



<b>ÚnaGanAGúna</b>	
<b>Interview Summary Sheet</b>	<b>Title Page</b>
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<b>Collection Title:</b> ÚnaGanAGúna Phase 1	
<b>Interviewee's Surname</b> McDonagh	<b>Interviewee's Title</b>
<b>Interviewee's First Name(s)</b> Bairbre	<b>Interviewee's Gender</b> Female
<b>Occupation</b> Access Officer	<b>Interviewee's Date of Birth</b> December 1971
<b>Mother's occupation</b> Housewife	<b>Father's occupation</b> Manager in higher education
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<b>Stereo</b>	
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<b>Additional material (e.g. photos, documents)</b> <b>One photograph provided by Bairbre which shows her and others in their garden in Limerick c1986.</b> "Yes that's me at home in Limerick. We had just got that table and chairs for our patio and were delighted." Photo edited to remove other unnamed people at Bairbre's request.	
<b>Copyright/ clearance</b> Signed and filed. New format participation and recording agreements.	
<b>Interviewer's comments</b> Some practical problems with room bookings on the day led us to cut the interview a little short!	



Ruth: So today is Tuesday the 25th of June 2019. My name is Ruth Beecher, I'm an historian at Birkbeck at the University of London and I'm here in a very drizzly Leeds to interview Bairbre. Bairbre, really nice to meet you and thank you for agreeing to do the interview and would you like to introduce yourself?

Bairbre: Sure, my name is Bairbre McDonagh and I live near Leeds in North Yorkshire—well West Yorkshire [laughs], on the border [laughs].

Ruth: On the border?

Bairbre: Yeah, so just outside Leeds in Wetherby but I work here in Leeds so that's why we met here today.

Ruth: Okay. And when were you born, Bairbre?

[00:00:41]

Bairbre: I was born in December 1971 in Dublin.

Ruth: Okay and can you tell us a little bit of background about your family and where they come from?

Bairbre: Some my father's family, the McDonaghs, were from Dublin and they were butchers on Dorset Street. And they had— they had links with Moore Street and again shopkeepers and butchers all around that area. And my mother's family were dairy farmers on her mother's side in Offaly in a town called Edenderry. So I think it had a large shoe factory and my mother didn't fancy that shoe factory so she became a secretary in Dublin. So that's where she met my father and— so I guess that was in the '60s because they got married in I think '68.

Ruth: Okay. And had children?

Bairbre: Yes so I'm one of four, so my sister was born in '69, I'm born in '71, my brother was born in '74 and then the youngest was born in '80. That's my sister, so she lives over here as well, she lives in Bristol my sister, but the other two live in Ireland. So yeah, that's the family. So we started in Dublin, me and my sister were born in Dublin and then we moved and my brother was born in Galway and then my sister was born in Limerick. So we're a bit



of a nuclear family I think they're called, aren't they, so— growing up in Limerick we didn't have cousins or any other relatives in the area, which I always felt a bit short changed by because I thought it was great to have— when you were going out as teenagers to have cousins and links in the town or the city I should say. But I think it was a good place to grow up and I was happy there so I wouldn't change it.

Ruth: Umhm.

Bairbre: Yeah. So I went to Dublin when I finish school so I sort of went back to my roots a bit before I came over here to the UK. first London and then Yorkshire - Leeds.

[00:02:29]

Ruth: So I'm going to take you back a little bit. When you were 15, can you tell us where you were? Were you in Limerick? What were you doing with yourself? What was life like for Bairbre aged fifteen?

Bairbre: Yeah, well the first thing that springs to mind was Irish College because I know I went to Irish College in a place called Carna in Galway the summer I was fifteen and I went with my friends and had a really good time. Met a load of guys from Dublin, all the usual, and that was a really fun summer.

Ruth: What was it like? Was it a seaside place or—

Bairbre: Ah yeah, it was. It was really remote, you know, really quiet but, you know, you obviously met your friends at the— at the sessions in the day and then in the evening you went back for a ceilidh so it was a lot of fun really enjoyed that. So I think fifteen wasn't a bad age but I think it was, you know, it's not an easy age at the same time because there's a lot of chopping and changes with social groups and trying to kind of work out where you fit in. But I think also I really enjoyed going to the GAA club discos which was a good social scene as well. So I've got I think fond memories of being fifteen actually. I played a lot of sport. I played volleyball and I then went onto manage the volleyball team when I was too old to play on the volleyball team.

Ruth: Was that a school team?



Bairbre: No, it was the community games. Well the school did— I learnt volleyball at school but then we did community games for our area and we were Limerick champions and then I think we might have been Munster champions. We certainly went to the next level but we didn't get all the way to Dublin or Mosney or— you know the finals but we really enjoyed it so— and I also played basketball but I found that not as easy because I used to get called out for fouling so I was advised that I was better suited to volleyball. And I enjoyed running so I did athletics so I think I was really active and quite happy, you know, not totally carefree because I was a teenager but I think it was good, yeah.

[00:04:30]

Ruth: And what was school like? What sort of a school was it?

Bairbre: Well, it was a convent school and they were called the Salesians, they were an Italian order and they were lovely. So the school actually was kindergarten mixed, then junior school with girls only, and then I went on to the secondary school. So I— from— I think I was five when I came to Limerick— So I did one year in Cork and then from the age of five to eighteen I was educated by the Salesians. But it was a really, really nice place, a really happy place and people still on Facebook now share stuff about the Salesians and have a good laugh about it. So I'm really lucky in that regards as well that it was a happy part of my life if and I had a lot of fun and, yeah, made some really good friends there.

Ruth: So did you sort of apart— was— was that Irish College the first time you had really come into contact with the opposite sex? Or—

Bairbre: Well, no, but at the same time I think when we— when I was finishing Junior School or Primary School at the age of 12, I was in a bit of a gang and that was all cool but when everyone went to secondary school then it did become very, you know, you didn't see boys much at all. And yeah, you might see them at running club, so very limited exposure to boys but we kind of— We knew them from when we were younger and then of course we went to discos, we met them again but we didn't actually feel— I would have been very distracted if they'd been in the classroom with me. I think it was better for me that they weren't, yeah, so I had— I still had enough exposure, yeah, yeah.

[00:06:05]



Ruth: And were you academic?

Bairbre: Well, not to begin with. I know that at primary school I felt a little bit thick as they used to say but— so I did get sent for an assessment to the remedial teacher who sent me back saying, “her problem is she doesn't think before she answers a question,” [laughs]. So— but I was really kind of envious of the girls who got to go to that teacher and got treats and prizes for achieving things so I kind of really wanted to see what was going on in Mrs Burke's room. So I suppose once I'd seen what it was I realised it maybe wasn't my thing. But back then it was very— school— well one of our teachers would have a table. Like a chart on the wall and you were given a position in the class and I do remember that. I remember that was, I think it's called third class, and that really did make an impression on me because I know that— you always knew who the top people were and they were praised and it was on the wall all week and then you did your tests at the end of the week to see if you could improve. And one week I decided I would make an effort but I only got to eleven and I just thought “well, what's the point?” So I didn't try again after that. And I also— and the— and I was near a friends in that table who I didn't consider that bright so I just thought “well, what's the point?” So I kind of coasted through school— through school after that until I was about fourteen and fifteen and then I just thought I needed to work a bit harder. It was getting closer to exams.

Ruth: So that was very hard having the chart on the wall with the—

Bairbre: Yeah.

Ruth: — It's like a league table of girls' performance—

Bairbre: It was a league table, yeah, it was. And I think she was a very old-fashioned teacher. She wasn't a nasty person but she obviously thought it was motivating people but I don't think it was— Well, not for everybody but I also remember one girl who was continually at the top. Her mother was invited in to kind of bask in the glory of her constant high scores and we were made to feel so impressed by her mother because she was working as a librarian in the University of Limerick. And I think that was again supposed to inspire us that we could be like her. And another mother once came in who was a teacher at another school and again she was held up as a model for us. So I think that that wasn't that healthy because a lot of mothers



at the time were housewives and that was basically saying, you know, “your mum isn't— isn't a model for you, a role model for you.” I think that was very narrow and a bit of a shame.

Ruth: It's interesting though in one way isn't it? Because it certainly wasn't my experience of school, you know, that it would have been the opposite in my primary school I think. In that it would have been, you know, the housewives were the good mothers looking after their children. The working mothers weren't really—

Bairbre: Yes, well interestingly, that wasn't a nun. I think if a nun had been teaching the class that wouldn't have happened. So that was a lay teacher who I guess was very pleased at where— the decision that she had made in her life if and she felt that other people should follow that route. So I think that that was a blip because the nuns certainly didn't devalue housewives and being a mother was, you know, I certainly felt it was valued. Yeah so that— but it did leave an impression on me that whole— that year— at school—

Ruth: What? That there wasn't any point in making the effort?

Bairbre: Yeah, yeah, there was no point and—

Ruth: It had the opposite of the desired effect on you?

Bairbre: Yeah, I mean it's funny because something similar happened in— so which class would that have been? First class, where I decided to make an effort and learn my spellings and it was a long spelling. It was— it was “to-get-her, together.” And I'd learnt it and it was spread over a page so I'd learnt it with a— what's that? A dash or a— So I'd learnt it with the dash and then I spelt it and then they marked it wrong. And I just thought “ah I tried again and it backfired” so I remember thinking “what's the point?” But it's interesting because they're such tiny little episodes—

Ruth: But they stand out in your mind?

Bairbre: But they— yeah, yeah, very much so. So I do remember that and— But I also so remember I think the story of “together” was that my mother helped me and she said break it down. And then the teacher gave that clue and I felt so cheated I thought “ah, now everybody knows” [laughs].



Ruth: You had your special way to win?

Bairbre: Yeah and I— But— And also— that was a rare — you know I had tried that time, and then that sent me back to not bothering really. I mean I didn't do dreadfully but I wasn't trying. So I guess it does show, it made an impression. I think I was a little bit unfortunate in that I had a sister who was very diligent, she was doing very well so I'm another one of these children who was constantly told about, you know, “can you be more like your sister or why aren't you like your sister?”

Ruth: So she was two years ahead of you in school—

Bairbre: In school. And she was a model pupil.

Ruth: Big pressure.

Bairbre: Yeah, in a weird way I kind of— I never— you know, I thought she was a bit of a— well back then you would have called her like a “swotter” or a “saddo” or a “square” so I never wanted to be like my sister. But it was annoying that I was constantly being compared to her at school by teachers. But then when I decided to work I knew I was probably just as clever as her so yeah, yeah, I turned it on when it mattered.

Ruth: Umhm. And were you the sort of— was sports your starring sort of area or—

[00:11:32]

Bairbre: Yeah, well my sister was good at sport as well but probably not as— I would have been a bit— I had the edge on her a bit but she would try anything sort of thing, she would. She was that sort of person— but— So sport was something I really enjoyed at school, yeah, and also the one thing that teachers liked about me was that I was good at Irish because my father spoke Irish and it was Irish at home. So I could—

Ruth: Did you speak Irish at home?

Bairbre: Yeah.

Ruth: All the time?



Bairbre: Well, I didn't because I was the rebel but yes, Irish was the language at home. So teachers really liked that. At primary school anyway. And they would make you, you know, if they needed someone to say a prayer in Irish or answer something in Irish. So I always flew through Irish. I found that really easy so I suppose that meant that they didn't despair too much because they knew I was good at Irish.

Ruth: Which was very important in those days if you were going to go on to university or the Civil Service or—

Bairbre: Or if you were going to be a teacher, yeah, yes.

Ruth: Or a teacher, yes.

Bairbre: Yes, it was valued, yeah, and I think they liked to say prayers in Irish or they would like to sing hymns in Irish although I couldn't sing but it was—

Ruth: Could you sing the Ar n'Athair now for us?

Bairbre: I could if I could sing, yeah, I know all the words, it's one of those things stay with you.

Ruth: They do, yeah.

Bairbre: You know, no, in fact I was at a funeral last week and I'm sure they sang that.

[Recording ended at 00:12:51]

[00:12:57]

Ruth: So we're back after a short break in the recording and I think Barbara you were talking about your sister and your school experiences the year you were fifteen?

Bairbre: Yes, so I think I was in third year when I was fifteen and it was quite a happy year. And I think I was enjoying school and— but I did used to find annoying was when I was told— I was compared to my sister and told how well she was doing, how studious she was and that sort of thing. But I think around that age I was starting to think that I wanted to do





well in my exams and I needed to up my game a bit. So, it was a bit of a turning point where I decided I would start working so yeah— It was a good year.

Ruth: And you said that the school was run by the Salesian nuns. What part did religion play in your family more generally?

Bairbre: Well, funnily enough, I considered myself quite lucky that we weren't that religious because I saw families who insisted on morning mass and rosaries. I was told some families said the Rosary so I felt I'd got off quite lightly. I think there was a prayer before meals and mass on a Sunday. But that wasn't too much, I don't think. That was fairly like, you know, that was— I felt like most other people but I did have sympathy for people whose parents were very committed to that, you know, outwardly worshipping et cetera, et cetera. But— but at the same time, my father I think was— his sister was a nun so I think he thought it was very important to stick to the rules and be observant because he had a member of the— you know, what do we call— 'the Cloth' in his family. So yeah I think maybe he was more observant. Although my mum was really committed; she used to like going to into Limerick city once a week, just into town and combine going to mass with a bit of shopping and a coffee. So she had a bit of routine and I think since we've all left home my mum does go to prayer meetings and things like that with the Salesian nuns who since— some of whom have left the convent and live in smaller groups in the area. So she attends the bits and bobs that they do. So, yeah, yeah so I think they were both fairly committed to their faith but didn't really do a hard sell on it which was quite nice. So yeah, it wasn't too bad in that regard. So yeah.

[00:15:26]

Ruth: So what would a sort of a typical day be like when you were about fifteen or sixteen?

Bairbre: Well I think on a school day, it was obviously up and out to school and I think— I'm not sure if I had my racer bike at that point I think I didn't get that until after my Inter Cert. I think my dad gave them out as prizes for— you know, so you had to earn them. So I think it would have been walking to school but that was fine because you would bump into people or if they saw you were behind, they would wait on a corner so most of the time you had company walking to school. And yeah, at the end of school again, you would just, you know, come home at your leisure really. You could go into town. In Limerick you know it's a decent



sized place so if you had a bit of money you might go into town after school and then take a bus home from town. So when I was younger, I was attending the Limerick School of Music and from a really young age, we would take a bus from near our school into Limerick and then walk back through town so we were quite independent and happy to go into town for errands and things like that. So I would have come home when it suited me really. I didn't really help much at home, my mother would have prepared the meal. I might have set the table probably and after the meal I'd have either been putting away or helping with the washing up but I never— I was never asked to get involved in the nitty gritty of preparing the meal. I think that my father was sort of happy for us to be encouraged to do music or do other things or study and not necessarily roll our sleeves up in the kitchen.

Ruth: Was your mum at home full-time?

Bairbre: Yes, my mum was at home full-time.

Ruth: And what did your dad do? Have you told me? Sorry if I—

Bairbre: Yeah so my dad worked in education, so he worked in third level education, so he—

Ruth: Was he a teacher?

Bairbre: No, he was an administrator. But I think he had— he started off in the classroom but he moved across to management so he used to— He worked near where we lived so he didn't have a big commute or anything like that. So his life seemed quite— you know, stress free although I know it wasn't stress free but certainly getting to work and getting home was easy.

[00:17:30]

And my dad would be home for the main meal in the evening and so we'd eat together but it wasn't— it was far from a calm experience because everybody was, you know, wanting to talk at once and all that sort of thing. It was very traditional so the men were served first as though they were sort of very important people and—

Ruth: Was it two brothers and—

Bairbre: No just one brother so—



Ruth: So your dad and your brother were served first?

Bairbre: Yeah, yeah.

Ruth: This was in the 70s now?

Bairbre: Yeah, yeah, in the 70s and—

Ruth: And the 80s.

Bairbre: And the 80s, yeah, and my mother might be asked to serve pudding before she'd even eaten her main herself or she would have only just sat down. It was never really rude or anything like that but it was just, you know, it wasn't great example to set because obviously, you know, my brother was learning some bad habits basically. But yeah. So there was a bit of a hierarchy. But sometimes my dad would be going out again to do some more work or to do something else so I could see that he was maybe rushing off to do something else. And my sister certainly continued with music so she could be rushing off to something else in the evening as well. But I think that my mother admitted to me it was a really tough time, you know, and she apparently used to— to say something along the lines of “please God this time will pass.”

Ruth: Because she was feeding five, four hungry children and trying to manage all the—

Bairbre: Well I don't think it was the feeding them although I don't think she— she particularly enjoyed cooking. I think it was just the clash of people, you know, not necessarily getting on that well and all being in a confined space, you know, at meal times and it being less than—

Ruth: Was there squabbling then?

Bairbre: Oh yeah, a lot of squabbling.

Ruth: And was it between you four children or was it back and forth to your mum and dad as well or—?



Bairbre: Yeah, I think it was— it was between us, but— and then— but I did think— I think that then that vibe would obviously upset other people let's say so, you know, kind of, it was difficult because it was noisy and me and my older sister gave my brother a hard time. But that was because he was always trying to compete so you'd put him back in his place so that was going on and that— yeah, that went on for a very long time so I think there were a big chunk of years when mealtimes were quite stressful. Yeah, it wasn't easy but I think, you know, there were obviously bigger families than ours, we were just four so it must have been tougher in other households but yeah it wasn't easy.

Ruth: Were you close?

Bairbre: No, I wouldn't say we were close at all. No, I don't know why but I think that I was always looking to get away and to move on with my life so I wasn't looking to be at home or stay at home or spend time at home. So I was always trying to be out doing things or busy with my own interests so yeah, I didn't particularly want to be at home. Not that it was a dreadful place but I just, I didn't find it interesting, it didn't do much for me so yeah.

[00:20:29]

Ruth: You wanted to be out in the world?

Bairbre: Yeah, I did, yeah. I was in a—

Ruth: Was that a— Were your sisters like that as well or—?

Bairbre: No, no, my older sister wasn't— she was— I think— well, she was doing music, a couple of different instruments, and involved in those sorts of things and she stayed at home to go to university in Limerick. So in fact I left home first, and then my sister left the year after to come to Dublin to teach and then my brother left the year after that to go to Belfast to study . So my youngest sister was at home on her own for six years so it really happened quite quickly that things changed but I think— yeah, I don't— I think everyone's got a soft spot for the baby in the family but aside from that I don't think there is a close bond or close relationships at all.

Ruth: And did your parents have a good marriage? Were they—



Bairbre: Well, I don't really know what the right answer is because I guess it's for them to answer so I don't—I don't know but I think that it will have had, like every relationship, ups and downs and I think that there was stress around my dad's job that made—you know, that affected him in a big way. And I think back then people didn't recognise what it was and they didn't have support and all those things so I think my dad did— was affected by stress definitely and I think it is a shame that there wasn't that understanding. But I think, you know, my mum and I have talked about it since then and we recognise that that's what it was. So it's a bit sad really because obviously it would have had—it would have been great if there had been ways to kind of address that.

Ruth: And were there things that you did all six of you together as a family when you were a teenager?

Bairbre: Well, the only thing— well, my dad always liked—I don't know about all six of us but my dad always liked going into town on a Saturday afternoon. Because he had grown up in Dublin and his family had all been in shops and retail, he loved to go and have a mooch around the shops. So even if you were trying to study and it was near an exam, my dad would say, “do you want to go into town?” Because he'd be going into town. So I would often take a lift with my dad. I wouldn't necessarily go round town with him but I'd—you know, we'd do that together and meet and take a lift home. So really I don't— And then my dad also sometimes used to force us all into the car to go on a Sunday afternoon kind of jaunt to a place called Cratloe which is outside Limerick and, you know, go for—

Ruth: Is it the seaside or— ?

Bairbre: No, it's a— it's part of the Forestry Commission so you park the car and you—

Ruth: Walk in the woods?

Bairbre: Yeah. A Walk in the woods but it had like a Trim Trail— or there was another place on the other side of Limerick called Curraghchase which was an old English sort of house that had burnt down but the grounds were nice. So we used to do things like that and I think that they were— there was— when we were younger that was— everyone wants to do it but obviously when you're fifteen you don't want to do that so I think it was probably like I was not wanting to be there if I was there. And I'm sure— my sister would have been sixteen,



seventeen, she probably didn't want to be there either, because she'd have been studying or something. So I think there would have been very few opportunities to do everything together at that stage.

[00:23:33]

Ruth: So you put your head down a little bit for the Inter Cert?

Bairbre: Yeah, I did, so I got on grand and it meant then I could, you know, make choices about Leaving Cert and also it meant that people took me seriously, didn't think I was wasting their time. So yeah, I think that really made me feel— yeah, I got a real boost out of that. So yeah, the next chapter then was quite— you know, I had a part-time job, I had money and I felt confident that I was going to do reasonably well. But the one thing that I didn't have confidence in was my ability to go to university and do a degree so I really doubted myself in that regard. So that was why I didn't go to university straight from school I went to Dublin Institute of Technology and did— I don't know what's it— some—

Ruth: You did fine at the Leaving Cert, did you?

Bairbre: Oh yeah, I did. Well, I think I actually found it fine. It was— I— I—

Ruth: You just did it?

Bairbre: Yeah, I just did it, yeah. And I— the things I liked I liked even with exam pressure. I went— I did go to what used to be called a grind. So I went to an English grind, which I loved because there were guys at it as well [laughs]. So again it meant when you were out in town you knew these other people and there were some girls from other schools as well so it felt like it was good for my social circle.

[00:24:48]

Ruth: Opened your world up a bit?

Bairbre: Yeah, it just gave me some other connections. And I went with a girl from my school and really enjoyed it. It was a Friday night thing, I remember going there wearing some new Doc Martens one night thinking I was it, you know, although they were really hard



to break in so that was a bit uh, ouch. So I did that, and actually I really, really [was] delighted that I actually got an A in honours English so that's kind of still the pinnacle of my educational achievements.

Ruth: Fantastic.

Bairbre: Yeah, so that really made me feel like I, you know, I was reasonably clever. So— But then I still did the course in— at DIT, which was interesting because I assumed—

Ruth: What was the course?

Bairbre: So it had a ridiculous title, it was called Auctioneering Valuation and Estate Agency. Other places where you could study it just called it Valuation Surveying or VS or Estate Management, but anyway, they had this long-winded title for it. But I knew that if I did that, I could transfer in different directions so I thought it was like a foundation course in property.

Ruth: But what attracted you to that whole area?

Bairbre: Well, I was desperate to get away from Limerick so I wanted to go to Dublin and my father was constantly trying to get me to be a quantity surveyor. Because at the college that he worked at, QS was his— one of his big things— He was always pushing and always promoting it. So I didn't want to do what my Dad had asked me to do. So I did a variant, so that's how it happened basically. And yeah, I don't really think I looked into it properly or anything like that.

[00:26:17]

Ruth: You were just like, I'm off.

Bairbre: Yeah, I was just—

Ruth: To Dublin.

Bairbre: Yeah, and also what was particularly attractive, it was funded by an ESF grant so I got paid to study. So I was away, you know, I was up and away.

Ruth: At eighteen?



Bairbre: Yeah, so off I went, delighted. But then my dad arranged for me to live with my aunt for the first year. But that was fine because it wasn't scary and it was easy. And I had some money and then I went—I'd been working at Roches Stores in Limerick so they just transferred me to Dublin so it was good, you know, it was good. So, yeah, it was a good time.

Ruth: You had a job, a place to live, and you started the course—

Bairbre: Yeah.

Ruth: And how was it? Was it—?

Bairbre: Yeah, it was funny because the one thing I couldn't get my head round was valuations, still can't understand yields so I re—I was in— A bit of the course I loved was art and architecture so I loved all that. I still find architecture really interesting and design and so— Yeah, it became clear I wasn't going to stick to the main aspect of the course so then I started looking at where I could go next and that's when I found I could transfer into a building surveying degree course and that's what I did. So I came over here to the University of Greenwich and I joined the second year— after two years in Dublin— the second year of a degree course. So I became a building surveyor, yeah.

Ruth: That was quite a big move, moving to Greenwich, no?

Bairbre: Well, no, it didn't feel like a big move, because again I had my dad telling me, “oh, there's this,” you know, my dad knew about these ways— and other universities over here that were doing something similar, Leicester did something as well and Limerick had links with Herriot-Watt in Edinburgh, so I kind of knew I was always coming to the UK even though we never really, really talked about it. Had quite a few cousins and an aunt and an uncle here so it was just, you know, it wasn't a big deal.

[00:28:07]

Anyway— So, yeah, I was excited about it, I was up for it and when I came from DIT— about four or five other students came from DIT, they were— they had been the year ahead of me and they transferred into the last year of the Estate Management course, but it meant that I had a crowd—





Ruth: So you were coming with people, you weren't all alone—

Bairbre: Yeah. There was—

Ruth: And where did you live? Did you live with relatives—

Bairbre: No, I lived in halls for the first year with a couple of guys from Dublin because they were all in the same building which was great and then my second— my second year which was the third year course, I lived in a house with some guys in the town and I had— I bought a bike out—

Ruth: In Greenwich?

Bairbre: Oh no, I wish it was Greenwich, in Dartford.

Ruth: Oh right.

Bairbre: And I bought a bike and cycled in and out of university to— you know, so I think— That was when Thames Poly became University of Greenwich and in the— you know, a couple of years after they bought the Naval College and it now looks like a very impressive beautiful university. But I went to a wedding there before I think they fully bought it and I've seen how amazing the Naval College is so I can see why they didn't hesitate to jump in there and rebadge it. So it still sounds nice when I say University of Greenwich, I don't need to mention Dartford.

Ruth: [Laughs]. I had no idea you were in Dartford and [indec].

Bairbre: Well I think there were a couple of campuses. There was one, Avery Hill, which is I think— now, what part— Abbey Wood? In that part of south east London? And there was in Greenwich, in— in the town bit, you know, in the sort of— not the arse end but in the busy bit, they had a campus there as well so they had a foothold in Greenwich but they were spread around southeast London a bit.

[00:29:45]



Ruth: So, ehm, the kind of journey from Inter Cert through Leaving Cert to Dublin to London, what happened to friendships and love affairs and all of that along the way?

Bairbre: Well, yeah, I think— I think fifteen and sixteen were tricky with friendship groups but I think because I'd kind of foolishly hung around with some girls from another school and eventually that kind of fractured and it didn't really work out so I was a little bit of— kind of— of one of these people who drifted in and out of groups for a few years. But I think by the time I got towards the end of secondary school, I was sorted again and so, went to like all— you know— so my social life was great, I was out all the time— I hung out with some girls who were actually the year below me but we got merged and they're still my friends now, they're just great fun. So that was really happy and I think they—

Ruth: What did you do?

Bairbre: Well, we would go out clubbing on a Saturday night and meet them after work and yeah, just that kind of thing—

Ruth: What kind of music did you like?

Bairbre: Ah g— well it was all very dance-y then, wasn't it?

Ruth: What year are we in now?

[00:30:45]

Bairbre: So that was 1990. So '89/'90. [indec]. So '88/'89, I was clubbing in Limerick with my friends—

Ruth: So was that like ecstasy and kind of all that stuff—

Bairbre: Yeah. Well, I don't— No, I think that came just a few years after that. Early '90s, well mid '90s was the whole ecstasy thing, well I think— Oh just— you know rubbish, I can't even remember the music, it was just really rubbish, it was just pop-y rubbish. We didn't really go to any live music, we didn't have any particular interest in pop— went to a U2 concert, you know, went to a Deacon Blue in 1990.



Ruth: You weren't a big gig go-er?

Bairbre: No, went to Deacon Blue concert. Well, you had to go to Dublin for them so you'd have to be fairly committed. But I went to— you know, I queued for hours and hours to get my U2 tickets but yeah, no, I think I was in my bubble, I had my part-time job and I had my nights out and yeah, you know, I think it was, yeah, music was sort of— yeah, it didn't— I think maybe because I couldn't play an instrument, I'd sort of— I'd kind of given up on music because I'd been introduced to it when I was young and I just didn't get it, whereas my sister and all my siblings played music but I could never learn the notes, I had to cheat and write them on the page so I sort of gave it up and then didn't really— didn't really bother with it. So yeah, live music. Although we went, there were a couple of bands, but it was— you were only going to be seen, you weren't going to really listen to the music, you didn't really care. Aslan were a band that used to come around and went to them a few times and there were a couple of other Limerick bands but they didn't make an impression on me [laughs]. It was the social thing that we know, so, you know. But it was a really happy time. So my friends stayed in Limerick actually so I would come home in my first year at— in Dublin. I came home quite a bit for the first term and then less so. But they were always there, you know, they were a really fun bunch to go out with and it's continued like that up until probably when I started working part time when I'd go home a lot less. But I'd go out with the same crowd and have a really good time so yeah, I was very fortunate. Whereas I met some friends in Dublin but that didn't really kind of last very long because they stayed in Dublin and I went to the UK.

[00:32:59]

And then, I met— yeah, I met my husband at university so of course I stayed— you know, I'm still with him so— but my— I've one— I've two friends from university who I'm still in touch with who were really good friends, one in— who's gone back to Ireland and one who is in London who I see.

Ruth: Are they Irish?

Bairbre: Ah, yeah, the girl who's gone back to Ireland is Irish so that was funny. I was in the lecture hall one day when she asked a question in a really strong Waterford accent and I sort of was taken aback so— She was called Gillian and we became good friends. But she was



living with her boyfriend who was working construction and she'd come from Ireland to live with him and study. So she wasn't kind of going out with me but in lectures and stuff, we were friends and then my other friend who was affectionately known as “Mad Caroline” was English and she was always getting into trouble, you know, she, she had a very interesting life. My husband was always warning me [laughs] not to get involved in her— her life but she's still a good friend now so I didn't listen to him — I ignored him. So yeah, so I had good friends at university, albeit a small group and yeah, I really enjoyed my time there.

Ruth: And your husband, so was he— was there romance before that or— ?

Bairbre: Yeah, but like, you know, here and there. Yeah, yeah, nothing serious.

Ruth: So, in Ireland?

Bairbre: Yeah, yeah. You know, just up in Dublin but nothing stuck, you know, and actually I had a lovely little boyfriend in Limerick when I first went to Dublin and he— But it was a bit more like a—

Ruth: A little boyfriend?

Bairbre: Well it was a bit more like a teddy bear scenario, you know, just thought he was very sweet and, you know, that—

Ruth: When you were— is this when you were eighteen say?

Bairbre: Yeah, yeah. Just someone I really liked but it wasn't that type of relationship, you know, so yeah, no—

[00:34:45]

Ruth: So did you only explore sex then when you left home and you weren't living with your parents anymore?

Bairbre: Oh God, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ruth: So you didn't have to go through that sort of negotiation at all?



Bairbre: No, no. Although we came to visit my family one year when we were just— I think it was the year we started going out and we—

Ruth: You and your husband?

Bairbre: Yeah, so we started going out and then we came to Ireland on our summer holidays together— we'd go to Kerry. And my mother did what— And we were— So we had like a night or two in my mum and dad's house and my mum wanted to speak to me before we went to Kerry so that was all a bit embarrassing.

Ruth: Did she put you in separate rooms in her house?

Bairbre: Oh, she would have done in her house, yeah. Because my husband's parents did anyway so that was— didn't feel awkward about that but she wanted to advise me before we went to Kerry which I just like was—

Ruth: As to what, making sure you didn't get pregnant or—

Bairbre: Yeah, well actually I didn't let her say anything to me. It was all very awkward but—

Ruth: Very awkward.

Bairbre: She didn't get to say what she wanted to say because you know, the horse had bolted and it was all a bit cringey.

Ruth: Were you about twenty at this stage?

Bairbre: Yeah, so it was just cringey, yeah [laughs].

Ruth: But she felt she had to have the conversation; it was quite sweet really.

Bairbre: Yeah, I suppose, I feel bad for her but anyway. I'm sure it's really hard to, you know, to deal with those situations and you know, yeah, very awkward. But I'm sure, you know, my mum was such a lovely person but you know, everyone's experiences are so different, I just— I just knew she could— Well in my mind she didn't have anything to add to, you



know, the conversation let's say, so I just dismissed her so— probably quite rudely and hurtfully but no, there were no voices raised but it was just awkward.

[00:36:18]

Ruth: Were you close, you and your mum?

Bairbre: Ehm—

Ruth: Are your parents alive?

Bairbre: Yes, ehm, yeah. I don't know— I think— I mean I think the world of my mum but I'm not sure if we were— because I obviously couldn't share any of that stuff with my mum whereas these days mothers and daughters do talk about that sort of stuff. So we wouldn't have talked about any of that sort of stuff so I suppose to a limited extent, but I'm really fond of my mum. I think she was a very kind mother, very kind, you know. So— lucky in that regard.

[00:36:50]

Ruth: So you were telling me about meeting your husband?

Bairbre: Yeah, so I met my husband when I was in Greenwich, yeah. And it was like falling off a log really, I was quite lucky. Yeah. So I got introduced to him by a girl— an Irish girl who was doing his course and they were doing like a presentation like, you know these fake sort of— It was supposed to be a planning examination and he said, “oh yeah, you know, I'm doing mine this afternoon, you can come and watch if you like” and I just thought to myself, “well, yeah, why don't I?” So I went and watched, had a good look at him doing his presentation and thought, “oh yeah, quite like him.” And then within a couple of days or maybe a week, there was a do on at the students' union, I think it was a comedy do or something like that and yeah, he just approached me and that was it. So it was really easy, so yeah, we got together there and then, so—

Ruth: And where's he from?



Bairbre: He's from Newcastle, yeah, so I didn't think he was from Newcastle because he doesn't have a Geordie accent and the lads I was hanging around with at the time were all from Yorkshire and had strong Yorkshire accents so I was teasing him saying he was a soft southerner but he's just— he is a Geordie but he is a very well-spoken Geordie [laughs], so yeah. All those years ago.

Ruth: What year was this?

Bairbre: It would have been '92, end of '92 because— so yeah, we met—

Ruth: What age were you? Twenty-one?

Bairbre: Yeah, I was twenty-one so—

Ruth: And what age was he?

Bairbre: He was twenty-one. He— Our birthdays are very close. So we met just before our birthdays in December and then we had our first proper date in January where he took me up to London, took me to a show and showed me round town and, yeah, it was great. I was really impressed [laughs]. So yeah, it was really, you know, really happy relationship and a lot of fun. So yeah, I've got lots of good memories of, you know—

Ruth: And where was that in your university degree, if you know what I mean, were you nearly finished at that stage— ?

Bairbre: He was a year ahead of me, so he was in his third year and I was in my second year so then he went off back up to Newcastle. So I was still at— in Dartford for a year while he was in Newcastle so that was a really difficult commute to see him sort of every other weekend but it worked out so— Plus I'm quite an independent person so I didn't really want someone in my space all the time, I wanted to still have other friends and do other things and I also— I wanted to do well at my degree as well and do my dissertation so it worked out fine, yeah.

Ruth: And then you had a decision to be made at the end of the—



Bairbre: Yeah, well, I was very fortunate because when I was doing my dissertation which was on indoor air quality, I was— I was researching the area and I contacted a company in London who were doing BREEAM assessments. And they agreed to let me go with them to do a BREEAM assessment. So I did these TFL buildings in London with a guy from a company called JLW who I got on with like a house on fire straight away, so that when I was then looking to apply for jobs, I wrote to them and of course I mentioned that I'd done this and I got an interview and I got a job with them.

So while I had concerns before I got that job about— because I wrote to— I think I wrote to sixty companies and I think I only got two interviews, so I was worried that things were going to fall apart and I would have to go back to Limerick and start from zero. And, I was worried about that but as luck would have it, I found a job in London and I moved up to London and stayed with my aunt for a little while until I found a flat share. So yeah, so then I sorted myself out and started life working in London after that. So then—

[00:40:28]

And then my husband—

Ruth: Who wasn't your husband yet?

Bairbre: No, it's my boyfriend. He eventually— I think it must have been a year or two later— I managed to recruit him to the same company and I got some money for doing it—

Ruth: Did you actually recruit him yourself? [laughs]

Bairbre: Well, yeah. So they had this system where you could— I don't know what they called it but you— you basically recruited somebody on, you know, and so I did and got £500 for recruiting my husband to the company.

Ruth: Fantastic. Husband to be?

Bairbre: Husband to be. So. But it was funny because my husband or my boyfriend was pretty good at what he did and it was a fee earning part of the company so very quickly, he was doing better than me and yeah— so, so then I left and he continued on an upward trajectory [laughs].





Úna Gan A Gúna

Irish women's oral histories

Ruth: So, we're just going to pause the tape now, we need to be out of our current space so I'll just thank you very, very much Bairbre for the interview today and hope to speak to you again soon.

Bairbre: You're very welcome.

[00:41:25 END]