

ÚnaGanAGúna	
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Mother's occupation Police officer	Father's occupation Police officer
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[00:00]

Ruth: Yes, let's get started. So, for the tape, I'm Ruth Beecher and I'm interviewing Jane Williamson.

Jane: Yes.

Ruth: And today's the 25th February 2019 and we're at Jane's home in south London. So, Jane, would you like to start by telling me a little bit about where in Ireland your family were from and the kind of background to the family and that— where you come in the family, that kind of thing before we get started?

[00:29]

Jane: Okayay. So it's just my father's side of the family that were Irish— are Irish. My dad grew up in Dun Laoighre. His father was in the police in Dublin, he grew up there and he was the second oldest of six children. Sadly their mum died when the youngest child was only three months old and they moved back to county Offaly, which is where the extended family are from— because they had got— you know, various relatives who could help look after the children. So my grandfather left the police and moved to Offaly and bought a farm and that's where my dad grew up.

Ruth: From what age was he? Very little or—

Jane: Yes, he was only six when his mum died, yeah, so they moved back to Offaly then and lived in— just outside, it's a little village near a place called Birr— lived there until my dad left Ireland when he was about seventeen.

Ruth: Mhm.

[00:01:46]

Jane: I think he was quite desperate to get away.

Ruth: Was he, yeah?

Jane: Yeah.

Ruth: Where was he in the family, was he— ?

Jane: He was the second oldest, yeah.

Ruth: Right, so had a lot of responsibility in the house.

Jane: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So my dad was the second eldest and he came to England, he came to London and worked in a bar to start with. He worked in a pub just off— near the Euston Road. I think it was some extended— you know, some friend of the family.

Ruth: Okay, yeah, yeah, through the connections.

[00:02:18]

Jane: Yeah, went to work there. And then he joined the British Army which was a bit— but I think it was more— he was only seventeen, he was kind of excited and wanted, you know, some adventure.

Ruth: Lots of Irish men did, didn't they?

Jane: Yeah, yeah, they did.

Ruth: So what year would that have been then? What year was your dad born?

Jane: Hmmm. 1920? About.

Ruth: Okay.

Jane: Yeah, about '20.

Ruth: So '37, so before the...

Jane: No, that can't be right. Sorry, I can't remember, I can't remember.

Ruth: No, I get like that with mine as well, yeah.

Jane: No, maybe it was after...

Ruth: So, was it pre-Second World War or—

Jane: No, it was about the time of the war—

Ruth: Okay.

Jane: So maybe it was a bit— sorry, he died. I can ask, I can find out in a minute so— he joined something called the King's Liverpool Regiment, which a lot of Irish people joined. And I think the British Army although they wanted these soldiers, they didn't really trust them that much.

Ruth: Ah.

Jane: So he was sent away, I mean he had a little bit of kind of direct action, but then spent most of the war in Jamaica, having the time of his life as a young man from a little village in Ireland. He just had a wonderful time, yeah [laughs].

Ruth: Wow.

Jane: And you know just, kind of— yeah, guarding Jamaica.

[00:03:46]

Jane: So then after the war, he joined the police and that's where he met my mum. And—

Ruth: And she was a civilian in the police force, was she?

Jane: She was— no, she was a police officer.

Ruth: She was a police officer as well, ah, fabulous.

Jane: Yeah, she was— so they met at Streatham Police Station and, yeah, they—

Ruth: So only a few miles away from where we're sitting now.

Jane: Yeah, yeah.

Ruth: And what age were they then, were they in their twenties or—

Jane: No, my dad was in his thirties.

Ruth: Oh, okay.

Jane: He was thirty-two I think, my mum was twenty-three, he was quite a bit older. Yeah.

Ruth: Mhm.

Jane: So yeah, and I think— they were very— my dad was from a Catholic family and my dad was very, you know, involved in the church always and that's where I think he was friends with a lot of other Irish— local Irish people as well and there was quite a lot of Irish people—

Ruth: Do you mean in your—

Jane: In this area I think—

Ruth: Oh right.

Jane: — when we were growing up. I seem to remember, maybe it's just because we went to school and church and we met a lot of Irish people through those places.

Ruth: Yes, did you go to a church school?

Jane: Yes, I went to a Catholic school, yes, just down the road.

Ruth: And where did they move when they married and had kids?

Jane: So they— because they were in the police, they got a police flat. At the time, the wages— police wages weren't very good at all. And it was quite hard to get— to afford accommodation. So they bought a flat— not bought a flat, got a flat, just down in Anerley, a police flat.

Ruth: Yeah.

Jane: And that's where we were all born and eventually bought a house. So yeah.

Ruth: In Anerley?

Jane: Yes, that's where I grew up.

Ruth: And tell me where you are in the family?

Jane: I'm the second eldest of five children.

Ruth: Mmhm.

Jane: So I've got an older brother and two younger brothers and a younger sister.

Okay, yes.

[00:05:47]

Ruth: And so, the main part of the interview is about the ages between about fifteen and sort of 25, 29 that sort of age.

Jane: Okay.

Ruth: Because that's an age you know, you're doing secondary school, lots of things happen with you growing up so that's what we're really interested in.

Jane: Okay.

Ruth: So thinking about that, when you were fifteen, can you sort of describe what your life was like at that time?

Jane: I went to an all girls' Convent school.

Ruth: Where was that?

Jane: — called Coloma, in—

Ruth: Oh, Coloma in Croydon, yeah.

Jane: — in Croydon. I loved school and I worked really hard, really liked it.

Ruth: It was a very good school as well, yeah?

Jane: It was— yeah, so yes, really liked being at school.

[Background noise.]

Ruth: Particular subjects or—

Jane: I liked most things, actually. I liked geography and English, Latin, I particularly liked, German, yeah, quite a lot of things. So I had some friends, lots of friends from school and friends from church, and friends who lived in the road. Used to do ballroom dancing, I think I might have finished it by the time I was fifteen. Used to go to a lot of school discos.

Ruth: So you've still got that talent for ballroom dancing then?

Jane: Not, no. [Both laugh]. I don't know if I have ever had it in the first place.

Ruth: I bet you can do the moves still, that— you'd never forget that, would you if you were trained?

Jane: No, some of it, the chachacha.

Ruth: You're lucky it was ballroom and not Irish dancing though?

Jane: It's true—

Ruth: Because the costumes— much better.

Jane: No, yeah, no, I did quite want to do Irish dancing but there didn't seem to be anywhere around here to do it.

Ruth: Oh, okay.

Jane: I wanted to do ballet actually, but I was quite a chubby child and they said I'd be better doing ballroom dancing [laughs].

Ruth: Cheeky.

Jane: Yes.

Ruth: So very busy sort of school life.

Jane: Yeah, yeah. And a very happy home life as well, what else can I say? So then I did my GCSEs and that was all fine.

[00:08:10]

Jane: And then obviously the big thing that happened was my mum died when I was seventeen.

Ruth: Oh right, seventeen, yeah.

Jane: And I was the—

Ruth: And you were the oldest girl.

Jane: I was the oldest girl, so I sort of took over really, looking after the others.

Ruth: Were you still in school at that stage?

Jane: Yeah, yeah, I was just in— doing A levels. So I stayed on at school and did A levels.

Ruth: You managed to do them?

Jane: Yeah.

Ruth: Fair dues, that's hard. Must have been hard with everything going on.

Jane: Yeah, it was very— it was a horrible time, it was really hard.

Ruth: And was it very sudden, your mum's death?

Jane: Yeah, she had a stroke and died really suddenly, she was in her forties, yeah, an aneurism.

Ruth: And your dad was a bit older then, was he?

Jane: Yeah, so he was in his fifties then, and left exactly like had happened in his own family—

Ruth: Of course, it was like an echo...

Jane: And he was six when his mum died and my youngest brother, who you know, was six when my mum died.

Ruth: That must have been so cruel, such a—

[00:09:09]

Jane: So yeah, but I think the kind of Irish side of things really helped a lot.

Ruth: What because there was a big group come around and—

Jane: Because there was a massive group of aunts and various people rallied—

Ruth: From Ireland themselves or from here?

Jane: Some of them were from Ireland and some of them were here. My dad had his closest brother lived— moved to London as well, they lived in Plumstead.

Ruth: Oh so not too far.

Jane: — and his wife was really, they had seven children of their own, but they still kind of helped us out and we used to go and visit. And my mum's family, you know, were really helpful as well. I think there was a sort of constant stream of aunts and visitors and various people.

Ruth: But must have been kind of helpful, and kind of difficult as well..

Jane: Kind of helpful and kind of overwhelming when you just wanted to be, to be on your own.

Ruth: Did that go on ad infinitum or was it for, like, an intense period around your mum's death?

Jane: It was quite intense but it went on, yeah, it did go on—

Ruth: When did she die? What time of year was it?

Jane: In March, 1st March.

Ruth: About now, anniversary coming up.

[00:10:18]

Jane: So, we used to go to Ireland for the school holidays or go to Hertfordshire to see my mum's family.

Ruth: What, for the whole of the six weeks kind of thing?

Jane: No, for some of it, I think my, some of the younger ones were farmed out to go an stay with people for the school holidays quite often but because I was a bit older, I didn't have to do that.

Ruth: I mean that's a kind of a tradition in Irish families in London anyway isn't it?

Jane: Yeah, yeah.

Ruth: To send people back, sending kids back? Even if you don't have a family tragedy like you know—

Jane: Yeah. So we didn't ever go to Ireland until I was eight.

Ruth: Ah right.

Jane: And my mum's— my mum had never met some of the Irish relatives. It was just they couldn't really, you know it was before cheap flights and—

Ruth: It was very different, yeah.

Jane: It was really quite difficult to go backwards and forwards. My dad—

Ruth: Yeah, you had to go on the ferry I guess or the coach—

Jane: Yeah, go to Holyhead and go on the ferry.

[00:11:20]

Jane: So we didn't go back, yeah, until I was eight and I must say it was a shock to the system— going back there then, they didn't, it was really primitive in Offaly then. No electricity, no running water, and that was in the sixties.

Ruth: So in the sixties, was it? What year were you born?

Jane: '59.

Ruth: '59? So '67.

Jane: '67.

Ruth: It was quite rural where the— where your relatives were?

Jane: Extremely rural, it was in the middle of nowhere, in the bog land, right in the centre. One of my aunts had a pub, one of my dad's sisters, married someone, they had a pub so we stayed in the pub which was quite exciting. And we were kind of allowed a lot more freedom to go out and go to dances and all that sort of thing during our teens, yeah, which was good fun.

Ruth: So would you have gone back every year in your teens or not that much?

Jane: Yeah, nearly, yeah. We did go back regularly.

Ruth: And was it something you lookayed forward to or did you sort of resent having to leave your London mates to go back?

Jane: I think it was a mixture, I think I liked— I hated— I'm a real townie so I hated the rural side of it and some of our cousins were a bit mean, they used to chase us with animals and, you know, just do all sorts of things to terrorise the townies. But having said that, we did have good fun and I had a few holiday romances while I was over there which was good fun.

Ruth: Did you go to dances and things like that in Birr?

Jane: Yeah, which was great fun.

Ruth: What, the church hall type of things or?

Jane: Well they were church halls or there was a hotel, Dooleys Hotel, we used to go to or the County Arms hotel and it was so exciting because I didn't do— you know, I hadn't gone out as much over here so yeah, it was good fun.

Ruth: Did you get swung round by these country fellas?

Jane: Yes, yes.

[00:13:17]

Ruth: How funny. So, you did your A levels?

Jane: Yes, I did.

Ruth: What did you do for your A levels?

Jane: Geography, economics and classical civilisations. And then I did sociology after I'd left school as well. So yeah, so what to do? So, I was still at home lookaying after the others and doing the housework and all that sort of thing and just decided— the school wanted me to go to university but I wanted to stay at home really and lookay after the others, so I didn't go. So, and I think also that it wasn't a tradition in our family that people went to—

Ruth: Would you have been the first to go, if you'd have gone?

Jane: Yeah, I would have been.

Ruth: And did you feel? What did your dad say? Was he trying to encourage you to go?

Jane: No, no, he wasn't and I don't think women in our family, certainly— I think there was one cousin on my mum's side who went to university and got pregnant and I think even before my mum had died—

Ruth: Was that like— was that the prediction— [both talking] sort of thing— [indec]— what's the point?

Jane: [indec]— go to university, you'll get pregnant. What's the point of doing that? Lookay what happened to your cousin, sort of thing. So there wasn't much encouragement. I mean my dad was very proud of me doing well in my exams but, at the same time, he— I think he thought studying was too much, what was the point of it really? Go out and get a job.

Ruth: And was it that he thought go out and get a job? Or did he think you were going to be married soon and there wasn't—

Jane: No, no, I don't think he thought that, no, no.

Ruth: Did he want you to go in the police or—

Jane: Not really, I don't know what he wanted. No, he used to introduce me as "this is my daughter Jane, how many O levels have you got Jane?"

Ruth: So he was really proud of you?

Jane: Yeah, yeah. [laughs].

Ruth: But he thought like well you've done well enough, now get a job, is it?

Jane: I think so, I think so. So I then got a job for social services in Croydon as an admin trainee so I did that for a few years and I did like it, and I— they—

Ruth: Was your older brother still at home?

Jane: No, he'd— I can't remember, he left and he did join the police. Yeah, he joined the police and then, yeah so, I went to work for social services. And actually my mum had, when she was in the police, female police officers were much more like social workers so what she did was dealt with children and dealt with women, women prisoners, children who'd been, you know, neglected or abused so it was much more like social work.

Ruth: That's really interesting, I didn't know that.

Jane: And she was, you know, very few female police officers then—

Ruth: That's why I was like, I was probably like being sexist when I said "was she a police officer?" I had thought from something Phil [Jane's brother] had said that she perhaps was like a civilian—

Jane: No, she was a police officer, yeah.

Ruth: But there weren't that many, were there?

Jane: No, not at all. No, there weren't.

Ruth: So do you mean that you were sort of by going into social services, you were sort of following in mum's footsteps then?

Jane: Well, yeah, I didn't think so at the time. I didn't think it was anything like what she'd done but actually now, looking back on it, it obviously was, much more. But yeah, I think my mum was a bit of a rebel, which I've only realised looking back on it but actually to join the police, her family were very against her doing that.

Ruth: Were they? What, was it too lowly or was it too rough or she might get in danger—

Jane: No, it was too dangerous and it's not the sort of thing women do. And then marrying somebody nine years older, marrying somebody Irish, marrying somebody a Catholic. So all of those kind of went against—

Ruth: So they had a mixed marriage then, did they?

Jane: Yeah, they did, yeah.

Ruth: Oh, I hadn't realised that. I thought your mum was English but Catholic.

Jane: No, she wasn't, no.

Ruth: Did she convert to marry your dad?

Jane: No, she didn't, no.

Ruth: So they got married in the '50s, mid '50s?

Jane: Yes, yeah, yeah. They got married in a Catholic church.

Ruth: Did they? So that's quite different from— I think my mum also was— My mum was Church of Ireland.

Jane: Okayay, okayay.

Ruth: And they got married in '68 I think, and she didn't convert but they couldn't have the full mass or anything. They had the choice of having just the ceremony but no mass or having the whole thing in the side chapel.

Jane: Okayay, oh yes, yeah, I've read about that, yeah.

Ruth: I think in Ireland, it might have a little bit behind in terms of mixed marriages.

Jane: Yeah, I'm not sure what they had actually but it was certainly in a church.

Ruth: So she was a rebel. She married across religious lines and chose her job that she wanted?

Jane: She was, yes, yes.

Ruth: Was she from London?

Jane: She was from Hertfordshire, a little village called Aldbury in Hertfordshire.

Ruth: So did she come in for the police then?

Jane: Yeah, she joined, yeah. She used to commute for ages from this little village to Streatham. I think there was a bus that came. I think she used to do shifts, so she came on the

bus, you know, on the beginning of her shift pattern and then stayed in the police section house and then went back again.

[00:18:41]

Jane: So, where was I?

Ruth: So you were working in social services—

Jane: I was working in social services.

Ruth: So you were about what now, eighteen?

Jane: Yeah.

Ruth: And so what age was your youngest brother then?

Jane: He was— he is eleven years younger than me. So there was one eleven years— my brothers— I've got a brother who's nearly four years older than me. Then my parents had another child who died as a baby in between me and my older brother Kevin. And then I've got a sister who's the next one down, who's two years younger than me. Then another brother who's nearly three and a half years younger than me. Then the youngest.

Ruth: Who is much younger than you— ?

Jane: Who's eleven years younger, yes.

Ruth: And so was your younger sister kind of doing more of the lookaying after the youngest when you went fulltime working?

Jane: No, not really no. She was just [laughs] having quite a wild time. No, my sister, yeah, she was quite the life and soul of the party.

Ruth: So she didn't feel the responsibility then, you did all— Ah, that's interesting, yeah.

Jane: Yeah. And it was just expected I think, it was just what people assumed I would do, I think.

Ruth: And were you kind of okayay with that or did you feel a bit resentful or was it just you expected it yourself as well or?

Jane: I think I— just got on with it really. It wasn't— it was really— I think you just get on with things, don't you? Now, lookaying back on it, don't know how I did it really.

Ruth: Well, no, I think you were probably remarkable because I don't think everybody would just get on with it, you know what I mean? But you obviously did.

Jane: Yeah, yeah.

Ruth: Did you like social services?

Jane: I did, yeah. So I worked in Croydon social services for a couple of years and I did a course in business administration— like local government administration, like a HND type course.

Ruth: So we're about '78 now or something, are we? 1978?

Jane: About '78/'80. Then I went to work for Southwark Council as an administrator again. And then I got involved in helping out with more— I worked for a team of social workers. No, sorry, I'm getting confused. When I went to work in Croydon actually, as part of doing the admin trainee thing, I was an administrator for a team of social workers, that's right. And they were the weirdest people I'd ever met. I'd been to this quite strict convent school, you know, I was very prim and proper and law abiding and everything else. And I worked with these social workers who used to swear, and I wasn't used to people swearing. They used to smokaye dope, they—

Ruth: Not in the office though?

Jane: No, but they were the remnants of old hippy social workers. One of them talked about having abortions. I mean it was really, I was just shocked, I was totally shocked, I was so green and so, kind of, naive, I think.

Ruth: That was just such a different world.

Jane: Yeah, completely different, completely different [laughs]. But anyway, then I went to work for Southwark and I helped out on something that was a community alarm scheme for older people and they were really short— there was only one person who'd been running this scheme and everything had got in a complete mess and he'd got piles of old files that hadn't been sorted out. So I started off helping with the admin and then I started off helping— going out and visiting some of the older people and really liked it. So then I got some experience with social work assistant, they let me do a placement. And then I got paid, got funded to do my social work training.

Ruth: Brilliant.

Jane: And then worked as a hospital social worker. So I qualified as a social worker when I was 28.

Ruth: And you really wanted to do that? So it was great that they funded it.

Jane: No, it was. It was the good old days when they used to do that sort of thing.

Ruth: So that was with older people?

Jane: Hospital social work.

Ruth: Oh hospital then, yeah.

Jane: Yeah, so people with— Yeah, it was Guy's Hospital so people with medical— on the medical and surgical wards. And while I was doing my social work training, I'd done a placement in a hospice which was really good, really liked that.

Ruth: So what was the hospital— what was that role like? What were you doing with those people? Like was it generally checking were they—

Jane: So it was helping with discharge planning, helping with all sorts of things really.

Ruth: Like practical or emotional?

Jane: Yeah, yeah, a whole range of things. There was— When I joined there was still the remnants of hospital social work as being like lady almoners and there were some very posh sort of middle-aged, twin-set and pearl type social workers.

Ruth: Yeah, did they work for the hospital or for the local authority?

Jane: They worked for the local authority.

Ruth: But they were kind of institutionalised in the hospital?

Jane: Yeah, yeah and there was a real deference towards the doctors, you know, it was really— Some social workers would challenge doctors but a lot of people just were like the handmaidens—

Ruth: Was this the late '80s now?

Jane: Yeah, the handmaidens of the doctors and I think because we were— I was young and newly qualified as well. It was, yeah, quite different. So lots of practical support, helping people who'd had road-traffic accidents, people who'd maybe fall— you know, old lady fallen and brokayen her hip, couldn't go home again. All sorts of things like that really, helping with housing, helping with benefits, helping with caring responsibilities, all sorts of different things. It was good.

Ruth: So you really liked it?

Jane: Yeah, I did.

[00:24:53]

Ruth: And where were you living? Were you still at home then?

Jane: So I stayed— because of the younger people in the family, I stayed living at home until I was about 27, 28. I'd had a few long term relationships, including one— the person I went out with for seven years.

Ruth: Wow.

Jane: I met him when I was sixteen

Ruth: - Ooh.

Jane: — and I carried on going out with him until I was 23. He wanted to get married but I didn't want— I didn't really want to and I didn't want to leave the family so I—

Ruth: Was it both things or—

Jane: It was both but I think probably the— lookaying after the family was— No, I don't know. Now, lookaying back on it, I'm really glad I didn't get married to him, it wasn't right. But at the time I felt that I needed to stay.

Ruth: But was that very, very hard at the time?

Jane: No, I think just—

Ruth: Or did it just fizzle out?

Jane: Yeah, I think so, I think so. But yeah, I still used to go out a lot and have fun and try and combine everything. And I also had— I'd— seen for years— I was thinking about this the other day— I always had more than one job so— I don't know how I fitted it in but I worked for quite a long time as a waitress so I used to work in Joanna's up here [Westow Hill, Crystal Palace], probably when it first opened, it was a sort of burger bar, just used to do burgers and fries there. I worked there for quite a long time. So I used to do my day job in social services and then go and work there and try and sort of lookay after the house as well.

Ruth: Wow. And was that for extra cash or was it sociable— kind of thing as well?

Jane: It was a bit of both but I sort of saved up to buy clothes or to buy— you know, to go on holidays. I used to love going on holidays.

Ruth: Did you? Where did you used to go?

Jane: Canary Islands, Spain.

Ruth: What with girlfriends, or the boyfriends?

Jane: Yeah, both, yeah.

[00:26:55]

Jane: Yeah, so, just—

Ruth: Sun holidays?

Jane: Sun holidays, yes. Real, good old-fashioned beach holidays, yeah, yeah. Greece, we used to go to a lot, yeah, lovely. So I used to do that, yeah I did that job for quite a long time

then also decided— some friends and I were going to set up our own fashion company. So we made lots of clothes, three of us, and sold some of them. And then some of them, the fabric we made, we made them in, people washed them and they shrunk—

Ruth: Oh no.

Jane: It was very— or the colours all ran, it was a bit of a disaster. And also, we'd make a load of things and people would say "I want that but I want it in a different colour or a different size" and we'd already made things so it didn't work out but it was quite [laughs] a novel idea.

Ruth: How long did you do that for?

Jane: Not very long [laughs].

Ruth: So you had lots of things in your life, lots of— what do they say? Strings to your bow?

Jane: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And then at some point, I worked in an estate agents as well. That, I can't remember how.

Ruth: What, when you were still a social worker or—

Jane: Yes, I worked at the week— I had a Sunday job in an estate agents in Peckham so I used to do that one— yeah, I used to do that every week as well.

Ruth: Wow, you just worked your butt off then, basically.

Jane: Yeah, no, I do like working, yeah [laughs]. Still a bit like that.

[00:28:23]

Ruth: Yes, you are. And so you had this one guy from sixteen to 23 or something, one boyfriend. And so, you didn't meet him in school obviously because you were in a girl's school?

Jane: No, no I didn't. I met him at a disco. Yeah, yeah, so he was called Ian, he was a bricklayer. And I think my dad really liked him because he was a proper man and did good manual work and— But he was ever so sweet, I mean after my mum died, my dad used to just— He used to come round all the time and help out— and help out at home. My dad always had him doing jobs, he built an extension to my dad's house. He [laughs] laid the garden path, he built the front garden wall, he was like "Ian— "

Ruth: So he was like another son then in family?

Jane: Yeah, yeah [laughs]. But yes, after that I had a whole load of different boyfriends. And then I had another seven-year relationship with somebody who was from an Irish family. Both his parents were Irish and they— he lived in Plumstead, he was called Michael. And,

yeah, there was a real— He really didn't like— he'd had a really difficult background and he wasn't keen on all things Irish at all whereas—

Ruth: You'd had a very different experience of the family kind of wrapping around?

Jane: Yeah, yeah. So yes, I went out with him for seven years and got engaged to him.

Ruth: Ooh.

Jane: Actually, I got engaged to the first one as well.

Ruth: Did you?

Jane: Yeah, of course, yeah.

Ruth: You've had two engagements then [both laugh]. Did you give the rings back?

Jane: It was unofficial engagement, the first one. Did I get a ring? I don't remember ever getting a ring the second time, no.

Ruth: I suppose the first one you were like a schoolgirl to early twenties and then—

Jane: Yeah, yeah.

Ruth: It sounded like he became like another one of your siblings almost in the house.

Jane: He did, yeah, yeah.

Ruth: And then the second one was probably, were you mid twenties then or—

Jane: It was— I split up with him in my early thirties actually, yeah.

Ruth: Did you live with him?

Jane: The second one, I did move in with him, yeah, eventually.

Ruth: So did you move out of your family home and in with him?

Jane: Eventually. I moved in with a friend first of all and then moved in with him, yes. Yeah, eventually, yeah, but that was quite— I must have been about— in my thirties, yeah, I think so. Late twenties.

Ruth: Yeah. And that was— why didn't you marry him?

Jane: He'd got a lot of issues actually. He'd got commitment problems and his— yeah, yeah. He was lovely and it was very, very difficult at the time. But— And then looking back, it was the right thing, yeah.

Ruth: But would you have ended up looking after him for life, sort of thing?

Jane: Emotionally. I mean he was very capable; he was a fireman and he was very, very good at doing lots of things.

Ruth: Did your dad like having a fireman?

Jane: He liked him initially, my dad used to judge my boyfriends by how shiny their shoes were [laughs] and he had very nice shiny shoes because firemen keep their shoes shiny.

Ruth: They have lots of time to shine their shoes.

Jane: But I think him and my dad were a bit too similar and they didn't— yeah, there was a real—

Ruth: Similar in what way?

Jane: I think they were both kind of— what's the word? They were both very upright citizens, they were both, you know, my dad in the police, Michael in the fire brigade. They— I think there was quite a bit of jealousy between them actually, I think, yeah, I think they were— yeah.

Ruth: Because of your role in the family and—

Jane: Yeah, yeah, I think so.

Ruth: It would make sense, I suppose, wouldn't it, yeah?

Jane: I think so, yeah, yeah.

[00:32:45]

Ruth: So, did your— how did your dad like the moving out? Was he alright at that stage with it?

Jane: No, it wasn't very easy. It was really difficult.

Ruth: Was there anybody left at home when you—

Jane: Phil— just my younger brother Phil.

Ruth: And your dad?

Jane: Yeah, yeah, so it was quite a wrench to leave. And actually, I'd had lots of opportunities to leave home before then, but I didn't go.

Ruth: What do you mean like people wanting you to?

Jane: So, one of my really close friends Alison and a friend— another friend of ours Kevin, the three of us who set up this clothing business. We managed to get a council flat—

Ruth: Wow.

Jane: — in the good old days of— So we all managed to get a council tenancy in— up by London Bridge. And actually in the end I never moved— I was on the tenancy agreement but I never moved in.

Ruth: And they did, did they?

Jane: They did but I never did because I just decided I couldn't leave home and then I was going to move in with some other friends of mine and I didn't and— yeah, so—

Ruth: So you kind of were making plans and then not quite able to follow—

Jane: Yeah, not quite, yeah, following through—

Ruth: — to the end?

Jane: Yeah, following through. And then I was going to go travelling— wanted to go travelling and then just thought, no, I can't leave them so— But yes, I moved out eventually.

What were you, did you say, twenty-eight?

Jane: Twenty-seven, I think, yeah.

Ruth: How did you manage your sex life then, being at home til you were 27 [laughs]?

Jane: That's— you find a way [laughs]. You find a way. It was— yes, and my dad was very Catholic

Ruth: Was he very old fashioned?

Jane: — about these things, yes. Very protective about, you know—

Ruth: The girls, is it? The daughters?

Jane: Yes, yeah, definitely. And I think being a policeman as well, you know, he'd seen some not very nice characters and was obviously very protective towards us. So yes, but you know, where there's a will, there's a way. Sneaking around and fumbling about and waiting til people go out and— yeah, yeah, yeah [laughs].

Ruth: And did you have like— were any of your aunts or— did you have any sort of— anybody to be a maternal type figure for you, like—

Jane: Yeah, lots of people, no—

Ruth: Because your mum died when you—

Jane: Yeah, lots of people actually. There was a neighbour across the road who had only got a son and she sort of tookay me under her wing - she was lovely, Lilian. There were a couple of women that I worked with at social services who both sort of tookay me under their wing as well. And aunts were always, you know, some of the aunts were always very maternal just—

Ruth: Because you had some aunts in London as well as the ones in Ireland, didn't you?

Jane: Yeah, and our grandma, my mum's mum, was still alive as well. So she lived til she was in her— well into her eighties. So yes, we used to go and stay a lot with her as well. And then I think most of my boyfriends' mums as well seemed to take me under their wing and then tried to intervene when the relationship ended because they wanted it to carry on.

Ruth: They wanted it to keep— they didn't want to lose their daughter Jane. Ah, that's lovely though, isn't it? That's a compliment to you like.

Jane: No, it was nice. It happened twice, quite significantly, where the mums then tried to disrupt any future relationships that the— they were having, to try and get them back together.

Ruth: If the boys moved on, they were like, no, no, no, we want Jane back, how funny [both laugh].

[00:36:21]

Ruth: So anything else that you wanted to say about Ireland or about just that part of your life?

Jane: I was just thinking about going to Ireland and how different it is now. So, we used to go— so we first went when I was eight and then we went a few years later— so this is when my mum was still alive and then, once my mum had died, I think we went nearly every year.

Ruth: What year did your mum die again?

Jane: 1977.

Ruth: '77?

Jane: Yeah, and then I used to go with my dad as well, we used to go back regularly. But I think, you know, when we first went, there was— It being rural and, you know, it was a real novelty. I mean it was exciting and— but it must have been so harsh there, really, really harsh lives, I think.

Ruth: Hard work, you mean,

Jane: Really hard work.

Ruth: And long days? Or do you mean the attitudes?

Jane: I think both actually and I think for some of my aunts, you know, one of them, she lived in the house that my dad grew up in which was— you know, lookayed really picture postcard, thatched bungalow in the countryside.

Ruth: Lookays lovely.

Jane: Lookays pretty. And I remember at one point, they were thinking of re— getting rid of the thatch and putting a proper roof on or knocking it down and building a new house. And of course, the Londoners were all horrified, you know, you can't do that. And they said, "well you don't have to live here," you know. But, no running water, just having to go to a well to get water. No electricity, no— you know, nothing— no mod cons at all. A big range where they did all the cookaying, with a constant teapot on the boil.

Ruth: Again, very picturesque while you're visiting but to live there, yeah.

Jane: Yeah, of course, of course, and nine children, just one after another. And the children—

Ruth: Imagine doing the washing even, just the washing.

Jane: I know, I know. So that was quite sort of shocking really. And the children, you know, you kind of felt that they were running riot really. But they were also, they got them trained from such a young age to do work.

Ruth: To do work, is it? On the farm?

Jane: Yeah, they were doing all sorts of work. Lookaying after each other, taking the cows down, milking the— you know, doing this, that and the other, lookaying after the chickens. When they were, you know, five, six, seven, eight years old. So that was quite a culture shock. And one of my— And you know also the church was— you know— ruled with a rod of iron really. The saddest, saddest story— one of the saddest stories I've ever heard is— My dad's oldest sister— so she was only really young when my grandmother died. She got pregnant when she was— outside of marriage and, you know, she didn't have a mum, she didn't know what she was doing, she'd never had any—

Ruth: When would this have been Jane, would it have been the beginning of—

Jane: This would have been in the 1930s maybe?

Ruth: She was younger than your dad? Older?

Jane: She was older than my dad, but she was still young when their mum had died. You know, and they had no sex education, nothing at all. I mean some blokaye tookay advantage of her, I think. Anyway, she ended up getting married to him. Really unhappy marriage but anyway, the saddest thing of all was she had the baby, she lived in a house down the lane from where my dad and grandad were— My grandad forbid any of the family to go and see her.

Ruth: Because she'd got pregnant before she—

Jane: Yeah and the children used to go and see her. They used to sneak down and see her and take her food and go and see her. But the baby died because she didn't know how to look after it, with no help. Didn't know how to look after it. It was absolutely—

Ruth: So she had nobody, she was completely isolated.

Jane: Nobody.

Ruth: She had the husband but he did nothing.

Jane: Yeah, but you know, he didn't know, they didn't know. The baby died. And then she became mentally unwell in later life.

Ruth: No wonder with the loss and guilt and all the feelings of—

Jane: I mean really tragic, really tragic.

Ruth: It's very hard for us to understand that kind of— that you could cut someone off like that, isn't it. God.

Jane: But— so I think— and you heard all these sorts of stories about people being abused and people going mad. And there were lots in that area, lots of people committed— you know, committing suicide.

Ruth: But how would you hear all these things? Through the cousins or—

Jane: Yeah, through family, through relatives, yeah.

Ruth: They'd just be talking about so-and-so who—

Jane: Yeah, you'd hear about it. Really tragic family stories and people being cut off and feuds and all sorts of things like that. But— and I think also loads of those from my dad's generation, people would try and get away— Some people were kind of stuck in it and other people just really tried to get away. You know, it was so poor as well then. But then, obviously then, some people went back and then there was a new wave of people coming over so quite a lot of my cousins from Ireland came over the years to work in London. Quite a few did nursing, worked in the civil service, yeah, lots of them lived in London for a period of time. And then obviously the Celtic Tiger and they all went back.

Ruth: Did they all go back?

Jane: I think, yeah, they've all gone back now actually. Yeah, they've all gone back. And you know, from living in these really sort of poor houses, they're now living in these mansion sort of bungalows, you know. Huge houses.

Ruth: The big houses that people build on a bit of what was the farm, sort of thing, when they were young.

Jane: Yeah, massive, massive houses. I mean, we're the poor relations now, you know, that they— And they're doing really well, loads of them, doing really well. So yeah, but despite all of that, despite the poverty, they— the generosity was absolutely unbelievable, you know. Constantly being— you know the door was always open to anybody who went. Really hospitable and real warmth and constantly filling you up with food and drink and food and drink and— Yeah, yeah.

Ruth: You've got that sort of feeling in your own family here, haven't you? So that's lovely.

Jane: Yeah, well I think yeah, you do inherit it. Yes, well I think you learn it as well, don't you? It's sort of learnt behaviour. Yeah, but I think it's nice, that's the really nice thing to have got really, that sort of hospitality, yeah.

Ruth: Did you ever feel like you wanted to be there or were you always glad to come back to London?

Jane: What, in Ireland? Well, when I— so I had this sort of holiday romance when I was seventeen— Fell totally in love with this— it was all blue-eyed— oh, anyway— guy and he wrote— we wrote to each other and then you know I wanted to get married to him and move to Ireland and have loads of children and all this sort of thing. But anyway, then I came back to London and it kind of wore off from my point of view but he constantly— he continued to write longer and longer and longer letters than—

Ruth: He had less distractions in Ireland [laughs].

Jane: Yeah, but no, I wouldn't want to—

Ruth: So he never came for a visit, it was just a—

Jane: He was going to. He was going to move over here and wanted to get married and all this sort of things. And by that point, I'd gone off the whole idea so— [laughs].

Ruth: You managed to get rid of him?

Jane: Yeah, yeah.

[00:44:21]

Ruth: Did you see it changing as you went back every summer or was it something that seemed to stay the same when you were a teenager and then suddenly years later changed a lot?

Jane: No, I think it was changing gradually, slowly. And then it just suddenly seemed to change completely. And actually, every time you go back now, there's more and more houses and, you know, everybody's got cars and the church isn't that important, you know, there is—

Ruth: So different now.

Jane: Really different, really different. And people are so— you know, when I used to go, you never ever ever see anybody except people from Ireland or people related to people from Ireland—

Ruth: No people of colour when we were young.

Jane: No, and I remember—

Ruth: The odd doctor or something like that from the hospital—

Jane: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ruth: But that would be about it, or a missionary—

Jane: Yeah, yeah.

Ruth: You know like someone who'd gone to the missions and married a person of colour and brought them back to Ireland, that was it. There was like probably two children in our school.

Jane: Yeah, yeah [laughs]. But, yeah, we went— it must have been about, I don't know. So Birr, which is the town, the nearest town to where my dad grew up, was where we used to go and there's a big castle, Birr Castle. And actually, it was a big kind of Anglo Irish place—

Ruth: Or was it, was it?

Jane: And actually now— we never appreciated it as children, but it's a beautiful town, beautiful Georgian houses, very affluent. They had a big army barracks there, British army barracks. And a lot of the army, kind of, that service, you know, the local population serviced the army so there was quite a lot of money, it was quite wealthy. And because it was right in the centre—

Ruth: Of the whole country?

Jane: Of the South, it was a good— sort of quite a safe place for the army to be. But it still was— the shops were a bit old-fashioned and all of that.

[00:46:19]

Jane: But about twenty years ago, it must be. It must have been about the time that I first went over with Toby—

Ruth: Your husband, for the purposes of the tape.

Jane: My husband, yes, of course. [laughs]. Yeah, we— There was a lovely B&B called Spinners and I think there were some gay people ran it, which was quite shocking for Birr.

Ruth: Quite the shock, how modern.

Jane: I know, I know. But there was also a place near there, a few years later when we went, where a load of asylum seekers had been rehoused and that was all a bit, to start with, you know, "oh, there's asylum seekers" but actually they seemed to really embrace that.

Ruth: Changes came.

Jane: Yeah, yeah. But yes, the first time I went with my husband Toby, my dad's sister who had the pub, she died and one of her sons took over the pub and there's always a tradition, the first sort of night or two we were there, all the relatives would come and see us. But we turned up at this pub on a Monday evening— quite in the evening, it was empty. And gradually the pub started filling up and filling up, and it was people— relatives of mine from far and wide had come to see Toby [laughs] to check him out.

Ruth: Oh, how fabulous. Isn't that amazing though? On a Monday night, like they'd made the effort, they really made the effort.

Jane: I know, I know [laughs].

Ruth: Isn't that amazing? How did he feel? He took it fine?

Jane: He was fine. They lined up pint after pint of Guinness for him and he actually was fine.

Ruth: Brilliant. Shall we leave it there? Is there anything else you wanted to say?

Jane: Yeah, that's fine. No, I think that's fine.

Ruth: That's a really nice place to leave it, I think, you being welcomed— Toby being welcomed to the fold. So I will press "stop" on this, thank you so much for doing it.

Jane: That's alright.

Ruth: Brilliant.

[00:48:09]

END