Úna Gan A Gúna
Irish women's oral histories

ÚnaGanAGúna

Interview Summary Sheet **Title Page**

Ref No: 0UNA-U1X00013

Collection Title:
ÚnaGanAGúna Phase 1

Interviewee's Surname
Heffernan

Interviewee's Title
Ms

Interviewee's First Name(s)
Mary

Interviewee's Gender
Female

Occupation
Counsellor/ therapist

Interviewee's Date of Birth
17.08.1966

Mother's occupation
PA to Desmond Williams at D E Williams in Tullamore, they make Tullamore Dew.

Father's occupation
Father was in the army during 'The Emergency' and then was a Technical Supervisor in RTE for over 25 years

Date(s) of recording 06.04.2021

Location of interview: Online

Name of interviewer: Ailsa Russell

Type of recorder Zencastr

Total number of tracks
1

Recording format
48 kHz, 32 bit

Mono

Total duration (01:07:42)

Additional material (e.g. photos, documents)

1. Mary on holiday in Ireland, 1983.
2. Mary dressed for Christmas Party in c1983. She notes: The sword was a joke but the outfit was not! 'New Romantic' fashion was all the rage. Terrible hair as well.
3. Mary on her graduation from UCD in 1988. Taken in her parents' back garden. This was the year she left Dublin and came to live in London.

4. Mary's parents Alice and Sean O'Ceallaigh on their Silver Wedding Anniversary, undated.
5. Mary recruiting new members for the Psychology Society at UCD Freshers' Week, 1987.

Participation and recording agreement
Signed and on file.

Interviewer's comments
Section 01:00:25- 01:00:44 and 01:01:37-01:02:13 and 01:02:35-01:03:17 and 01:06:39-01:07:26] muted on recording and redacted in this transcript.

Ailsa: Mary, so it's great to talk to you again.

Mary: Hi, Ailsa.

Ailsa: Thank you for coming online and doing this interview and agreeing to be recorded.

Mary: I'm delighted to do it.

Ailsa: And I— we had a really good chat the last time?

Mary: Yeah.

Ailsa: Yeah, and learned, you know, really a lot about your life and especially your family background and early upbringing.

Mary: Yeah.

Ailsa: And you told me about how you had a much older sister— half-sister from your father's first marriage.

Mary: That's right, yeah, yeah.

Ailsa: And then, a younger brother, I think.

Mary: Yes, yes, yeah. Not much younger, eighteen months younger, yeah, yeah.

Ailsa: And you told me about how your parents met and how your mum had worked for Tullamore Dew Whisky until she got married.

Mary: That's right, yes, yes.

Ailsa: And I guess I wanted to kind of dive in to the age of fifteen onwards really and think about what was life like for you then as a young girl growing up in Ireland and a teenager?

Mary: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ailsa: With a much older half-sister as well.

Mary: Yes, yeah. Well, you know, it's interesting actually when I think about fifteen. Actually, fifteen was one of my best years. If I could go back and do another year, I would do the year of fifteen because that was Inter Cert year, I think, or probably the end of it. Fifteen, sixteen was Inter Cert. And we just had a blast. I mean disgracefully behaved like, just having a great time but also incredibly innocent when I look back and we thought we were so bold. And I had five friends—

Ailsa: What school were you going to then?

Mary: So I went to a state school. I went to the Presentation Convent, Terranure and the Presentation Convent, Terranure was a mad school to go to. Interesting school to go to. Because it was a school— when I look back now I realise— it was very much a social intersection in south county Dublin because although it was in Dublin, it was obviously a very leafy affluent suburb of Dublin. And, you know, we felt we were— we were affluent. When I look back now, I don't think we were [laughs] but we thought we were very well off. But there was a system introduced at some point that I don't really know but certainly when I started going to primary school where there were children from further out in the suburbs in Tallagh, which would have been considered not as affluent and very much a working class area— And they were offered places in schools like my school in Terranure. And so the Tallagh bus used to come every day, full of girls from Tallagh who used to come in to Terranure to go to school in Presentation. And it was a blooming brilliant idea because it made us very mixed as a social group which was good for those of us who were living in the surrounds of Terranure— I lived in Rathfarnham— and the girls that lived in Tallagh. It was a great mix and whoever thought of that, well done, because it was a really good idea and I hope they still do things like that in Dublin. So we had a great mix socially in the school of people who would have been very well off and people who would have been absolutely not well off at all and that was very good for all of us. You know, so I had five friends— four friends, five of us altogether, a little group, a posse of girls as I'm sure still goes on today, girls kind of go round in posses. I also think it's a reflection of our ability to go out socially, we needed to be in a group and that was one thing I do remember standing out all the time I lived in Ireland and from fifteen to when I left at sort of twenty-two, that going out on your own as a girl was virtually impossible. I felt it was anyway. That—

Ailsa: You weren't allowed or—?

Mary: No, no, I was allowed but, you know, my parents were pretty good actually at letting me go out and stuff. I didn't feel particularly— they were particularly strict. I mean there were various rules about where are you going, who are you with and let us know when you'll be back and come back on time. I didn't always stick to that but, you know— Them's the rules and if you broke them, you had to stay in for a weekend. But no, it was to do with men, you know, and lads and if— The idea of going into a pub on your own was just like, "are you mad?" Because people will think a) there's something wrong with you and men will think you're available. So you went round in your girlie group and if you got boyfriends, the

boyfriend was actually on the fringes of the group then and you'd go along with your boyfriend but the girls were the most important part of your life, you know, the five girls together. And nobody got left behind. You know, if we were out for a night. If anyone got very drunk or anyone was like with some bloke who turned up, they weren't going anywhere without us, you know, we were very protective of each other and very aware of our personal safety.

[00:05:00]

Ailsa: And would you go to pubs and things at the age of fifteen or—?

Mary: Yes. [Laughs].

Ailsa: You remember this well Mary. [Laughs].

Mary: Sorry, Mammy, wherever you are, sorry Mammy. Absolutely. And the hilarity of trying to get into places was part of the fun, it was the challenge and you knew which pubs you could get into and which you couldn't. The nightclubs were very difficult until you were kind of— well, seventeen, eighteen, and you did really need to look it to get in there but it was kind of a challenge. I always remember you could never get into the Baggot Inn, it was very difficult. Occasionally we did and it always felt like a triumph when we got in and actually once you got in—

Ailsa: So you went to central Dublin to—

Mary: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. We'd go into town, yeah. Now the schools were great, they did something that— I think— Certainly I was always surprised when my daughters went to school over here, there was no social life for them at all around the school in terms of socialising. There was loads of activity in terms of sport and clubs and blah, blah. There was absolutely zero social life. And yet our schools in Dublin, who in many ways you would have thought, they're very behind— Actually, no, they all ran discos for us between fifteen and eighteen and they were fantastic, they were brilliant and I wish I could go to one now because you went with your five friends, your posse of girls and you owned the place. Like you were going in, yeah, Terranure College School Hall here I am, whoah. And it was fantastic fun.

Ailsa: And where— where would the boys come from?

Mary: They were from— well what they would do is— It was mostly the boys' schools who ran them, not ours. So the nearest boys' school to us was Terranure College where my brother went to school and it was a private school, fee-paying school. But they ran a regular disco once a term usually and would send the tickets up to Ter— up to us and to Our Ladies— boo, and other places. And we'd all get these tickets, we'd buy the tickets and off we'd go on a Friday night. And I mean, you know, it was from eight until half eleven or something. But it was the highlight of the term, absolutely the highlight, and that's where you got to meet boys— was at the local disco. And that would be— St Mary's used to do one as well but they didn't do it in the school, they had the rugby club so they used to hold it in the rugby club. And again, getting in— they were actually very strict on getting in, they would really look at you going in the door to make sure you were old enough. And then we got in. No alcohol, no food, just a DJ and a hall; that was all you needed. And that was all we needed and we were very happy with that and of course it was great and you met so-and-so and then you might know some friends from some of the other girls' schools but that would be unusual because we were very, very fixed in our groups as teenagers are, I guess. But I'd know one or two of the girls from Our Ladies and say hello to them, yeah. Then it'd be— the challenge would be the boys, there they are.

Ailsa: When you say "the challenge," what do you mean? [Laughs].

Mary: [Laughs]. Getting somebody to ask you to dance, which I believe doesn't happen anymore at all now. But not always because like we'd just bop around ourselves. But then there'd be a slow set so they'd play some slow music and then you just had to wait and wait and hope that somebody not too awful would come over and ask you to dance. And that'd be your moment. But it was great, you know, it was mad when I look back on it now. My daughters have no idea what I'm talking about, all this stuff, waiting to be asked to dance and all that is just mad to them but we did and it was great and I— I loved it. We just had a great time and it was incredibly innocent. For my friends certainly. From fifteen to eighteen as far as I knew, certainly in my group of five, nobody was having sex. There was a lot of what they called "heavy petting" going on, no mistake. A lot. And I guess it was the usual Catholic thing of "everything but," "everything but," you know. And in terms of— I met— who is now my husband like can you believe it? I met him when I was eighteen and then it got very serious. Then he was my first sexual partner and part of the reason for all of that too was the total unavailability of contraception. So if you wanted the pill, what we mostly did was— you

went to your doctor and said you were having a lot of period pain and all this kind of— you made up this big old story, and he'd put you on the pill. Because they were doing that to regulate women's periods. And we knew that. So we'd go, and that's how you got the pill.

Ailsa: And Mary, how did you know that? Was that because it was a— something everyone—

Mary: We all told each other, we all told each other. And then, I guess as I got to about sixteen, seventeen, there was also a Well Woman Clinic in Dublin, which was an absolute Godsend.

[00:10:00]

Mary: And everyone I knew went there. The Well Woman Clinic was great but there was only one and that was it, so it was quite difficult to get in and get an appointment and all that stuff. All of us— the doctor we went to was our family doctor and make no mistake like [laughs], you had no trust in his confidentiality whatsoever [laughs]. Because he knew your Mum and your Dad and your brother and your friend and, you know, his wife knew everybody and even going to him, you didn't want him to think that you were fast or loose or fast and loose, whatever.

Ailsa: And is that what you would have been seen as?

Mary: Oh absolutely, yeah, of course, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ailsa: So were you— would you—did you want— were you able to tell him or— about like—

Mary: No.

Ailsa: "I've got really heavy periods, can I go on the pill?" or—

Mary: Oh yeah, you could do that but, you know— And I remember him actually saying to me, "now Mary, I'm giving you these tablets," not pills, tablets, "to regulate your periods" or whatever. "Now, you know, you want to make sure if you keep these in your handbag, don't let them fall out because you know they look— they are a contraceptive pill." So it would be

embarrassing to me that people would know I was on the pill, so don't let anyone see them in your bag. He said that to me, the doctor. [Laughs].

Ailsa: It would be embarrassing for him?

Mary: No, for me.

Ailsa: Oh for you, okay.

Mary: You know, there'd be a great shame on me if someone saw I had the pill in my bag.

Ailsa: And do you think he knew why you wanted them or—?

Mary: No, no, I genuinely don't. I know it sounds mad but I genuinely don't think so because I was a very good girl, whatever that means. You know, I was a good girl and I went to school and I did my business and I was— you know, I wasn't wild or mad or anything like that. Because very often, certainly in my experience, if you were very badly behaved, you were playing up at school or you weren't doing what you should do, very often parents would go to the doctor and talk about that. You know, how do I get my daughter to behave herself. And so, you know, he knew like— there was never a problem with me. I was— you know, I was a good kid. I kind of did do my homework and study and I never gave any trouble as my mother would say. So there was an assumption about who you were from your behaviour and I got away with loads of stuff in school because of that. I got away with smoking in school because I was thought to be a good girl. But I was doing all kinds [laughs], I was just very good at it. I was just very good at sneaking around.

Ailsa: Drinking in the pubs at fifteen. Listen, this is nothing. We had this in Cork as well but it's kind of interesting that there's this picture of you being a good girl—

Mary: Absolutely and fifteen was a good age to be doing that. You weren't young at fifteen doing that. That was normal and I can't imagine what it was like down the country unless it was harder because everyone knew you in the pubs, I don't know. In Dublin, maybe it was easier because it was anonymous. So if I went in to the Baggot Inn or whatever on a Friday night, they hadn't a clue who I was whereas if it was a small village and everyone— Then that'd be very difficult. I mean before fifteen, I didn't do it but I did have some friends when you would buy alcohol in an off licence or a supermarket and drink it in a field somewhere. Usually in the field before the disco down in Teranure College [laughs]. I don't know how people didn't trip over each other in the dark down there because there were groups of people all over the place drinking cider in the field before the disco but I was too fancy for that, I just

thought, I am not sitting on grass for anybody, for any reason. I'm turning up looking pristine. And I also— I never particularly liked getting too drunk or being very drunk, I felt very vulnerable if I was. And certainly as girls even we knew if you got yourself very drunk, you needed to be very careful because you could be taken advantage of or whatever and guys, I think— a lot of them, not all of them, not all of them but a lot of them saw you as fair game if you were very drunk and— So we— Again, it was about that sense all the time around us of fear, of that— I'm going to say "assault" but— I think that's a fair word because we did all group together for protection, physically. So that's— When I look back now, that's quite sad, I think that's very sad that we had that sense of threat. That if you were a woman on your own, you were vulnerable and that was very much a thing.

[00:14:44]

Mary: Now at the same time, I had a couple of friends in that group— One of them, her family came from Feathard in Wexford and she would fairly regularly, with one other girl, hitch a ride down to Feathard if she was going down for the weekend, which used to horrify me. I used to think, "Oh my God," and one— I know one night, they decided to hitch home from a disco at Wesley and the police picked them up, pulled up in a car and said to them, "girls, what are ye doing?" "Oh, we're just hitching home." "No, you're not, get in the car." So he took them home and then one of them said to him, "please don't park outside my house, can you drop us at the end of the road because my Mummy will go mad if she sees me coming home in a police car." So they said, "yeah, no problem," and they dropped them at the end of the road, and just brought them home. So yeah, there were some mad moments like that. But the— the— so that interaction of the schools where they held these dances and discos and allowed us to mix was very healthy, actually, in a weird way. It was a good thing. And I think my daughters very much missed out on that here, they really did; there was nothing like that for them here.

Ailsa: So it sounds like there was this general fear of men and boys but somehow rather this was a safer space to—

Mary: Exactly, exactly and this kind of thing— because it was run by the school, there was a sense of safety. And in Teranure College especially, you know, like my Dad would come and

pick me up at half-eleven or twelve or whatever; he'd come and pick me up and like, one of the priests would be standing outside the disco. I don't think he'd been in there, they weren't inside and I know some people maybe— I don't know, maybe in the country, maybe in the generation before mine— the clergy would be inside the dancehall. But in my day, they were definitely outside and they never intervened. I never had any kind of thing like that. But when you came out at the end of the night— I think he was there mainly because he had the keys to the hall. [Laughs]. He was just waiting to lock up to be fair to him, but he'd be a presence and maybe he was making his presence felt, I don't know, but we certainly never felt the interference of the clergy in the social space at all. They didn't need to, they had us well-trained. [Laughs].

Ailsa: Yes. Did you meet— did you meet boys there? I mean did you have any boyfriends at that age that you met at those or—

Mary: Oh yes, yes, and what was nice about it in a way when I look back was because sex wasn't going to be on the cards at that age for sure, but it was very romantic. You know, it really was and I had several boyfriends but they were like— For several weeks at a time, it would be a great affair and then suddenly yeah, we'd all be fed up and go off our separate ways. And there'd be groups of boys so if one girl knew one guy, then we'd all get to know his friends and that was how we got to know each other in a very kind of— Gosh, I don't know how I'd describe it [siren sound]— but through friendship groups. So that was another way of being safe I guess, that if you knew who this guy was and you knew where he lived, it was highly unlikely he was going to do anything terrible to you. So we got to know each other that way and I think also for the boys who had terrible social skills, it was easier for them to be with a group of girls who were friends of their sister or friends of their friend or— So it was very organic is the word I'm looking for. So kind of organic way of getting to know— Getting to know each other but in a kind of safe space of— These are people from our neighbourhood, we know where they live, we know who they are, they're not total strangers.

Ailsa: So where did this fear come from, do you think? I mean where— how did this get transmitted?

Mary: Well I think there was definitely from our parents and very serious conversations about going out, you know, just to be careful of yourself and your— There was this kind of thing, I remember my Dad— I might have mentioned it in the last tape actually— my Dad

giving me this book written by a Catholic woman doctor, when I was about fourteen. And while it dealt with sort of sex and periods and stuff in a very bizarre way, it also had this chapter that was full of weird stuff like sitting in dancehalls— sitting in a car outside a dancehall meant you were a bit fast and like I didn't even understand that but anyway, apparently that was the thing. So there was this kind of thing about not leaving yourself open to someone taking advantage of you and to look after yourself and to set limits with boys and that kind of stuff. And then, it does occur to me now as I look back, there were rumours around of, you know, girls who'd been assaulted. So I always remember the girl who lived round the corner from where I lived, I even remember her name but I won't say it. And I was told that she'd been assaulted in the church. She'd gone into the church for some reason and some man had sexually assaulted her in the church. And I remember my mother and a neighbour— I was sitting in the room, they were having a conversation about this and the neighbour said to my mother, "but sure that one always goes round dressed in hot pants and all the rest." You know, what did she expect, kind of thing.

[00:20:02]

Mary: And I remember being really shocked but not surprised I guess by that kind of thing. So there you go, you know, the idea was put out there that you were to blame so all the burden was on you as the girl to dress nicely, be a good girl, be well behaved.

Ailsa: To look after your reputation?

Mary: To look after your reputation and it was all on you. It wasn't on the boys. It was all on you. So yeah, that was definitely around us and that came from our parents, yeah.

Ailsa: And was— were they seen as people who just couldn't control themselves or— you know, I suppose it's kind of interesting, isn't it? That if the burden was on the girls to look after themselves, then—

Mary: Well I think the kind of attitude I picked up, and from my older sister as well, not just from my mum and dad— The notion was that boys didn't really know what the hell they were doing and that they were these kind of bundles of energy and testosterone that could explode at any minute and it was up to you not to pull the pin, do you know what I mean? [Laughs]. It

was up to you to control the explosion and that was all on us, whereas the lads were just bopping about and they didn't know what day it was kind of thing.

Ailsa: But did your parents treat you differently then to your brother?

Mary: Oh yeah, in the sense that when he went out, he just went out and it was like, "what time will you be back?" But there was nothing like the level of questioning [laughs[for him that there was for me and then he went into the army, so of course that was— that was that about that. Although I — I might have said this in the last tape, hysterical, and it's come up again because last week in the post, my sister sent me "the book," "the book." And I don't know if I mentioned "the book."

Ailsa: I think you— Well you told me—

Mary: I must have mentioned "the book," it's hilarious.

Ailsa: You told me this very interesting thing that your Dad— it was your Dad who had done that bit of education with you because he'd had this daughter before and he seemed better equipped to transmit information than your Mum?

Mary: Absolutely, totally but the hilarious thing was— two nights before my brother was getting married, he said to me, "don't forget to give your brother that book I gave you." He'd been in the army—

Ailsa: Your dad did?

Mary: Yeah and I just looked at him, I said, "Dad, are you mad?" "Well, just give him the book, I gave it to you." I was like, "yeah, fine, okay, yeah, no problem." And yeah, it's here in my study now, she sent it back to me. She was— she came across it, she was cleaning out something a couple of weeks ago like everyone during the lockdown. Oh yeah, it's over there, it's there. I'll show it to you. Hang on one sec. [pause]. I love this book because it tells you everything you need to know about sex in Ireland so here's the book.

Ailsa: What's it called?

Mary: Brown paper cover, Ailsa, because we don't want to shock you.

Ailsa: Oh so that was put on it?

Mary: Oh yes.

Ailsa: So did— did you sister know about this book because it was given to her as well?

Mary: Oh actually— do you know what? I've never taken the cover off. There you go.

Ailsa: It's called "Ideal Marriage"—

Mary: Isn't that lovely?

Ailsa: "Its physiology and technique." Oh my God.

Mary: You have no idea, this book has everything. So this is what we were given. Imagine. I wasn't given this until two nights before I got married, by the way. Like the other book I had was for girls, fourteen— which was basically twenty give pages of "don't do anything." But—

Ailsa: Oh so this was the premarital book?

Mary: Yeah, she's put a lovely letter in with it. She— This is actually because I think I did mention— the reason my father had this book. He was given it by a priest because— I think I said to you, his first wife had a heart condition. They were told after Dymphna was born, my sister, that they couldn't have any more children because to give birth again for her would have been life threatening because of the heart problem. And so the priest told them they could never have sex again and—

Ailsa: The priest, not the doctor?

Mary: The priest, the priest. And the priest gave them this book. I don't know what— what he was doing but anyway. So look at it. I mean it's all just— that's it.

Ailsa: My God, it's like— it's like Ulysses.

Mary: Yeah, but—

Ailsa: There's not a picture in there.

Mary: There is some excitement at the back. [Pages rustling].

Ailsa: Is there actually a diagram of the human body?

Mary: [Pages rustling]. See this?

Ailsa: Yes.

Mary: It's a temperature chart so if they wanted to try the rhythm method.

Ailsa: Oh, that is actually for the rhythm method.

Mary: Yeah.

Ailsa: Okay.

Mary: And it says on it, "abbreviated curve of morning temperatures in a healthy woman through first pregnancy."

[00:25:01]

Mary: Oh, right, so that's for pregnancy but there is one that's for ovulation. Oh yeah, sorry, the one before. Just in case you're taking notes there [laughs]. Yeah, I mean, it's mental. There's one picture in it, I think. I showed this to my daughters, they were howling. There's one picture, one colour diagram and it's of the male member. A drawing, obviously, because we don't want anything filthy. I can't even find it. There's one— literally just one colour picture, the whole thing. It's a nightmare. So that gives you an idea of the secrecy and the covert nature of talking about anything sexual even into the '80s really. And then—

Ailsa: But that was— in your family, that was the heirloom book to be given before you were married?

Mary: Honestly, God bless, but do you know what I love my Dad for this book and I keep it because— for all that we might laugh about it and everything, that was done with love. That was done because he didn't— he genuinely felt I might be horrified on my wedding night. God bless him like [laughs]. The innocence of it. But anyway, it was done with love and he was doing his best in very difficult times and there are many, many girls never got a book like that and were horrified on their wedding night I'm sure.

Ailsa: Yeah, no, no, no, no, no. I mean I just— it's— and I can see that it's also written by a Dutch man, I think, by the surname that's on the front.

Mary: Oh yeah, yeah.

Ailsa: But that's different to the book he gave you when you were a teenager about becoming—

Mary: Oh yeah. No, no. I was— Oh no, God no, I'd never be given this as a teenager. What? No.

Ailsa: So your father would do the— would he just give you a book when you were a teenager about kind of girls growing up or would he talk to you at the same time?

Mary: He would talk to me if I was willing to talk to him to a certain degree. I think I said in the other tape, all that changed when AIDS happened because suddenly there were— I mean it was great for us in a way because suddenly there were all these programmes on television. Because suddenly RTÉ were allowed to show things about sex they would never have been allowed to show. Because it was in the public health interest. So they had this kind of excuse now to do loads of programmes about sex they would never have got away with previously. And my Dad would sit with me and watch them. My mother would leave the room, she didn't want to hear about any of it or know about any of it but he would sit and so conversations would naturally occur about sex. And you know, to an extent but not to the extent that I could tell him I was having any [laughs]. That was— absolutely not. And there were all these kinds of— I'll tell you what it was, "don't ask, don't tell." That's what it was, "don't ask, don't tell." And I think there were lots of parents knew their kids were having sex and just didn't want to hear about it or talk about it or know about it because then they'd have to deal with it. They just weren't equipped to do that, my parents' generation. They just weren't. They'd no idea how to do it.

Ailsa: Although it sounds like your Dad was probably a bit more further forward and progressive than [indec].

Mary: Oh, very much so. Because I think he'd been in the army and he said that's what made him realise that sex education was very important because he said he had dealt with far too many young men who knew nothing about sex. And it was— you know, he was this kind of agony aunt to all of them. He was a lovely man, you know, and he was willing to answer questions and he said these lads would go out on the town at night and pick up a woman and all kinds of stuff would happen and they wouldn't really know what they were doing. And he said, they'd come to me the next day or whatever and we'd talk about it so— I always say— whatever– if any skills I have as a therapist come from him— definitely come from him, not my mum. So yeah and then the thing about the boys and all the rest, fifteen to twenty two, the object was to find a man. The object was to have a boyfriend.

Ailsa: You said when we talked the last time that you thought your mum had wanted you to go to university because she thought it might be a good place where you might find a decent husband and other than the education [some noise] itself.

Mary: Yeah. I think if she was here now, she would deny that but that was definitely— It kind of— I mean can I just say her wanting me to go to university was great and it was unusual because a lot of people thought university was wasted on women because we were going to go and get married and sure what's the point, you know? Whereas my mother— No, definitely the education was part of it, but I kind of have the sense that that made me an even better prospect [laughs] because I was educated. It was another string to my bow if I was well educated. A well educated nice girl would be great so that was definitely a big part of that. But I remember Aunty Nuala, Mark's aunt, saying to my daughter about— Because Isabel has a— isn't really into boys— hasn't had a proper real boyfriend. And Nuala said to me, "is she not lonely?" Like no, [laughs], she had loads of friends and stuff. But like, if you didn't have a boyfriend, you'd be lonely. Again everything centred around men, that was the goal.

[00:30:10]

Ailsa: So you were expected to have a boyfriend but not be having sex with them.

Mary: Of course, yes. And they should spend endless nights in longing for you. That was the way it should be really, yeah. So yeah, it was kind of weird but there was an innocence to it that was kind of nice. And I have to say I talk to my daughters often about this. We were not under pressure like they are actually to have sex and to be proficient and to be knowledgeable. You know, there's a sort of comfort in ignorance in a way that it didn't impinge on my life. You had a boyfriend but yeah, he was around to go to the pictures with and go for a walk with and stuff like that but that was it. You didn't have him expecting you to sleep with him or expecting you to be super good at sex and knowing all the tricks and stuff. I think girls now have a terrible burden of that where there's a huge expectation on them to perform sexually and to be sexual from a very early age. We didn't have any of that in my experience and there was a real freedom in that. Like we were just bopping about at fifteen having a great time and your best time was with your friends and your best time was like sneaking a cigarette down on the tennis courts and not getting caught. Or maybe getting caught. Or trying to get into pubs in Dublin. And then— it was all the excitement of getting in and once you got in, you were like, well this is fairly boring, let's go and try somewhere

else. [Laughs]. Because actually getting in was the fun bit. So that was all great and I really regret— I don't think my daughters have that kind of freedom, weirdly.

Ailsa: And then you— I guess as you got older, things got a little bit different. Because I know you met your husband before you went to university, he was a college student or—

Mary: Well yeah. He was— That was very odd because he was [laughs]— and, and I think I said in the last tape— My parents had no problem with it but my friends had a massive problem with it, that he was five years older. And I was going into UCD [University College Dublin], he was going out.

Ailsa: Right.

Mary: It would have been unusual, yeah, I guess. But as you can see, it's worked out quite well and we're—

Ailsa: How did you meet?

Mary: We met in a club, met in a nightclub in Dublin and again this kind of way people met organically— I was going— I was just finished my Leaving— I'd finished my Leaving Cert in the June and this was kind of July. So having an absolute ball because you know, the Leaving Cert was over, all that— years of study done. Oh, unleashed. And myself and my mates were all over Dublin and going to Feathard on holidays and just having a ball. And yes, could I have that summer again of my life, yes, I would have that summer. And my best friend's older sister had just qualified as a nurse in the Meath Hospital and it was her graduation party in the Montclare Hotel in Dublin. There was a nightclub in the basement and again, this thing— Her younger sister was going to the graduation party but wanted to have one of her friends with her. So again this thing of not going anywhere on your own, even to a party, you had to have your friend with you. So I went with her. And genuinely, just, across the crowded room kind of thing, saw Mark. And that morning, I'd been to the doctor because I had a very bad sore throat, just basically tearing the candle at both ends, you know? And— very bad sore throat— And the doctor said to me— I said, "oh, can I go out tonight because," I said, "I have this party I really want to go to." And he goes, "where are you going?" This is the doctor, "where are you going?" So I said, "I'm going to this party in the Meath Hospital." And he said, "that's going to be full of medical students." And I went, "I know, why do you think I want to go?" And he said, "now Mary, you be careful with those medical students because they're— you know." And I went, "yeah, yeah, yeah, sure, sure, okay, bye bye." And

give me the antibiotics and off I go. But imagine like, he's giving me the conversation about, "just watch yourself now with those medical students."

Ailsa: With the medical students [laughs].

Mary: And I'm like, why do you think I'm going? Like that's the whole point, there will be medical students. So and of course, that was every Mammy— middle-class Mammy's dream future boyfriend was a medical student. Oh my God. So long as he wasn't anyone from Surgeon's [?] who wasn't the same colour as you. That was a whole other problem but if he was a nice boy, great. So I wanted to—

Ailsa: But was that your dream to or—?

Mary: Absolutely not [laughs]. I mean in the sense that there was kudos in it, I guess, but in terms of the guys like. Well they were just guys like any others, you know. And actually, medical students were a bit of a pain because they were known to be very promiscuous and hit and run kind of guys so yeah, nice idea but oh, a bit of a waste of time really.

[00:35:03]

So I wasn't really that interested, but sure give it a go, you know. So off I went and literally saw Mark and I just thought, that's the guy for me. Really and truly across a dance floor, that is the guy for me. So somehow managed to engineer an invita— an introduction, kind of worked our way round the room and the first thing he did was ask my friend to dance. So I do remind him to this day. And we're thirty years married this year and I will remind him again that that's what he did. And I was sort of dancing with his friend who was a medical student, who I still know Peter Meagher and bloody well ended up spending the night— I mean the evening, not the night because we were taken home at half eleven by Daragh's brother, put in a taxi and sent home. But— so chatting and dancing with Peter Meagher. But my eye was on Mark the whole time and the next day, my friend— I said to her like, "oh that guy was really nice that you were with." She was like, "ach God, he was okay, he was alright." And I said, "is that going anywhere like?" And she said, "oh, he's— I've given him my number and I said, "ah, okay." So he never rang her. So that was that and I wasn't interested in Peter Meagher because he was mad and now I'm livid because Peter Meagher is now a cosmetic surgeon, living in Australia. Oh, I could have done with him now. So anyway, two weeks

later, we head off to Feathard for the weekend because her family own the hotel in Feathard. We'd go down there occasionally for dances and stuff and have a nice time. Walked into the bar of the hotel and there's Mark sitting at the bar and I was like, "oh my God." I said, "I can't believe it's you." And he said, "oh yeah, I'm down here with a friend, blah, blah, blah." And the rest is history. And then he took my number and he phoned me as soon as we got back and we went from there. And she was furious. [Laughs]. She was really annoyed, not because she liked him but she just felt that was a bit mean that she never— he never rang her. And she was bridesmaid at our wedding so it all worked out in the end but yeah, I think I was just lucky. It was just pure luck, right place, right time. An unusual relationship and it was difficult for us in the beginning because both sets of friends did not approve.

Ailsa: I was going to say while you were at university then, he was— he'd finished and he was living in England and—?

Mary: Well, I went into UCD in the October and he went to Trinity and he did a year. He did an MBA at Trinity and as soon as he was finished the MBA, he came to London. And then I finished at UCD but we wrote to each other the whole time and we kind of stayed in touch all the time and as soon as I was finished, I came over and that was it. So, yeah, a very weird story because when I look back and I think God, seventeen, you know, but it just— I mean it's a one in a billion chance that—

Ailsa: I was going to say it's one of those— you know, it's quite remarkable, isn't it?

Mary: Yeah.

Ailsa: Like to walk into a room and see someone across a dancefloor and think that's it, it's kind of—

Mary: That's him and literally when I saw him I just thought, yeah, that's the guy, that's the one.

Ailsa: Wow.

Mary: My sister though would have been similar. She met her husband when she was fifteen and he was eighteen and they're both in their seventies now and still together. We're just lazy, I think. I said to her, "I think we're just lazy." We just couldn't be bothered so we went yeah, okay, that's the one, let's go. You know, just didn't want years of messing around with the wrong guy. Like let's just go with this now. And she laughed and she was like, "yeah, you're right, we're just lazy."

Ailsa: Tell me what was university like? What was it— What was— socially and education— you know, as a woman?

Mary: I loved it, I loved UCD. Suddenly there was everything: clubs, socialising all the time if you wanted to. Then it settled— So that's first year, which I had to repeat because of said socialising. So my second year, I settled down a bit and then I realised actually that it wasn't that different to school. That there were cliques and groups the same as school. Very much again, groups, although what was different was, there would be groups of boys and girls together. And actually, I'm always looking back astonished at how that worked so quickly considering we'd pretty much all been to single sex schools. I think first year was always a bit challenge for everybody because that was quite new for lots of people for there to be boys and girls. But we settled down fairly quickly.

[00:40:00]

Mary: And it was fine. And then there was all that access to healthcare and the pill and everything else. Like you just had— the world was your oyster because they were— that information was available to you all of a sudden when it hadn't been. You still had all that stuff though of reputation and, you know, not putting it about too much or you'd be thought badly of.

Ailsa: And what was it like for you who had this kind of older boyfriend who sometimes was in the country, sometimes wasn't and, you know, yeah, did that— what was that kind of—

Mary: Had a great solution, which happened by accident in first year. I did have a friend who I'd known since I was fourteen who lived quite near, a boy. Another Mark which confused everybody because my best friend was Mark and my boyfriend was Mark. And for years I think some of my relatives went to their graves thinking I was marrying the wrong one, the different one. Anyway— but Mark, my friend, was gay and he came out to me when we were about fifteen, sixteen. And his life was very, very difficult, very difficult at that time as a gay, young man in Dublin. And I had sort of supported him in that sometimes I would go to gay bars with him to kind of help him go in and meet people and, you know— initially, then I just left him to it after a couple of times [laughs]. He didn't need me anymore. But in first year, I met a guy in third year through the psychology society. He was in the psychology society and

we got talking and chatting and became good friends and then I realised he was gay. And— so this was in my first year. And I said to him, "you know, I have a friend who's gay," and I said, "it's tough for him." Because he wasn't at university, he was working, he went straight to work after school. I said, "I think he finds it really hard to meet other gay men." This guy was very experienced and kind of— seemed quite knowledgeable about the gay scene in Dublin. And he said, "yeah, bring him in, let's meet and we can chat or whatever." So I brought Mark in for lunch in Bellfield one day and introduced them and they are now still together, living in Boston where Colin's at Harvard— He's at Harvard as a psychologist and they're still together. They're together longer than me and Mark. So my matchmaking skills are unparalleled Ailsa, they are the best. I'm the best in Dublin at matchmaking. And— but what it meant then, they kind of hit it off straight away and just completely fell in love and for the three years of university, I socialised the whole time with them and it was brilliant because I was with all these gay men who weren't interested in me sexually but we could have a great time socially. And so I could see Mark when I needed to and I didn't have again the hassle of other men much. I mean now and again I did kind of have guys asking me out or whatever but very rarely and, you know, you just don't put that— Maybe I just— yeah, maybe I just didn't put that out there that I was available [hissing on recording], it was like that I wasn't and I had a ball with these gay men. It was just fantastic. So I spent three years.

Ailsa: So what was the gay scene like? What kind of things did you do? Where did you go?

Mary: Brilliant. It was brilliant. I mean it was very covert still in Dublin and there were two pubs, the Viking and the Parliament in Dublin. And they were the two main gay bars in Dublin. So you went to one or the other at the weekend. And then there was the Hirschfeld Centre. The Hirschfeld Centre was in what's now Temple Bar and it was a kind— a very— I mean it was so covert. There was like a gold plaque on the door that said the Hirschfeld Centre, it looked like an orthodontist, you know. [Laughs]. But actually, it was just a club and a place for gay people to hang out and I'd go there now and again. But at the same time, I didn't always go out with them because also I didn't want to socialise all the time with gay people, thanks. But we did have some very funny moments like at the Viking where I'd meet girls who'd been in my school and I'd meet them in the Viking and they'd go, "are you?" and I'd go, "no, but I—." "That's okay." [Laughs]. So that was very funny. But I just had a great time but gay men I found— that the gay men I hung around with were far more interested in me as Mary than just someone to go out with and have sex with. And they wanted to talk to

me about what I was doing at UCD properly, you know, what I was reading, what I was interested in. You could have great dinner conversations whereas with straight men in Dublin, I found, they were really only interested in are you available. I hated that, I really did and yeah, you know, when Mark would come home and then we'd go out socially with him and his friends, I'd go back into that world and it would really piss me off actually because you were always very sidelined as an attachment to the guy you were with. I really felt that.

Ailsa: Okay.

[00:44:49]

Mary: And, I think I probably said on the last tape, I used to notice that. Because my brother was very sporty. He played cricket and he liked rugby and stuff so I used to watch a lot of cricket. Not wanting to, by the way, and still he comes over here to watch the cricket and stays with me and I'm like, oh God, bloody cricket again. So— but I would know about it. I'd know about cricket, I didn't want to. So if Mark and his friends are having a conversation about cricket, I'd go, "oh yeah, but, you know, I think Botham scored last year, blah, blah," and the whole five heads would turn and look at me like [mimes]. And then they'd carry on their own conversation.

Ailsa: So you were not expected to contribute, you were just there to be there kind of—

Mary: What's wrong with you? Who's this? Who is this? Or you know, I'd have something to say about the rugby match that we'd all just been to but like, no. I remember an English friend of ours being over one time with us, we brought him to Dublin. This is like when we were in our twenties and we brought him back for the match and again Mark and his mates, standing round in the Lansdowne Bar with pints talking about the match and I'm there. And gradually I'm kind of moving backwards and backwards and eventually this English friend of ours comes over to me and says, "what are you doing over here?" And I said, "because what's the point of standing with you lads like?" He said, "I want to hear what you have to say, I want to talk to you so I'm going to come over here and talk to you" and I went, "okay." But that's very unIrish of you and he went, "that's fine." Because, you know, they were male spaces. And I think that's what it's about, I'm thinking with my therapy head on, the spaces, there were very much male spaces and female spaces and I was someone who liked to transgress into the

male space and if you did that, like the way of getting rid of you was just to ignore you. But even— Mark has a really good mate, still a good mate of ours in Dublin— and we used to go to his mother's on Christmas morning for a drink and she would have— you know, she had this huge house in Terenure. It was lovely, two rooms and— but the men would all be in one room and the women would all be in the other room and if I strayed in to the male end of the room, she'd come and get me. "Oh Mary, there you are chatting to all the men, come on down here and I'll introduce you to Maureen." "Oh, I don't want to talk to Maureen." "Come on." You know, so our mothers and fathers controlled those spaces as well so there was male spaces and female spaces and you stayed in your lane as the kids say now. But I didn't like staying in my lane.

Ailsa: And when you were at UCD then, what should your lane have been really? I mean you were kind of stepping out of it by hanging— you know, you had gay male friends that you could go to those places with—

Mary: Yeah, but I had female friends too and I had good female friends and also where I was able to get involved and I enjoyed being with men was in clubs. So, I was secretary of the psychology society and I loved that and that was very mixed, boys and girls. And the guys there were pretty good actually. I have to say, I feel maybe it's not— not typical in that people who were in the psychology society were obviously thinkers, if you know what I mean [laughs] and maybe more open and— certainly had no problem. My only problem with the psychology department in UCD was that it was so clergy-dominated. That was the problem in UCD was the flipping clergy were around every door, honestly. Crazy.

Ailsa: In the psychology department?

Mary: Oh, it was the worst, it was the worst because the psychology department was on D5, fifth floor of the arts building and at that time, psychology was still part of the arts faculty. It's not now, it's in science now. And at that time, the head of psychology, Professor Nolan, was a priest and he was obsessed with getting psychology moved to the science block, obsessed. The first question in first year on the exam paper was, "is psychology a science?" And believe me, the correct answer was "yes." So he was obsessed with that. But the psychology department was mixed in with philosophy. So philosophy and psychology were in the same place. You've frozen a bit Ailsa, can you hear me? Oh it's okay, you're okay now. And the philosophy department was riddled with clergy as well. The future archbishop of Dublin was in that corridor and, you know, they had a very definite perception of psychology

and what it was and what it should be and woe betide like anyone who didn't go along with that so, yeah, I felt intellectually it was quite stilted and stunted. But when you're an undergraduate, you just pass your exams, you do what you're told and you have a great time and that was the purpose of my time at UCD. It was the next step, you know. But it was a real shame and now, one of the reasons that Birkbeck— I'm loving Birkbeck is— Birkbeck is the absolute opposite of that. Birkbeck is so open to everything. Feels to me, intellectually, I feel incredibly free at Birkbeck. But one of the issues— their obsession with making psychology a science, they wouldn't allow you to do psychology with another arts subject. So the way the arts department worked, I don't know— did you go to UCD Ailsa, no?

[00:50:08]

Ailsa: No, I went to UCC but again they— you had to do double psychology.

Mary: That's right, yeah.

Ailsa: You couldn't just do— you couldn't do it with another subject at an honours level.

Mary: That's right. So I loved psychology and— but I loved history, I loved history, I was doing both and when it came to the end of second year— like I'd got a first in history at the end of first year but my psychology not so great. It was okay, I passed. And when it came to moving on, I went to see my tutor or whatever and said, "look, I really want to do both." And he said— and actually, you know who it was? Aidan Moran, a guy called Aidan Moran who died last year. I was at a memorial thing online for him a few weeks ago. He was fantastic. He came into the—UCD, into the psychology department new when I was there and spent the rest of his career there. And he came in doing sports psychology and I remember at the time, we were all laughing— sports psychology, what the hell is that? What a load of rubbish.

Ailsa: Very new fangled.

Mary: We thought it was hilarious and of course now— he's— he was all over the world as like really an expert in sports psychology. And he was a lovely guy. Anyway I said to him, "Aidan, I really want to do both." And he said, "Mary, if you do both, we can't give you an honours degree." And I said, "but what if I do really well?" He said, "it doesn't matter, you just can't have an honours degree if you do both." So I went off and of course that was all

around professionalisation, you know, you had to have a pure psychology degree because that's what qualified for the Institute of Psychologists afterwards and blah, blah, blah. And I was just really fed up about this and so, incredibly stupidly— although not really I suppose, not now, in the long run, it wasn't stupid— I insisted on doing history and psychology, not getting an honours degree and thinking that was great. Until I came out to the job market. Anyway, here I am now at Birkbeck doing the history of psychoanalysis.

Ailsa: Doing the history of psychoanalysis in Ireland?

Mary: In the history department. In the history department. And that's just fantastic. So here I am finally and I promise you Ailsa, if I get my doctorate, I'm going to go back and nail it to the door of the psychology department at UCD. Like Martin Luther, you know, with the— nailing the thing to the cathedral door. I'm going to go back and go, "you lads, there you go." So, I— looking back now, I don't regret it a bit but at the time it probably wasn't great in terms of job prospects. But then why do you go to university? It's just for the job? Or because there are things you really want to think about and I felt that history and psychology had a huge connection and that the humanities had a lot to say to psychology. But that was absolutely totally against the thinking at the time. Totally against the thinking at the time. It could not be tolerated. Psychology was a science, we want it in the science block. They used to send us over there for classes just to make us go there, you know, it was just mad. So they're fine now, they have their psychology department as a standalone in the science block and that's what they always wanted. But I think it's a shame that they've moved it out of humanities altogether but that's just my particular intellectual hobby horse. But Birkbeck, oh my God, the total opposite. Now I know time had gone by, it was thirty years, you know, have gone by. But when I went in there, it was like they [00:53:33] just had their arms open for me. "Yes, history and the humanities and psychology. Yes, yes, we love all that, Mary, come on, come on." And I'm like, "Oh, I'm home." So, yeah. So UCD—

Ailsa: You took quite a stand, that was a brave thing to do when you were an undergraduate [both talking].

Mary: Not really, it was just really stupid. [Laughs]. It was just they all thought I was mad. And like people would say to me, "oh hi, what are you doing? Psychology and history. What? What? Why are you doing that?" And I'd just say, "yeah, because I don't care about the honours degree." And they were just like, "oh my God." Because of course—

Ailsa: So where do you think that came from in— that ability to kind of stand for what you— you know, you really thought was right and interested in and I guess to have a bit of individuality?

Mary: It came from my Dad I think, he was very— My dad's thing was— He didn't care what your opinion was in that sense so long as you could argue it and— argue it with him and we'd have really big rows in the house about politics and news— you know, the news of the day and he'd say, "look at that fella, blah, blah, blah, blah." And I'd go, "what do you mean, he's a blah, blah, blah." And then we'd be off, you know, and my mum would just be like, "oh my God." But it was great for me because he was giving me an education in how to have an opinion. That was a big thing in our house, have an opinion, argue your opinion, and we'll hear you out. And I changed his mind about things a couple of times, not very often.

[00:55:02]

Ailsa: He sounds like he maybe had a different view of women than, you know, the broader society?

Mary: Yeah, he did.

Ailsa: In that he didn't want you to— to be sort of sidelined in the corner without a view. He wanted a daughter who had— had some thoughts about her.

Mary: Absolutely, absolutely. And had something about her, you know, and I think because his mother died when he was three and he was raised by women. He was raised by his sisters and he thought they were amazing. He only ever told me great things about his sisters and how strong they were and trying to raise him when they were only young girls themselves. And through difficult times, he was raised in the hungry thirties and he said, you know, "my sisters were working fulltime and looking after me and trying to look after the house and everything else." And my dad was just going to the pub every night. So he had huge admiration for women and what we did and I remember telling him I was pregnant, expecting him to be absolutely delighted. And he just looked— he was like, "oh, that's fine, yeah, well, you'd better talk to your mother about that." And he didn't say much. And I went back to him afterwards and I said, "are you okay about this? What's going on like, you didn't seem very

happy," and he said, "oh no, I am," he said. "I'm delighted for you love but," he said, "I know the pain that you're going to go through," and he said, "I can't bear that."

Ailsa: The pain of childbirth or—

Mary: Yeah. No, no.

Ailsa: Or of childrearing or—

Mary: Like he said, "I know how painful it's going to be, you know, giving birth and having a baby, it's really hard" and he said, "I'm just worried about you for that." He'd had a sister who'd had some very difficult pregnancies. I think she had pre-eclampsia. Listening to— And she had to spend all her pregnancies in bed and all the rest. And as it turned out, at the end of my pregnancy, I had pre-eclampsia but obviously times had moved on and I— I was very well looked after but it was dangerous, and pre-eclampsia is a dangerous condition. So he was worried about that. So it was quite sweet but ehm— he adored having a son. I mean he loved that my brother— and loved that my brother was in the army and was an officer in the army, you know, because he'd been a sergeant major, he'd never been an officer. And of course it was a huge thing for him that Kevin was a second-lieutenant when he started and yeah, but he loved his daughters and bizarrely, he was actually much more of a feminist than my mother, much more. My mother was more traditional in some ways. But yeah, he was great. So that kind of arguing all the time, while it was very tiresome for my mother, Dad and I really enjoyed it and— and when I went to London first, I rang him a few weeks after I'd arrived and he said, "ah God," he said, "I really miss you." And I said, "oh that's lovely, thanks Dad." He said, "I've noone to fight with." And [laughs] I went, "okay."

[Both laugh]

Mary: "Okay, well I'll phone you up and fight with you if that's what you want." But he loved that, he— we both did, we enjoyed the fight. "How dare you say that about Nelson Mandela?" "You care more about those people in South Africa than your own people who are oppressed in Ireland." And I'm like, "oh my God." So we'd like— we'd—

Ailsa: So it sounds like you're like different to your mum in the way—

Mary: Oh, yeah, totally. She did not like confrontation. She was very passive aggressive, you know, the really Mammy kind of martyr thing and, you know, if she was annoyed with you, she just wouldn't speak to you, which was fairly redundant really. Whereas he'd have it out with you and you'd have a really good like— And then you'd be best pals afterwards. So—

no, we— but Mum even though she was very passive aggressive, she also was someone who was like, "well, I'm not putting up with that." You know, she wasn't going to be told, and so, yeah, unfortunately, I got all that northern blood of resistance so— I mean I was very nice and I didn't put on a show or have a parade because they wouldn't let me do it but I just went, "I'm going to do it anyway." LIke, okay, that's your view but here's what I'm going to do. And now I'm glad because I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now if I hadn't done that. Definitely wouldn't. And I love doing history and I love doing psychology and I'm still doing history and psychology so we found a way. [Laughs].

Ailsa: You did, you found a way and it was— yeah, and you stood up for [indec] fantastic.

Mary: And I did get a job in the end and that's the background to this I think is important in that when I was in UCD in the '80s, there was a terrible recession— economic recession and so the purpose of everybody going to university, male and female, was a job— was a job when you emigrated so you took your qualifications with you. And luckily, when I came to London, the fact you had a degree was great, like they were delighted. They didn't really give a damn whether it was an honours or a pass degree, they were just happy you had a degree and you were literate and whatever so it never held me back.

[00:59:44]

Ailsa: No, good on you. Okay. So Mary, I don't know if you want to— I mean I think we've got really a lovely flavour of—from having talked to you before and now really— got a really lovely flavour of that time. And I don't know if there's anything else you want to add to this recording at all that you kind of thought about while we've been talking or thought about since the last—

Mary: I think something that's kind of come upon me in the last two years while I have been at Birkbeck and have looked back at that history. It's really made me reflect historically on what we were taught. [I've come up against an issue at Birkbeck where [REDACTED] [there's an idea that] all Irish history students who went to university in Ireland had a very mythologised education in history. So the old nationalist history of 'everything Irish good, everything British bad.' 'We didn't get any nuance and all that kind of stuff' and that's been very difficult to manage and to think through and it's made me look back. I don't think it's

entirely true or fair because I certainly grew up in UCD during— after revision— And you know, they talk about revisionist history, I certainly grew up— you know, Mary Daly is one of the leaders of revisionist history, she taught me at UCD. So that's something that's actually made me think back to another aspect of my intellectual development in Ireland. And certainly in the '80s, I would like to add to this recording, we did receive revisionist history in the '80s definitely. Maybe not in primary school but certainly in the '80s **[redacted]**

Mary: I think it's— I think it comes— I think this is something we're going to have to seriously think about in terms of our relationship with the diaspora. I think the diaspora very often sometimes live their parents' experiences of Ireland rather than their own **[redacted].** But it's made me really reflect on my own intellectual education at UCD and I just want to say on this tape that okay, bar the clergy hanging— But the clergy were a problem in the psychology department, they absolutely were not a problem in the history department. The history department was very robust and as I say, Mary Daly is still a very tough cookie and had her own revisionist— I remember people walking out of Mary Daly's lectures because she— she— they felt she was diminishing the famine and the impact of the famine. And people got up and walked out. So I remember those times. So to say that we were just handed the nationalist myth is very unfair and not true, certainly in the '80s, that was not the case at all. UCD was very revisionist in the '80s. So I just wanted to say that.

Ailsa: No, no, no. That's really interesting. I mean I know nothing— Obviously history is not my subject and I didn't even think about that idea of the kind of revisionist history. You're educating me to be honest, it's very interesting.

Mary: I mean I would say I'm probably— and funny, you know, I'm at Birkbeck with a girl— she's doing her Masters— and I think I said this to you— it’s unbelievable. We were in psychology in UCD together thirty years ago and I walked into Birkbeck for my first history lecture and there she was. But we've talked about this a few times and, yeah, there is— The relationship with the diaspora has to be thought about more than it is I think. Between the diaspora and the indigenous population, I don't know if that's the right word. But the native population so people who grew up and were raised in Ireland.

[01:04:56]

Mary: And people who grew up and were raised in England or New York or Boston or Sydney. And their notions of Irish history are very different and we need to have more dialogue around that. I— my generation I suspect are the last cohort who would have done the old history in primary school. So the old nationalist history was all about how great we were, Celtic tribes, we were always one people, that kind of stuff. And then the revisionists came along in the '70s— late '60s, '70s— and said, "oh, hold on, this is all a big kind of myth of identity for nationalist purposes. Actually we were never all one, we were always a mix, you know, there was always a fluidity between the islands. The famine wasn't that bad, you know, the oppression wasn't that bad." You know, Roy Foster famously said he couldn't understand why other — nationalist Irish historians complained about the loss of the Irish language because wasn't it great for us when we went on the boat to America that we could speak the language before we got there. [Laughs]. Like, what? But that's revisionism at its height, which I wouldn't agree with. But also, I'm not a nationalist historian either. I like to think I'm post-revisionist and I'm able to look at the whole thing. And actually a lot of my thesis is a plague on both your houses— is a lot of my thesis. But, I'm hitting this stereotype— really— of what history teaching was in Ireland and is in Ireland and it's been a bit of a shocker, I won't lie. It's been a shocker and it's something I have to deal with and I didn't expect that. [Redacted]. So that was all I wanted to add and I've taken up loads of time, I just go on and on sorry.

Ailsa: No, Mary, that's fantastic. I've taken up— Thank you so much for your time, you've been so generous.

Mary: I've enjoyed every minute. You've brought back some really lovely memories for me. Really and maybe some not so good ones even that I need to think about too.

[01:07:42 END]