?

C: Well, they didn't seem to mind, because lots of people did that, really. My parents were more against it. I remember I came here in 1946, September, and I got married the 1st of October 1948. So it wasn't long. And don't forget, as he had this fully furnished prefab he'd been married before the war, I had a proper home. Which unlike many of the other girls who got married from the hospital, the nurses were living in furnished rooms. But I had a prefab and a garden. It's a beautiful place, Shooters Hill, because it's all like woodlands behind, and there was only nine years between Anne, my stepdaughter, and I; so we had great fun together. And so we had a wonderful time. But during the years, I did find life with his friends and his relatives, very difficult. I could not relate to them at all. I who was used to a different kind of childhood. But people talk to you; he used to say; "I hate taking you to." because I was going home and hiding myself away, because I didn't understand their drinking, I didn't understand what they were saying, I didn't understand their way of life; it was so alien to me. And I remember he used to say; "She's lovely for the things she says." Whenever I opened my mouth I put my foot in it.

I: Were these a very reserved people?

C: They were very reserved and I mean, I remember going to see his sister, and she said; "We're having our dinner." And we sat in the front room with a cup of tea. Well, at home we would have joined in with the dinner. They were very much a London family. And don't forget, all his brothers being older, I was younger than any of his brothers or sisters wives. So it was a big age gap. So there was this eighteen-year-old colleen and all these older

people who were used to going for a gin and having parties, and things, which I didn't really enjoy. But he used to let me go to a dance on St. Patrick's Night.

I: Did he take you?

C: No, he couldn't, because we had a baby, like I say. But he used to let me go anyway.

I: Could you describe one of those dances on St. Patrick's Night?

C: Oh they were the highlight of the year. You obviously wore something green. And it was packed out, and there was drink going, and lots of boys there. And that was the highlight of the year: We sang the Irish song, and you felt that you were home at least for one night. Living in a culture that was unfriendly and cold. I mean you couldn't © I had neighbours, but you couldn't go in and have a cup of tea. Well you could at home, and just walk in if you were lonely. I find it quite lonely after I was married, very lonely. All my neighbours were English. And Anne was at school, and I was alone all day, and I find it terribly lonely. Whereas at home I could go into anybodies house and sit down and have a chat. Suddenly I was in this isolated.

I: Do you think that would have been different if you had married an Irishman here?

C: Oh yes, because I would have been mixed more with the Irish community, wouldn't I? Don't forget I mixed with all English people, apart from 'til my husband gave his first visit to Ireland after we'd had a child. And then I remember.

I: I thought you said you got...

C: We got married there but that was only a weekend. I remember after I was married I became pregnant. I did lose my first child. And I remember going to the local hospital for an antenatal. And they laid you on the couch, and, laying there, he was saying, the doctor was saying; "Well if you don't open your legs, I can't examine you." I said; "There's no way am I going to do that!" I was sexually naive. I didn't realise what it meant. And I remember I never went to the clinic again until my husband made me go. He said; "You're an Irish woman; you must put your legs up." I thought, "No way". There was two or three doctors there and the woman, and I was absolutely shocked and horrified. And really I can't believe how Irish girls are let out into the world like that. I remember at my wedding I cried for my mother.

I: Because you didn't know anything about it?

C: No. It's a good job I lied there, because I think that I would have had a very failed marriage.

I: Yes, because he would have understood.

C: He was very understanding. Well I remember that the clinic when I was sort of © don't forget this was very hidden at home and I was suddenly exposed to internal examinations, and being prodded around by men; I was horrified. This was the most terrible experience. And I developed something called toxæmia, so I lost the first child; then there was all these doctors. I mean it would have been horrific; my mother brought children into the

world at home. There was only women there, there was no men. And I remember when I was in labour and I was crying for my mother, and I was shouted at; "It's too late to cry for your mother now." But we were so sympathetic kind of people you know. And I remember somebody saying to me; "You'll be alright when you get married," they said, "you'll have your mother there to rub your back." But I'm afraid she wasn't there.

I: Had your mother died?

C: No she was at home. So it was a very alien society indeed.

I: Didn't your other brothers and sisters come over?

C: Yes they did, later. And my brother came to live with me and got married, stayed here 26 years then went back home. Two of my sisters still live here, and my other brother never came at all. My youngest brother, he stayed at home, with my mother until she died. But my brother came to me when he was 17; he married a nurse. And then after 26 years he had enough and he went back.

I: So it seems that Ireland is very much part of you?

C: Yes, I think it is. I 've never become part of the land that I've been in exile for 40 years. I am still 100% Irish. And very much in love with my homeland. And I think it's only now when I've gone back and toured it in comfort, I realise how beautiful it all is. And you must think that in the midst of such beauty, why's there so much trouble, because it took my husband to point out that my house, our cottage, looked onto lovely green fields, a lovely stream running around; you see what I mean? And I have never, never become an English woman. It's amazing; I intend to go home to go home to live.

I: Back to Croom?

C: No, to Limerick I'll go, where my brother is. But I have never really become in 40 years over here; I'm still the same. I have a wonderful relationship with my stepdaughter; I have five gorgeous grandchildren through her. And we get on great together. She had no brothers and sisters, much longed for brother. She absolutely adored him. When she was courting, she lost a lot of boyfriends because of the kind of love she had for my brother. Don't forget she's never had a brother.

I: How many children did you have?

C: I had seven pregnancies, but I've only had two living children. I've had my little girl, but she died the next day, cot death. I've lost a lot to toxæmia. And then the other two were born seven months. Nigel had a speech defect and was born disabled, and only weighed one and three-quarter pounds. Well they actually sterilised me when I was 29 years old, 'cause I had this cord. But, you see, my husband used to say, in the pubs before, when I was pregnant, "Wait 'til you see my bouncing baby boy." He always wanted a son. And I had the baby, and he only weighed two and a half pounds. He was very good looking, my son. I had this boy, and Anne wanted a brother.

I: This is Nigel?

C: This is David. He's also a teacher, head of maths in a big school.

I: Do you think that's what you would have done if they'd had the scholarship?

C: Oh, yes, yes.

I: I just wanted to come back to that: When you talk about school and you said that the national education that you got from three to fourteen, which you reckon gave you a really good, solid foundation.

C: It gave me a good foundation. I could add up quicker. I still can add up quicker than these. And don't forget I was taught to add in Irish. And composition. And we were taught to be imaginative. And I still think that everything that I've achieved here was down to my basic education, and devotion of those Irish teachers in those days. I still think that they gave us a very good education. It was limited, unless you had money to pay for higher education. But I still think that we could all read and write, and I can speak my own language, which very many of the children cannot do today.

I: And were they strict, these nuns?

C: They were fairly strict, but we kind of loved them. Don't forget, nuns are very dedicated teachers, especially the nursery, aren't they? And I still go and have a cup of tea with them when I go home. But I still think that they gave us © considering the poverty of the time © they gave us a good education. For nuns, that was their only vocation in life.

I: When you say they told you imaginative compositions, how would they help you to write the composition?

C: Well, the point is that you were told to write a composition, which I was very good at, and the nuns gave you the ideas, and then they corrected you when you went on. And I think giving us Irish and English composition, and they taught us about Shakespeare, and I read Dickens from the nuns. So really, basic as it was, they ran the little library. But they did give us a sense of history, and they certainly gave us a sense of nationality. I'm very proud to be Irish, regardless of what kind of childhood I had. I still say, well I'm no part of this mongrel race, and have a go at my kids. I still think they did a very good job.

I: One thing that comes over from you; you seem to have been able to tell me the faults in the way that you like, in the system, maybe, about certain ways of being suppressed about sex, not being told anything.

C: Oh that was terrible.

I: Yes. The sermons of heaven and hell, you mentioned?

C: Yes. There used to be also the missionaries come to promote church once a week for the parents. And I remember my mother coming up from one and saying; "None of my girls will ever go outside this door at night; and don't let me ever see any of you talking to a boy." Because really they closed the pictures down for those three weeks of the mission. The picture house closed down for those three weeks, and then the missionaries

would come down, and you were taught to keep your daughters in. You were never supposed to be alone in a room with a boy, or never let him hold your hand.

I: You said you thought when you had your period, you were bleeding to death?

C: Yes. I went up and told my friends that I'm bleeding to death. Well I didn't know.

I: How did your friend say; did she know?

C: She had some idea; she called it the monthly sickness. But that's all I knew. She said; "Girls get a monthly sickness." But that's all I knew; I didn't associate it with pregnancy, or anything. I had never seen a picture of a nude man in my life. I mean when I was first married I went to the bath; if my husband had come in the same bathroom I would have died of embarrassment.

I: But you don't seem to have any bitterness about religion?

C: No, because in some ways, but in a way I think I go back to the affluent Ireland and I would begrudge it. Well I think that in some ways that progress hasn't done all that people think it did for Ireland. I think the Irish people of my day were a happier people. Maybe that's because I was only a child. But I think this keeping up with the Jones's now and having two cars and a television up in the hills: That where you could up to and my grandmother lived in a little village and she put on a goose my mother's mother and all that; that's all gone. Getting a clean dress for Sunday, and a ribbon, and having a bit of green ribbon and a skirt made up for St. Patrick's, that's all gone. And we used to have the platform dances; you know someone with a melodeon would come with the crossroads.

I: What were they?

C: They were great. There was a plank of wood, large plank that was kept in somebody's barn. It would usually be on the Sunday night near the crossroads. The crossroads between Bruree and Croom. And someone would come up with a fiddle or a melodeon, and we did Irish folk dancing. That was great on a summer evening. You had your Sunday dress on, and fixed your hair up, and that was great entertainment. You saw the boys and things, you know. And that's all gone. The community life in those days was visiting each other. My mother went up to someone's house and all the children one night. You see that's all gone now. We never had a lot of trouble. Insurance men walked in and poured him self a cup of tea. Ireland has changed; and some things are better. But they've lost an awful lot as well. They've lost a lot of their identity, I think. And they have lost a lot of the kindness towards each other; the neighbourliness. Whatever status you were, when there was a funeral, everybody closed the door, from the rich to the poor. And everybody went. I think all that's gone. In spite of there being a class distinction, in one way it was classless; when it come to dying, or being married, or being born. This is what I think has gone missing from Ireland. I think that long summer days and a lot of walking, maybe we saw more of our country. I used to hear all these women and kids going telling stories, and we played cards, and we read aloud. I remember my father's sight failing, and I used to read aloud. And I remember a story with any sort of a love interest; I used to skip the pages because I was so shy to read out anything about love to my father. So I think progress might have helped Ireland, but it's lost an awful lot of the enchantment it had. Maybe not so much in

the villages, but certainly in the cities, you know. There's no pride. There's sport once a month, and being drunk, and driving a bicycle without a light.

I: Oh yes; that was the big thing, wasn't it?

C: You could have a bike, or a motorbike and you could see it thrown at the side of the road and nobody would dream of stealing it. We never locked our door ever. I never remember locked doors; I never remember any robberies, any burglaries. There was no child abuse. There was nothing like that in Ireland. We didn't have to worry where your children were in those days, because if they weren't in your house, they were certainly being well cared for somewhere else. So when I go back and see the crime I'm appalled at the Ireland of today. Crime was an unknown quantity. There was one murder case when I was a child, which was in Kilmallock. And I remember this was serialised, this murder case; I mean it was the only one I ever remember in the whole of my childhood. So I remember an Ireland with no crime, with no locked doors, no pinching cars. I remember a very different Ireland. And also I think that the people in my age group, that the Irish government are not aware now that we're dying 10% quicker than any other ethnic minority because of the conditions we go through when we came here. I worked long hours. We send our money back to boost the Irish economy; what do they do for us now? I have made so many applications for a handicapped accommodation at home; because I'm living here I can't get one, because they're not being built now. But without us Ireland would not have and Sean Lemass's ten-year plan to make Shannon a free port Ireland would still have been on the drawing board. We boosted the economy. If you think, I got £12 a month, half of that went, and my father's pension was only five shillings a week. So you can imagine that was riches. So I think that the Irish government and the people who live there today don't realise how much they owe to this. Not just the people that came to England, but to New Zealand, Canada; we left our homes, our families, everything. This was not a glamorous land, England, when I came. Was full of bombsites, and rationing, and a shilling's worth of meat a week. And cooking I didn't even understand; no fresh vegetables. We left all this behind. I think we survived in those days because the food we had was very fresh, potatoes and cabbages, that must be why we all stayed healthy, in Ireland. How else could you survive on a very staple diet, homemade bread and butter and cheese? And then being always hungry, how did we survive, coming mostly healthy and strong. Them men that came over here to work were big guys in those days. Must because the food was dug fresh from the ground and there was no artificial manure. So I think that the Irish government don't do enough for the senior citizens that would like to go back to live and get free travel at home. But I still think that progress, okay, I'd like to see everybody better off, but it's going too much the other way for my liking.

C: ...and dinner on Sunday. And jelly; I'll never forget jelly and custard. It was the highlight, was probably the cheapest dessert people could afford. Halloween was a wonderful occasion as well. We had barmbread, and we had peanuts. And you hung your stocking after winter, and the boy who picked up your stocking you'd marry. If you went up to your bedroom at twelve o'clock and looked in the old cracked mirror, you'd see the face of the man you were going to marry. The lighted candles in every window at Christmas time, all up to the hills: Great big candle; I don't even see them now.

I: Was this in every house, even in the poor ones?

C: In every house, no matter how poor. And when I went home I've been home a couple of times later for Christmas, and I miss the candles. Everybody had a lighted candle. And if you can imagine the hills - there was no street lighting - all in the hills there was all these lights burning all over. And I miss it when I go back. Same for all souls, this is the same thing. And barmbread. There's some wonderful things in my childhood. It was a wonderful life. But as you can realise, I have an ongoing love affair with Ireland, never likely to change.

I: You came from a very good home?

C: Oh yes.

I: How many rooms did you have?

C: Well we had a big kitchen. And then we had two bedrooms of that and we had a loft, and we had an acre of ground. Which was the first labourer's cottage. I remember the first one they ever built was given to Devalera on his second night that he ever came from America. He spent the first night in Bruree in one of those mud cottages himself. And he got the first - there was a mere eight built - and he then got moved the next day to the first one of the labour cottages like I was brought up in. He spent his first night in a simple mud hut. I know them anyway. Because don't forget, his alma mater was Charleville.