

Úna Gan A Gúna	
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Mother's occupation Insurance Broker (self-employed)	Father's occupation Insurance Broker (self-employed)
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Ruth Beecher [00:00:06] *Welcome, Stephanie.*

Stephanie Blythman [00:00:09] Hi.

Ruth Beecher [00:00:09] *Hi, I'm Ruth Beecher, and today is Saturday, the first— the first day of May, two thousand— no, what is it? 2021, 2021. Welcome to our Úna Gan a Gúna interview. And would you like to introduce yourself?*

Stephanie Blythman Hello, my name is Stephanie Blythman. I'm thirty years old. I was born in Mount Carmel Hospital in Dublin and I grew up in Glen of the Downs, County Wicklow, which is just outside Delgany and Greystones, and I lived there at home until I was about twenty-five and then I moved over—and moved over to the UK. I went to school in Delgany— a primary school in Delgany, and then I went to secondary school in St. Andrews College in Booterstown, County Dublin. I've got two younger brothers, about two and a half years between me and my next brother and then five years between myself and my youngest brother. Uh. I'm quite close with my parents and my brothers, they all still live back in Ireland, um, I work as a— in costume for film and TV, sometimes theatre, but mostly film and TV the past few years. Yeah, I had— I went to university in Trinity, Trinity College, Dublin, did my BA there in Drama Studies and French, and then after that I did training in costume design and makeup at Inchicore College in Dublin as well. I worked for a few years after that before moving over here. And then, um. Yeah, after having worked, I think I'd lived here for about a year or so, and then I went back and did my Master's in the History of Design at the Royal College of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum. And graduated that in 2018, and since then I've just been working in costume.

Ruth Beecher *Mmhm, that's brilliant. I can't wait to hear more about all of that. Sounds fascinating. And how you got into that. And so, if I— if I was to take you back to your fifteenth year, can you tell me what's your most? I suppose, what memory pops to the top of your mind about that, about being fifteen, so you would have been in Wicklow then?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes, yes. In— in secondary school in St. Andrews. I suppose the first thing that happened when I was fifteen, my birthday is in— is in June— I'm born on the 4th of June,

1990. First thing that happened would have been my Junior Cert. Doing exams, turned fifteen and immediately doing a load of exams. So yeah, I guess that that would be the first thing.

Ruth Beecher How was that?

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, it was alright. I was doing an awful lot of subjects. Yeah with— and my mum had me actually doing music on top of all of the other ones which I really, really resented that, that she made me do that. I think if, ah— If maybe it had been my choice, then I might have been worked harder at it, but because it was something that she just like, ‘oh well, you're doing this.’

Ruth Beecher Why was that? Why was that, Steph?

Stephanie Blythman Well, I was— I think she thought it would be a good subject, that it would be an easy subject for me to do because I'd been doing piano. I started learning the piano when I was probably about seven or eight. So, I think she thought maybe it would complement that. And she thought that I should— maybe I should have picked it as my subjects, one of my subjects when I was starting secondary school. But the way— The way my secondary school offered the elective subjects— Music would have clashed with Home Economics, which I had picked. So, you, you had your— You have your compulsory subjects, English, Irish, Mathematics and then CSPE, which is Civics, Social and Political Studies, you learn about how to be a good citizen, and how the voting system works in Ireland, about human rights, all of that stuff. And then you've got— You had to learn a language. So, I chose French for that. And then— You do Science, Geography, History, and then you had two sort of elective subjects after that, so I picked Classical Studies for one and then Home Economics for the other. But yeah, Mum just thought I should do music.

Ruth Beecher [00:05:53] [laughs] Thanks, Mum! It's like I need something extra. Like Ireland doesn't make it hard enough at that age. You know, you have all those subjects, don't you?

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Because, you know, I was having to do— because at my school, the way they — As well as— we had to do PE during school hours, but we also as— presumably as their notion of a team building or bonding or whatever we were, we were forced— we had to do a

team sport. So, the options were either doing hockey or basketball. I've never been particularly keen on throwing balls or having them being thrown at me. So, I went with hockey. But again, it's really not— it wasn't my favourite sport—

***Ruth Beecher** What kind of a school was it? Was it a church,— I don't know, here they call it public, private or whatever, you know, was it— State school?*

Stephanie Blythman Private, it's a private school. They were— It's a funny— They are an international school. They operate as an International School. It had originally been Presbyterian. So, the way my dad always described it was that it was a Presbyterian— a multid denominational with a Presbyterian ethos. So, he'd— He and my uncles went there and my granddad as well.

***Ruth Beecher** So you were continuing the family tradition?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes. Yeah, it was— it was funny. I had some of the same teachers as he had that they were still knocking around. Yeah, I remember—

***Ruth Beecher** And were you— were you Presbyterian or?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes, yeah. I'm Presbyterian and my dad is. My mum's Catholic. But yeah, we were— we were raised Presbyterian. I think Mum said that it was— she felt it was more important to my dad that we were Presbyterian than it was for her that we'd be Catholic. But the only caveat to that was that if we were being christened and Presbyterian and it mattered that much to him, then we were going to go to church every Sunday. So, we did for— Probably until I was about ten. But then it was actually— because my brothers at that point were seven, eight. So, they'd have been getting more into sort of soccer and joining— And they were, like, part of soccer clubs. And a lot of those sports, they tend to have their matches on Sunday mornings so that clashed and we just gradually fell out of the habit and ended up just— you know, Christmas, Easter, maybe one or two other important days.

***Ruth Beecher** Was there a big community of Presbyterians where you lived in Wicklow?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Yeah, there's a Presbyterian church in Greystones, which is where we went. Yes, it's— Yeah, my grandparents went there. My granny, she still would, she's not as religious as— My granddad would have been quite— much more devout, I think. But yes, my granny would still go there. And so that's where we went. And yeah, I think there's another Presbyterian church down in Arklow, which is a town a little bit further south. So, yeah, there's a relatively okay— I think it's quite a Protestant area. The— I know the village of Delgany, it is very much tied into— there was a Huguenot, French Huguenot family, that they owned an estate around there, the La Touches. So, there's still various landmarks there which— there used to be a hotel called the La Touche Hotel in Greystones. And so I think I think there is quite a strong Protestant,—

Ruth Beecher [00:10:07] So French Protestants, the history, rather than Scottish Presbyterians, for example?

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, yeah. So, the primary school I went to was Church of Ireland, which would be Church of England. But they don't call it that anymore [laughs] over there. But it's the same thing. So yeah, there's—

Ruth Beecher So I'm a daughter of a mixed marriage. Mother was Church of Ireland and my father is well— my mother is Church of Ireland and my father's Catholic. So different— a different mix. But yes, I was wondering because one of my friends, her family is from Scottish Presbyterians in Cork. So, it's interesting, isn't it? But we did have the Huguenots in Cork as well, obviously, but it seems like there were more Scottish Presbyterians. I don't know. That's my ignorance showing now. It's interesting, isn't it?

Stephanie Blythman Ah, yeah. I think the Presbyterian Church in Ireland seems to be quite linked to Northern Ireland. I think that's where the base for the Republic of Ireland Presbyterian Church seems to come from, because a lot of— I think quite a lot of the ministers would have been Northern Irish. Certainly, the minister when I was growing up, Jim, he was Northern Irish and his wife was as well. So, I think there's quite— that Northern Irish link with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, more so, I think, than the Scottish.

Ruth Beecher *And were you devout? Were you a religious young girl or—?*

Stephanie Blythman Um. Not particularly. But I think that's probably as a result of my dad. He's very— he's quite irreverent. And maybe in part because— you know, my mum isn't Presbyterian, that she's Catholic. And then obviously I was going to a Church of Ireland school. And then I was— I used— I did Brownies— like Girl Guides, which is very linked to the Church of Ireland as well. And I did Girl's Brigade for a while, which again is quite linked. So, I think perhaps just being exposed to all of these different sort of versions as well as, as I said, [laughs] my dad's quite irreverent when it comes to religion and all of that. And they were—

Ruth Beecher *Because the stereotype is the— is a quite a dour, stern Presbyterianism, isn't it? So, your dad sounds like the opposite to that.*

Stephanie Blythman Yes, yeah. He's very much— a bit of a joker, my dad. Very— very mischievous. I mean, you know, everyone— My mum is as well, I think, to a certain extent. She— I think she's— people don't necessarily realise that about her, but having grown up with the pair of them and having them, like, loving to have a laugh at our expense. Yeah, she— they both like a laugh. She— I think she'd take religion a little bit more seriously. She gets very annoyed with him when we'd visit churches when we were away on holidays, and he'd be joking around and she gets quite annoyed with him for that. But, yeah, I think they always said that it was— they were less concerned with having us be hugely religious and more that my dad— he put it that they wanted us to have Christian values and to live a 'good, clean life'. And so, it was less about getting caught up in the going to church and being seen at church and doing all of these things and being seen to do all these things and more about instilling the— the values of 'do unto others as they would do unto you' and that sort of thing.

Ruth Beecher *And how much of an issue or was it an issue, the fact that they were in a mixed marriage, was that unusual in Wicklow at the time or—?*

Stephanie Blythman [00:14:34] Um, I don't know. I don't think that it really— I noticed. I think. Yeah, it wasn't really— it wasn't really a thing that—. Yeah, certainly I'd never— It never really struck me as anything that was an issue, like, the only— in terms of religion, the only thing that,

like, I would have noticed growing up was that, obviously being Presbyterian, we don't do, like, First Holy Communion and stuff, so when all of my classmates, a lot of them would have been Catholic and they'd have been doing that when we were about seven or eight or whatever age that happens. And so, they're going off and doing all of that. And I very much wasn't. So, I think that would be more of a standout thing for me, yeah. That— that side of things, but in terms of my parents being in a mixed marriage, no, it wasn't. But, you know, I don't know, maybe that's— like, my family is quite casual when it— when it comes to religion. Like, I know my granddad on my Dad's side, like, while he was Presbyterian, I know his parents— I think they started out actually as Methodist. They were from— they were from Leeds and they moved over, I think around the time they got married, to Dublin. And they were originally Methodist and there was something about the church that it had to close or something. And presumably the next nearest Methodist church in Ireland in the 1930s was too far for them to be bothering to go every Sunday with the kids. So, they went— I think maybe they went to Church of Ireland first and then I think that church closed down [laughs] or maybe it didn't suit them. But anyway, they ended up— they ended up going to the Presbyterian one because they felt that a church was a church and I think it had similar, I think, Methodist and Presbyterian they have similar-ish sort of— sort of values. But yeah, I think— I think maybe the fact that, yeah, like, that casual— not casual, but that sort of openness to there being other ways of doing things.

Ruth Beecher And before we go back to your school then, in terms of the two sides of the family, like your mum's Catholic side and your dad's Presbyterian side, were they— Were they very different? Were they— Would you not notice or culturally—?

Stephanie Blythman I suppose in a way— they are quite different in the sense that my mum's side, my granddad Cooney, he was a farmer. So, she grew up in Westmeath on a farm until she went to secondary school, and then she went off to boarding school. So, in that sense I suppose that— whereas my dad's side would be, I think, much more urban, more— yeah in that urban setting. They— they were tradespeople. My great granddad Blythman, he owned an industrial sewing machine factory in Dublin. And I think they supplied to all of the clothing factories— all the clothing manufacturing factories in Ireland until obviously that industry moved to Asia. Cheaper. But that's— Yeah. So, he was in that and my granny— her— My Granny Blythman— Well, her father was actually— he joined the British Army during World War One. He was a dispatch rider.

And then after that, he went into sales. I think he was a salesman or worked in something to do with that. So yeah, yeah. I suppose in that sense there is a difference that, like—

Ruth Beecher *There's an urban, rural difference rather than a Catholic, Presbyterian type difference, maybe?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes. Yeah, I think I wouldn't necessarily know my mum's side as well. Partially because they lived in Westmeath and so that— you know, at the time when I was growing up, it was a little bit more of a trek to go down there.

Ruth Beecher *How far was it to Westmeath from where you were in Wicklow?*

Stephanie Blythman Um, it would have probably been, like— If we were going down— Like, nowadays there's motorways and everything. So, it's like you could go down for, like— And have lunch or whatever— for your Sunday lunch if you wanted to. It would only maybe take a couple of hours to get down there. But, you know, back in the nineties, you know, when I was growing up, like, that was before the M50—. Maybe they were only building it at the time, but it would have— I think if we were going down, we'd have probably been going down for the weekend.

Ruth Beecher *[00:20:08] Right, it wasn't a day trip like, it was a good old drive.*

Stephanie Blythman I think, you know, well, I suppose with three kids, the last thing you want [laughs] is to be arguing them into a car in the morning at whatever time to get down in time for lunch and then driving them back in the afternoon, in the evening, or whatever.

Ruth Beecher *So you didn't see them as much?*

Stephanie Blythman No, no, we wouldn't have. Whereas, as I said, my dad's parents live about a fifteen minute drive from us and we went to the same church, so I'd have seen them a lot more. And the same for, well, his younger brother, my uncle and his family. I mean, they didn't live as close to us and they went to a different church. They lived in Dublin. But I think I have seen them a lot more than my Cooney cousins.

Ruth Beecher *Mm hmm. And how did your mum and dad meet from their two different worlds?*

Stephanie Blythman They— As far— as far as I know. Well, they both work in insurance. They actually, they run their own insurance brokering business together— brokering business together. So, they were both working— I don't know if they were both working for one of the— Hibernian or one of those companies at the time. But I think there was something that they were— there was— they had mutual friends and they were all going down to Cork or Kerry or somewhere. And my dad was doing the driving. And so, they— that's how they met. And then when it came back— when they got back, Dad must have obviously liked Mum, but he's— Rather than just asking her out, he rang her up and wanted— and asked her— asked to meet her on the pretext of getting petrol money out of her, I think.

Ruth Beecher *[Laughs]. Brilliant! How romantic.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Well, yeah, he's really just the least— one of the least romantic people I know, I think. So, obviously she was very annoyed by this, I think. But, um. But anyway, she said yes. And then my dad being my dad, he hadn't organised anything. So, they ended— rather than— they ended up driving around south Dublin, I think, for a while that evening until they found what's actually a very nice restaurant, quite an expensive seafood restaurant. It's still— yeah, I think it's still there. I think— the Lobster Pot, I think it's still there. It must be around Donnybrook or around that area or Ballsbridge, I think. But yes. So, they ended up going there for their first date and yes. I don't think they've ever been back! But that's our— the family joke. That he took her— took her to a very nice restaurant on their first date, but by accident!

Ruth Beecher *Yes. Yeah. So, I'm going to take you back to school then. And just to pick up on something, you said you picked for your elective subjects, for your Junior Cert, classical civilisations and home economics. Quite the contrast.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, I— I think— well, I suppose I always quite liked— when, when I was a kid I was very, very into history. You know, I still am. But. Yeah, I used to love— like, I would have been reading Greek and Roman myths and I was quite into, I think, Vikings for a while. And

so, yeah, I think just the idea that I could do that as a subject in school really appealed to me. So, I picked that. And then home economics. I think I just liked the idea of a class where I'd be learning to cook and learning to sew. Like, I'd done, I used to— when I was small, I used to get given a lot of sort of kits of like—

Ruth Beecher *Craft kits. Love those.*

Stephanie Blythman Cross stitching kits, and making creative kits and stuff. So, I did— I used to do quite a lot of cross stitching when I was a child. Um, and then, yeah, so, I think that just it appealed to me in that sense it was— I was torn, I think, between doing home economics and doing art, because I used to love drawing as well. But I think, I don't know, maybe in my head I just thought, like, 'oh sure. I draw anyway in my spare time and what do I need to do that— what do I need to do Art for?' I did end up doing Art for my Leaving Cert. But yeah.

Ruth Beecher *So you have the history and the textiles there already in your elective subjects for your Junior Cert. The future was mapped out in a way. [Laughs].*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Yeah.

Ruth Beecher *[00:25:05] Was it a mixed school then?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes. Yeah, mixed, mixed schools all the way.

Ruth Beecher *How did you find that?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, I liked it, I suppose. You know, I was used to it, I had brothers and through whatever twist of fate, like, my parents, their friends, they mostly had sons who were my age. So, I ended up spending a lot of— whenever we had their friends over, I was running— we were just tearing around the garden with the boys, climbing trees and hide-and-seek and all of that. So, yeah, I quite liked— I liked being, you know— yeah, I found it difficult, I think particularly in my early teens, relating to girls. Maybe— maybe because I was used to having brothers, so, you

know, I didn't have any sisters and my female cousins were mostly either older or younger than me. So, you know, as I said, like, most of the sort of incidental playmates that I had were boys.

Like, I did have my best friend who— well, he's since come out as trans, so [laughs] that's— you know, I don't know if I can really count him as a female— female best friend anymore, because obviously that's— it's definitely something that's been there since childhood. But, yeah, I think— I did, you know, I did have female friends, but generally I think I usually only would have only had, like, maybe as a child— like, maybe one best friend at a time. Like, a wider group of female friends, that's something that I think that's really only come as I've got older, which I really enjoy.

Ruth Beecher *So where did you— What age were you when you, when you, I suppose, did you— did you bring a friend from primary through to secondary school with you, or did you have to reinvent yourself in your secondary school?*

Stephanie Blythman No, there was a few of us that went from primary school through to secondary school. So, there was— It was one of those awkward— I sort of switched— ended up just— you know, as you do where—. Like, my best friend from primary school, Nate, who I am still friends with— that he went to a different school. Whereas, there was another girl that I was relatively good friends with in primary school, but we became best friends when we went to secondary school. And so, in that sense, I had her and then one of the boys from my primary school who came through with us, he was actually in my— Because our year was— there was about a hundred and fifty of us in our year in secondary school. And we were all divided up into separate forms. But he was— he was in my form. So, I had somebody familiar there. And so, yeah, I was— wasn't— yeah, I didn't have to completely reinvent myself in that sense. And then, so, yeah, I had her until the end of second year when we ended up having a— having a huge, huge fight. And basically, after that we never spoke again.

Ruth Beecher *And I— it happens to so many people.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Yeah. I think it was one of those things that— I'm not and I never really have been particularly interested in— in being part of the cool crowd and pandering to all of that and— And— yeah, being you know, I just wasn't— I just wasn't cool in any way in secondary

school and I think— And certainly not at thirteen, fourteen. I was just finding it very difficult to fit in and— But I think she was much more interested in being invited to the parties and all of that kind of thing. And— but she was also a bit flighty, that— for my part, that she was one of those people who if she— even if she made plans with you, if something better came along, she'd drop them and go and do the better— the more interesting things. So, I think I was finding that frustrating and I wasn't able to necessarily vent to her. So maybe I think I was probably venting to some of our other friends. And then, so, she was having a go at me for bitching about her behind her back. And I was having a go at her for just being a flake. And so, we had a massive, massive, massive fight on this sports day at the end of second year in front of all of our friends. And then a few of the girls took me off because I was very upset and— And then, yeah, they became my core— core friends. And I'm still— Well, one of them is my now best friend, Jenna. And then we're— and we're still quite close to one of the other girls, Sibel. We stayed— we hung out for the rest of school and we still keep in touch.

Ruth Beecher [00:30:59] And so your social life when you were 15, was that sort of centred around your school friends and around school or—?

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, yeah, it would have been, yeah. By that stage, fifteen, I think, yeah. Jenna and I would have been best friends by— Or heading towards being best friends by that stage. So, it was mostly our little gang of four: myself and Jenna and Sibel and Rosa. And sometimes there was another girl called Hannah. So— and then there was another girl, Kate, who used to hang about with us. And yes, that was our little social circle, I suppose, that we'd have. Going to the cinema or hanging out at each other's houses.

Ruth Beecher So. So, was that what you did, go to the cinema and—?

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, yeah. Mostly I think we just— that was that was our sort of— our world, like, we just— we'd go—. Well, Jenna lived in Dun Laoghaire, so— and that was the hangout spot for all the teens in— who went to the schools in and around south Dublin like our school, and then, like, Blackrock and Foxrock and the ones in Dalkey as well. It was— I think because it was— I presume, like, teachers, like, parents saw it as, like, a relatively safe— it's urban,

but there was a shopping centre there, there was a cinema there. So it was allowing us a little bit of freedom without actually— .

Ruth Beecher Going into Dublin City Centre.

Stephanie Blythman Going into Dublin, which, you know, at the age of maybe thirteen, fourteen, maybe they thought it was too far. And that all we needed— that was Dun Laoghaire. So, yeah, we spent a lot of time there and then at— Yeah, I think that's— in and around, like, around each other's houses, having film nights and sometimes sleepovers or— Yeah.

Ruth Beecher Mm hmm. And so, you— were you— you know, what would have been your main interest around? You know, if we're talking now fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen? Were you into— I think you said not team sports, but, you know, music, theatre, film, or boys? What was the— ? What were you all interested in— what were you specifically interested in?

Stephanie Blythman Well, I was a big reader. Reading, drawing, and I think that's, like— our—. I think those would be the two things.

Ruth Beecher And did you spend a lot of time at home doing that, then?

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Yeah, we used to— There used to— I think it still exists. There's this site called DeviantArt, and I know that, like, certainly, Jenna and Rosa and I— we would and Nate because we were— maybe— probably back in touch with Nate at that stage. And he's very artistic and has been working on a graphic novel for a very long time now. But yeah, we would all be doing our own drawing and artwork in our spare time. And we post it up onto this site— and be commenting on it in each other's profiles. And so there— and then there was another site called Gaia Online, which is very—. We were all very into anime and—

Ruth Beecher [00:35:01] Oh, yes.

Stephanie Blythman Japanese comics and stuff. So that was— we were—

Ruth Beecher *Is that like Manga?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Yeah. So, it's I think, like, yeah, manga, anime. I think manga is, like, the comics and anime is the cartoon— like, the TV, film. I think that's the difference. So yeah, we were— we were all very into— into that and I think that would have very much influenced what we were drawing as well, and the way we were drawing. So, we were, yeah, we were doing our drawings and posting them on this DeviantArt website and then also on this Gaia Online, which was forums, but you had your little avatar and you could take it on adventures within, like, there was a little sort of a an interactive world, I guess. Not like—

Ruth Beecher *What— what year are we in now, Steph?*

Stephanie Blythman So that would have been so while I was fifteen, so 2015. So, it's been 2015 to 2016, 2017, 2018. *[SB note: stated incorrect years here. Should be 2005 to 2006. 2007, 2008]* Yeah. Yeah. And yes, that— that was our— our world and engaging in the chat forums on there with various—. There's, like— you could do, like— You ended up, like, in various conversations with, like, other people I know. Like, Jenna was in chats about, like, Formula One and that because she was really into that and, you— yeah. Or you did roleplaying forums where you went off, took your character or your avatar or whatever off on adventures with them, with the other people in the forums and stuff. So yeah, I think that was— And then— Yes, we were on that, and we'd interact with each other on that as well.

Ruth Beecher *Yeah, as well as, like, other people and yeah—.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. And on the DeviantArt and then— and then, also, MSN Messenger was kicking off around then as well. So, we'd be having group chats on MSN as well.

Ruth Beecher *And the people that you met on the DeviantArt that weren't in your little circle of four to six. With that, would you ever meet those people in real life?*

Stephanie Blythman Not DeviantArt, I know with Gaia, my— Nate met his first boyfriend on Gaia, who was from Michigan.

Ruth Beecher *Wow.*

Stephanie Blythman And they were long distance— for quite a few— a long time. And then they eventually met up in real life. And then I think I— I made— there was a friend of mine that I met through Bebo, of all places. And yeah, I met— I think I met up with him once or twice and then that faded. But yeah, I think some people— some people did, like, I didn't really— I don't think I ever really engaged in the digital world to such an extent that it became more real to me than the real world. I think I was quite content with the friends I had because I had that core group of friends in real life.

Ruth Beecher *And would you describe yourself as, like, a happy fifteen, sixteen, seventeen year old? Were you—? You know, what was—?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, I think, yeah, I think I was— I was pretty— pretty happy. Still probably awkward and uncomfortable and trying to figure out how to— how to be— but, yeah, I think I was, you know, I was happy. I had friends, you know, I was doing well in school and— yeah.

Ruth Beecher *[00:39:13] And so, what was the next big thing that you can remember from those teenage years, do you think?*

Stephanie Blythman Well, I suppose there's my first boyfriend, which ended disastrously [laughs]. But, yeah, I think I met— I first met him at the end of fourth year in school or the end of Transition Year. I was doing work experience—

Ruth Beecher *Transition Year is the— is a year out from study where you do work experience and that sort of thing?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes. Yes. It's— yes, yes. So that comes after the Junior Cert. You go First to Third Year in secondary school, and then at the end of Third Year you do Junior Cert, and then there's Transition Year. Some schools, I think, allow you to skip it. Mine didn't—. Personally,

having met people— there was a few people who came into our year in Fifth Year who had skipped Transition Year and for me, I really— I think I did notice the difference in terms of maturity and where— I mean, I suppose they were just that year younger than the rest of us, but also just like, even if we were all bored of our trees at some points during Transition Year because it's a bit of a— You're not really working towards anything in it, you're just trying different things out and stuff, and I think it did give people a time to sort of relax and just figure themselves out a little and not— without that external pressure of exams looming and having to work and just sort of— And they mixed up the classes a lot more. So, we were thrown into classes with people we hadn't been in class with before. And we were trying different things. And I think, yeah, I think it did just offer a year where everyone kind of— egos sort of calmed down a bit. And then by the time we got to Fifth Year, everyone was a little bit more, maybe, centred and a little bit less— a little bit less concerned with that whole jockeying for position and the social hierarchy thing. Whereas I felt that some of the people who had not done Transition Year, they weren't quite there, that they were a little maybe— a little bit more concerned with that stuff, which, you know, some people are like— some people are for their whole lives. Yeah, I think— I think it just— I did feel like there was a growing up in that year.

And so, in the Transition Year, we had— our last two weeks of school were spent doing two weeks of work experience. So, I did it with The Ark, which is a children's cultural centre in— in Temple Bar in Dublin. They do arts programmes, something like theatre shows sometimes, or, like, art exhibitions, or they do workshops that will be themed around whatever they have on at the time. So, I was volunteering with them and there was another boy doing work experience there at the same time. And then I— for whatever reason, he didn't have a mobile phone. So, he was using me as the go between. So, we arranged to meet with his friend who— then I started talking to this friend Brian for— like, of my own volition. And then we became friends, and we were sort of— I suppose we were probably chatting maybe for about six months. And then, yeah, it's funny, looking back, like, I don't— I don't know, I wonder, like, how much of me— because it was definitely me that pushed for becoming boyfriend, girlfriend sort of thing. And I suppose by that stage, I was sixteen. And I do wonder maybe how much of that impetus in forcing the issue was through my embarrassment, I suppose, at, like, being sixteen and I'd never kissed anyone, never been kissed, never had a boyfriend. And yeah, I wonder how much of it was my self-consciousness about that. Like, he was nice enough, but, like, he was a terrible, terrible boyfriend and definitely in that *Sex*

and the City— you know, *He's Just Not That Into You*— very much. You know, he'd go AWOL for weeks on end and not answer text messages and always put everything back on me, and then, like, go, 'well, what do you want?' And so that was most of Fifth and Sixth Year.

Ruth Beecher [00:44:53] *So it went on for quite a bit then?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Certainly longer— I'd never— I would never put up with that now. But, you know when you're a teenager, you're an idiot. And yeah, definitely, I was very— it left me feeling very insecure and I remember, like, the end of it— was just— I was wrecked by the end of it. I just felt just exhausted. And I mean it came at a really— like, it was a whole load of things that happened at the same time because we— Basically, we'd finished our Leaving Cert 2018. June, 2018. And then, well, essentially, he just ignored me for the whole summer and then around September— it would have been, like, a few weeks before we were due to start college— my friend's dad died very suddenly. And I remember, I think I was ringing him in part to kind of tell him that and— but also that, like, I was trying to work out whether if he was going to come to my Debs, which— So the Debs is like, I guess, like prom [laughs]. I think that's the closest, isn't it? And because I asked him weeks before and he hasn't responded. And so I was ringing him, and so I rang his house, I think, actually, and his brother answered and was like, 'Oh, yeah, no, he's— I'm sorry. He's packing the car to go to Galway, but he'll get back to you.' And then I was like, 'oh, right, okay yeah.' Then two days later, still had heard nothing from him. And then so I sent him a text being like, you know, 'where are you at?' Or like, I don't remember. And then still nothing. And woke up to, like, a text message on the— on the Thursday, I think, which was— said something like, oh, 'sorry, I can't come to your Debs, have a great time.' Um. And that was— that was it, and it was just, you know, when you just have that moment of like— yeah, right, yeah, no, he just he doesn't— he doesn't care, and that's that.

Ruth Beecher *Horrible. What a horrible thing to do, huh?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, yeah. Just careless.

Ruth Beecher *Had he sort of been— you know, you told me about the beginning of the relationship and how that came about— but had— had you integrated him into your friendship circle over that*

period of a couple of years, or was he always on the outside a little bit, sort of— a different part of your life?

Stephanie Blythman I think always on the outside. And, you know, it was one of those, like, I kind of tried to integrate him but— He lived on— like, he lived on the other side of— he lived in north Dublin. So, in that sense, it was hard, and he went to a different school. So, in that sense, it was harder, because we wouldn't have had necessarily many mutual meeting points— natural meeting points and at this— Yeah— but yeah, it was one of those funny things that I think we very much got on and were talking a lot more when we were just friends, like, before we started in a relationship, such as it was. Yeah, so, like, you know, as I said, now— like now, I would never, ever put up with that. But, you know, I suppose I took from it that, you know, I would never put up with that myself, but that also I would never treat somebody in that way. And that, you know, if I ever felt that I was doing that, I would try and assess and think 'right, okay, well if this is happening, what does it mean?' And kind of try, yeah, just— I know how awful it is to be in that limbo of not knowing where you're at and kind of— or, you know—

Ruth Beecher *And where did the friendship group weigh in on all of this?*

Stephanie Blythman It was just quite separate.

Ruth Beecher *Was it?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Yeah.

Ruth Beecher *Is that— did you keep your ups and downs about it quite private then while it was all going on?*

Stephanie Blythman Not really. I think, you know, with— I'd have talked about it with Jenna, but I think, you know, it's one of those things where as much as she would have very much, I think, disapproved of the way he treated me, there's only so much you can say to somebody if they're not willing to see it. I think she just let it— let it be. And yeah, that yeah, but he was very much a separate—

Ruth Beecher *Part of your life.*

Stephanie Blythman Part. Yeah.

Ruth Beecher [00:50:22] *And were you having a sexual relationship with him?*

Stephanie Blythman No. No. And, you know, I don't think I would have been ready for it to be like— I really— that's where I'm— when you're like, how much of it was my own self— consciousness about the fact that I was sixteen and never been kissed and all of that? Like, I don't know that I really even, kind of— Yeah, like, I don't know that boys really occurred to me that way [laughs] for a very long time, maybe even—

Ruth Beecher *Like, feel like you should have somebody hanging around rather than maybe actually desiring it in that way for itself.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, yeah. Like, I don't think I really just came around to that kind of— until maybe university— that I had, yeah.

Ruth Beecher *And did it— was it— You know, did you bounce back, was it— did you feel quite damaged for a while? How did you— how did you move on?*

Stephanie Blythman I was definitely very damaged for a while. I think I was— I think I was quite numb for almost a year after, which wasn't helped by the fact that, as I said, my best friend's father had died. And a week after that happened, she moved to London to go to university there and then I think between her spiralling and her grief and then me obviously being in a really awful place as well, we ended up having a really awful fight, just before Christmas of that first year. And we didn't— we didn't speak until the following June, which is— that's the longest we've ever gone without speaking to each other ever that I think I remember. She— I think she messaged me that June, um, just saying, 'oh, it's weird not talking to you.' And we slowly built back our friendship.

Ruth Beecher *Oh, that was good. That was good. That she reached out and that you rekindled it, wasn't it? But I guess so much emotion and pain in that period and a big change in going to university as well and leaving all your friends behind?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes. Yeah. I think where you asked if I reinvented myself going to secondary school, like, no, but definitely when I went to university.

Ruth Beecher *So this is Trinity, was it?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes. Yes, this was Trinity. And it was kind of—

Ruth Beecher *So you must be quite a— quite an intellectual achiever then to get a place at Trinity? First to mark that. That was an achievement, right?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes, yes. It's funny, I definitely didn't do as well in my Leaving Cert as I could have. By the time I was finishing school, I think I was just very tired of being in school and very fed up of it and very bored.

Ruth Beecher *We can blame Brian as well, right?*

Stephanie Blythman Possibly, but I don't know.

Ruth Beecher *No! We won't! [Laughs].*

Stephanie Blythman [00:53:36] I don't think it was really— I think it was just, I was so— school just really didn't suit the way I learn because it's very—

Ruth Beecher *Was it rote? Rote learning or—?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, it's very formulaic. Like, you, in the way you learn, like, the way you have to pass the exams, it's like you have to— even for the essay questions and a lot of the subjects, you have to answer them in a very formulaic way. It very much doesn't suit the way I think and the

way I learn. And so I think— And then obviously, you know, you're in school and so they're sort of dictating to you what subjects you can do. And I think I was just—

Ruth Beecher *You felt bored and constrained by it?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, I kind of lost— sort of that momentum. I think maybe after my mock exams in— in the spring. And so, by the time I got to the Leaving Cert, like, the actual exams, I don't— I definitely did not study as much as I should have.

Ruth Beecher *You still got into Trinity— [laughs]*

Stephanie Blythman But yeah, somehow [laughs]. I think I'd obviously done enough, like, residual work— enough of it had sunk in that I did, I did do well enough to get enough points, which is the system in Ireland, to get into— to get my place in the course that I wanted in Trinity. So, I was— I was happy enough with that. I remember going back to do some rechecks on some of my exams. I think I went because you can check your papers if you— if you think that maybe you deserved a higher mark. I think I remember going back in. I did— I went back in to check my Irish paper. And, you know, I think I could have probably got that mark bumped up. But I was— at that point, I was a little bit afraid that— I was— I didn't know how the system works that, like, if I got that mark bumped up, did that mean that I would lose the place that I had and get bumped up to a different course that I'd actually realised I didn't want to do? But I had originally made my first choice. And so I didn't. But I remember going in with my Irish teacher and just opening it, and I'd written, like, about four pages or something, or four or five pages for the essay question. And that was— she'd spent the last two years trying to get me to write longer essays because there was this— I don't know why, but, like, my school was obsessed with, like, getting us to write, like, answer— There was various different questions on it. And one of them is, you either write about, like, the education system or the health care system in Ireland, but you're writing about it in Irish. And I just really didn't care because it was— it was basically like you just learn bits of vocabulary and, like, bits of sentences and then you'd be putting that in. So, I think the, like— the most I was— I ever wrote in any essay that she ever set was about a page and a half and she was constantly like, 'You have to write more than this, you need to write more than this'. But then for whatever reason, when I got into the exam, I opened the paper, and I was glancing down, and the creative writing question

caught my eye. And that was— ‘Talk about—.’ It was something like ‘talk about a place that is special to you’ or, like, something along those lines. And so, I answered that question instead and got, like, four or five pages out of it, as I said. But yeah, I think she nearly cried when we opened the paper [laughs] and we're looking at it. And she was just like, 'you've written so much!' and I was like, 'yeah' [laughs].

Ruth Beecher Aw. That's lovely.

Stephanie Blythman But yeah.

Ruth Beecher [00:57:34] So what was Trinity like when you got there?

Stephanie Blythman It was great. Yeah, I loved it. You know, it's right in the centre of Dublin.

Ruth Beecher Beautiful campus.

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Yeah. The campus is right— right in the centre of Dublin and I was still living at home but— and I'd get the train in. But that's not really unusual for Irish students. You know, most of us stay at home unless you decide to go to a university that's the other side of the country.

Ruth Beecher Yeah.

Stephanie Blythman So, yeah, it was great. I loved it. Joined the Drama Society and various other ones, but, like, drama, like, Players, was definitely the one that I was most involved with and most heavily involved with through the whole of the four years I was there. And I suppose it made sense, like, I was studying drama and then, like, most of my classmates were in it as well. So, we were all doing the theory of it in class and then actually just being able to put on plays and do it all ourselves in Players, because it's up to you. So, we were the ones— like, people could try writing plays or, like, directing or doing lighting or costume and sound and all of this stuff, and coming together and doing so— yeah, no, I really— I really loved it.

Ruth Beecher *Sounds fabulous. And you said you completely reinvented yourself. What did that look like?*

Stephanie Blythman Um, I suppose I think it was definitely a conscious choice on my part in that sense that I just arrived in and introduced myself to people as Steph. And I don't know if it was necessarily intentional that I wanted to distance myself from secondary school or that kind of thing, but I feel like it probably was that I just wanted to start fresh. And, you know, I suppose I was aware that, like, I have to start again because, you know, my best friend had gone off to London, so she wasn't going to be there. And then my other friends had mostly all gone to— UCD or were in other— like, people who I wasn't necessarily as close to were in different courses and stuff. So, I think I was just very much aware that I needed to make friends so that I would find people to have fun, spend time with and be friends with. So, I think there was there was that and then— But in a sense, it was kind of easier because— especially in— I think in, you know, in university, it's, like, very— For the most part, people are doing the course that they're doing because that subject really interests them and that's what they want to be there. So, you can share that and you can just be as passionate as you want about the subject that you're doing without that self-consciousness that maybe you might have in school. So, I think it was the first time that I could really start, maybe— figuring out how to be myself, being outside of just my friend group.

Ruth Beecher [01:01:19] *Sounds really fabulous and energising. Yeah, sounds like, amazing, like stepping into another world. Yeah, yeah, and so was it work hard, play hard at Trinity? To go with the cliches—*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, yeah I think so. Especially as the yeah— we'd just get involved in, like, plays and pitching in and— and— and helping other people doing their— their plays.

Ruth Beecher *And what was the, like— the students in your— you know, in the Players and in your different courses that you were doing, was that, like, quite an international student body or was it mostly people very similar to those you'd gone to school with or that lived in your area? You know what I mean? Was it quite a different community or not?*

Stephanie Blythman I think it was kind of a mix— probably a mix. I mean, you know, as I said, I went to— Like, my school had been an international one. So, we did have quite a mix. And then my friends had done what's called the International Baccalaureate instead of the Leaving Cert, because my school offers that— my school offered that as well as the Leaving Cert. So, I actually ended up spending a lot more time with the internationals like the Australians and the Americans and that than— especially in my last few years, than I did with any of my fellow Irish students. But yeah, then university. I think it was that— that mix of, like, there were people from much more different backgrounds that, like, you know— There was a few— a few English students. I remember in our first year, we had— there was a girl from Finland, I think there, although she dropped out, I think. We had, like, Americans. But, like, they would have been from a much more varied background as opposed to that very middle-class south Dublin, north Wicklow environment that my— like, the school would have been for the most part, except for those few internationals. So, in that sense, yeah, I think it was— it was a really interesting experience.

Ruth Beecher [01:04:01] *Would you still have had to have been quite well off to go to Trinity, or were there people there on scholarships and that kind of thing?*

Stephanie Blythman Umm, I don't know. I think there are people who do go there on scholarships. I mean, you know, obviously any of the Americans who were there would have— either they were there on massive, massive loans. But, you know, then America's quite different in the sense that for them, going to university is outrageously expensive anyway. So, I think in that sense, they were probably all relatively middle-class in that sense, because to pay the international fees as well as paying your rent or whatever in Europe, that, um— But I think maybe some of the Irish and English students, they might— you know, I don't think it ever really bothered me or occurred to me in that way. But yeah, I think there was much more of a mix that there'd have been, like, people from maybe less well-off areas. Yeah, I do know that Trinity, they have, like a— I think they call it TAP, like, Trinity Access Programme.

Ruth Beecher *Bursaries and things like that.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. To try and reach out to and get people from less advantaged areas into university and stuff. I don't know if anyone on my programme was like that.

Ruth Beecher *Yeah. And would it still have been a largely white student body at Trinity? Because Dublin would have been quite mixed ethnically by the late 2010s, wouldn't it?*

[SB note: confusion here probably as a result of saying wrong dates earlier in interview. Correct time period is actually late noughties to just before the 2000 teens]

Stephanie Blythman Yes, yeah, yeah. My— certainly my courses were still quite white, like, there was a few— well, the American— they were American, actually, but there were a few Jewish girls, but that would have been, I think, about as ethnically diverse as my year got in Drama. I'm not really sure. I'm not so sure about French, but I never really bonded with French.

Ruth Beecher *The French lot. You were really bonded with your Drama?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. I think perhaps the difficulty with the French class was that it was— it was a much bigger year. There were only thirty or forty of us in Drama total in our year. And we were— we had, like, a practical class workshop. We were— where we were, like, you had to get to know someone [laughs], because if you're, like, pulling off them and hanging off them and kind of having to create things, so you bond with them in a much different way. But I think also, you know, in French, there was a mixture. There wasn't just people who were doing French with Drama or whatever. There was, like, people who were doing French with, however—

Ruth Beecher *Economics—*

Stephanie Blythman [01:07:15] People doing French who were doing— also doing Law. So, you were in a much bigger mix and all of— you weren't necessarily the same people in every class. It was— yeah, I think harder to get to— get to know.

Stephanie Blythman So, I think I did bond with my classmates who did French and— French and Drama. Certainly one of them, Stacy, we'd have been very close for the first few years of Drama, and then as our different interests diverged a bit more, we drifted a bit.

Ruth Beecher *Is that what happened to people on the Drama course, that they sort of started to develop interest in specific areas then, of— Like you with costume or—?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, yeah. different. Yeah. Or you figure out sort of— maybe, what your niche is and you get more involved in that, or maybe, like, there's other clubs or societies that you get more involved in. As I went on, like, in my— I think towards the end of second year, there was— Somebody— a group of people decided to set up a French Society, which I— I got very involved in that. So, I was on the committee for that for my final two years, helping try and establish it. So, I was doing that. And then I was doing— helping with the St Vincent de Paul Society. They put on a pantomime every year, where they got some of the schools— local schools that they worked with. The kids— some of the kids from there would be in the pantomime and doing all of the— Some of them playing the main characters and some of them just doing, like, crowd dances and stuff.

Ruth Beecher *Amazing.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. So, I got involved with, like, helping costuming that. So, yeah, everyone finds their sort of niche and you fall into working with particular people and, yeah, working towards figuring out where you might want to go after graduation, I suppose.

Ruth Beecher *And was your social life centred around Trinity or did you head out into Dublin a lot?*

Stephanie Blythman It was quite a lot of— quite a lot with Trinity, like, particularly with— We'd end up having, like, various events in and around, like, the different bars and clubs around Dublin. But, yeah, like, with Players, whenever you did a play, you would— it would open up on the Monday. I guess the Monday would be sort of like an open dress rehearsal as such. And then it would run for the rest of the week until the Saturday— either the Saturday afternoon or the Saturday night. And then on the Saturday night, both shows that were running that week would have a massive— would do a get-out. So, you'd just, like, rip out all the sets and put them back down in the basement and get all the costumes back down and packed up and ready to go off to wherever they were going. And then after that, you'd all just head out and either go to somebody's

flat and have the party there, or just go out to some pub somewhere. Usually, I think it was Doyle's, which was just off College Green that— we ended up going there a lot. That became our haunt because they had, like— I think it was on, like, Fridays and Saturdays, they had a night where, like, the upstairs would sort of turn into a club— like, they'd have a dance floor and a DJ and you didn't have to pay in. So, it was— it was easy, you'd just, like, sidle in, you'd have, like, your pints or whatever or your drinks and have a dance. And so, yeah, that was— that was where we went quite a lot, I think. Yeah. There was a few— there's a few pubs that we— were our main haunts, all of which I think are now closed.

Ruth Beecher Aw, that's sad isn't it?

Stephanie Blythman And been redeveloped into hotels or student accommodation or whatever. We'd have gone the Long Stone [closed 2018] or there was another one called MacTurcaills [closed 2015] and yeah, I think they're both—

Ruth Beecher Gone.

Stephanie Blythman They've gone.

[01:11:50]

Ruth Beecher And were you a big drinker or?

Stephanie Blythman Not really. I didn't really drink at all until I got to university. It just wasn't really— which I think is maybe unusual but—

Ruth Beecher It's the stereotype of theatre people, isn't it, that there's a lot of alcohol sort of around the whole—

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, but— yeah, I wouldn't have said that I was ever a big drinker, but I definitely kind of— a lot of drunken nights. But I wouldn't have ever gotten too out of control. Like, I'd never— you know, obviously, there's— everyone has those few nights where you

underestimate or misjudge your intake or your capacity and you end up a bit worse for the wear. But, yeah, I've never— I never felt comfortable with the idea of not remembering. That— you know, there is a culture of, like— people will go, 'oh, I don't remember anything from that,' and they'd be talking about this every week and it just— it made me feel really uncomfortable, the idea that I wouldn't remember my night. Yeah, it just— it made me feel very—a bit ugh— and I never wanted that, but I'd have a few drinks, have a good time. Sometimes I'd get drunk, sometimes drunker than I intended, but never— never out of control, I don't think, really.

Ruth Beecher So anything else you wanted to say about your time in Trinity or what— where did you want to go next?

Stephanie Blythman Well, I think I had— I was trying to decide whether I wanted to be an actor. That was originally why I did Drama, I thought maybe I wanted— I kind of wanted to be an actor and then as I— Yeah, I kind of fell into costuming in that way, towards the end of my second year, I think. And then by the time I was Third Year, I really started trying to costume as many things— And so then, by the time I was in Fourth Year, I was majoring in Drama at that point— Because the way my degree worked is that you did two subjects up to the end of Third Year and then you decide which one you want to major in. So, I majored in Drama and I did my final exams as such for French at the end of Third Year. And then— So, yeah, I was trying to decide whether I wanted to sort of pursue costume as— and go and do proper training in that. I was doing the costume design module that was offered in— in Trinity at that point, and whether I wanted to go and do proper training in that. So, I was looking into that.

[01:14:53]

And then— But I was also sort of looking into— actually the MA that I ended up doing a couple of years ago with the Royal College of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum in History of Design. I can't even remember how I came across it. I just remember thinking, it really appealed to me. The way— what they were proposing, the structure of what they were proposing to teach. And so, I was torn between these things as well—

Ruth Beecher So was one a practical sort of route and the other was a theoretical academic—

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. And then I think the answer came when my mum came across this course in Inchicore, which is— it's actually called a FETAC [Further Education and Training Awards Council] course. So, it's not a degree course. It's like a diploma course. And so, it's— I think the qualification is, like, slightly above what the Leaving Cert is, but it's— yeah, it's not at a degree level. But she came across this course anyway and I was looking into it and it was, you know, offering to teach making and pattern drafting and art and design and costume history and theatre history and hair and makeup. And it just— And because it was a diploma course, presumably, it was very affordable. I think it was, like, €500 per year for all— like, for all of this, and just compared to any of the other courses that I was looking at. And because I was very aware that I didn't feel like— I didn't necessarily feel confident that, like, my portfolio as such was up to the standard that, like, say, the likes of RADA [Royal Academy of Dramatic Art] or Central School in London or, like, Edinburgh College of Art— that, like, any of those Master's courses were looking for in terms of portfolio. Like, the word 'portfolio', really just, like— it sounded really scary to me. So initially, I actually— I applied to Inchicore with the thought that, like, 'oh, well, I'll do the first year' and then I'll— like, through doing that, I'll have built up something of a portfolio and I can use that and apply to one of these other courses. And so, I was also quite nervous about the idea of learning making. I was like, 'oh, I don't know what kind of standard—' So I ended up doing— Between my finishing Trinity and starting that at Inchicore, I ended up doing a course at the Grafton Academy, which is a fashion design school in Dublin. And so, I ended up doing a dressmaking course with them through the summer. As it turns out, [laughs] I didn't need to because with Inchicore, we literally— it didn't matter how much of a skill level, because there was a real wide variety. There was a few women there who'd been dressmaking for years, and there was some of us who'd never touched a sewing machine— some people who'd never touched a sewing machine in their lives. So, their approach was to just start at the beginning. And no matter what your skill was, and just work from there. And like, 'this is how you do straight stitch, this is how you do this seam, this is how you do that,' which was really good, I think, because obviously, like, especially if you're self-taught with sewing, you might have bad habits or, like, maybe you do things, and some you're like, 'oh, this is a much easier way of—.' So yeah, I think, yeah, I ended up applying for that and let the MA, the History of Design MA drop. And I was like, 'right okay, this is what I'll do.' So, I applied for that and I went for the interview and I got in and, as I said, I did the Grafton course and then got into Inchicore. And then, I think once I was there, I just— I loved it so much.

Ruth Beecher [01:19:30] *Did you? The teaching or the people there or—?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, like, just I mean— like, the teaching. And then it was really, really full on. Like, we were in full-time, like, five days a week, probably about, like, five hours a day. And then after that, you'd have loads of assignments. And I was working as well part-time in Penneys (or Primark, as it is over in the UK). So, it was no time for anything else. But I really— I really loved it, and the girls, and my course were just amazing. Like, we really, yeah— We really just all really bonded. Our course, like, our— the head of the course. She was laughing at us in the second year. She was just like, 'I remember those first few weeks, like, the first month.' She was like, 'You all were just so just, like, wary and sizing each other up.' And she's like, 'And then, you know, like, after Halloween, you all just, like, clicked and—' And we were like, 'we'll just tell her that we got really drunk in the sewing machine room and, like, had pizzas and, like, went on a night,' because it was, like, rule number one: no food in the sewing—

Ruth Beecher *Yes. That would be the cardinal sin of the sewing room!*

Stephanie Blythman Because, like, we— There was also, like, a kettle in there and we almost immediately just obviously started a tea round. And she was like, 'You know, you're the first lot that has ever done that.' We were like, 'What do you mean? It's a kettle! Of course, we're going to make tea.' She's like, 'No, we're, like— we use that kettle to boil water for dyeing things.' We're all just looking at her being like, 'yeah, but it's a kettle, like, tea obviously.' So, it must have just been, like, whatever combination of us that were there that, like, we all just got on really well, because the year ahead of us hated each other, like, they were like, all right. Yeah. They were all very divided up and, like, in their little groups whereas we were— Like, a whole just, like, all 13 of us, just—

Ruth Beecher *So was that a year's course— or two years or a year to you?*

Stephanie Blythman *Two years.*

Ruth Beecher *Yeah, and so very different from Trinity and full-on practical hard work.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, yes. Yeah, very much so.

Ruth Beecher *And wasn't it great that you loved it though. It was really the right choice.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Yeah it was, it was really good. And we're all— well most of us are all still in touch that we—

Ruth Beecher *Were there people on that course for all sorts of different reasons, Steph?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes, yeah. Yeah. You know, there was— there was people on that course that, like, they— there was, there was one woman, Ginan, who was— she came back and she came in in our second year. I think she'd done the first year a few years before. She's hilarious. She's a hilarious Iraqi woman. And she was a— a fashion designer and dressmaker. And she'd be more— She had her own company and been working in Dublin for years. But I think she just wanted, like, that qualification so that she could say, like, 'I have this qualification in costume.' I think she'd made, like, a lot of Irish dancing costumes for people as well and stuff. So, she was there, she wanted— she wanted this qualification so she could put it on her CV, I think. And then the same, I think, for there was a— I can't remember if she was Hungarian or where she was, but she was also definitely a qualified dressmaker. She was like— she was amazing. And I think maybe she wanted that qualification as well, that thing that you can say, like, oh, you know, like, a recognisable thing, like, 'oh, I did this course at, like, Inchicore and dadadada,' because the course had been going for 20 years, so it's quite— And then, I think maybe she wanted to also get into, like, costume making. And it's sort of like, well, if I do that, it's a way in. And it's also helps sort of in terms of, like, improving English for her, for that girl, Jurgita. So yeah. There was some people who were retraining or reskilling, and then there was a couple of— a couple of girls like me who'd gone through university and had sort of, I think, decided like, 'oh, this would be this looks like an interesting direction to go in.' And then there was a couple of girls, one of whom dropped out, she realised it wasn't for her very much, so— A couple of girls who literally just left school, they were about 17. So, yeah, that one girl, she ended up dropping. I think she realized that— she went off to become a paramedic, actually, which we were like, 'definite shift.' But yeah, she seemed a lot happier, when— because she actually did the paramedic course at the— which the college that Inchicore offered. So, she seemed a lot happier when we saw her the next year. But yeah. And then

the other girl Jade, who I'm still— I'm still friends with now, she was very much our course baby, like, we all— I think we all became, like, surrogate sisters to her.

Ruth Beecher [01:25:00] Aww. Big sisters.

Stephanie Blythman Mammies, in a way.

Ruth Beecher Sounds lovely.

Stephanie Blythman So, she— I don't think she necessarily knew what she wanted to do, but, like, I don't even know how she picked the course. But yeah, she came on and she did it and then yeah, I think she's gone back, she's gone— She went off and travelled a few years. But I think she's come back to do— to study arts management now. So great. Yeah. She's got her— figured out— figured out her way but, yeah. So, there was— there was a huge, a huge mix.

Ruth Beecher What was your social scene when you moved to Inchicore? Because you'd been in with the Trinity crowd and very much sort of hanging out with your Drama buddies there for the— for the four years at Trinity.

Stephanie Blythman Um, yeah, it was—well, we didn't—well, because I was, I didn't really have much time for—

Ruth Beecher Yeah, you were working very hard.

Stephanie Blythman We mostly just hung out with each other I suppose. And, like, a thing with, like, because we were, like, in class in the mornings until maybe, like, twelve or one o'clock. And then quite often we'd just stay and work away in— in the studio. At, like, the sewing studio or sewing room to be doing our coursework or whatever, and we'd work together and be helping each other out. And so that was, I suppose, the social scene then. And then every so often I might go out with people from work, uh, from Penneys that I made a few friends there as well. So, there'd be every so often, just, like, a work night out, we'd go to the pub that—because I was working in the one in Dundrum. And so we'd end up, there was a a pub in Dundrum village that was the place that

we just went for, for work nights, actually start there and then go on and head up to the tram or whatever the— to the Luas and head into Dublin from there or get taxis or whatever, or go back to somebody's house and or flat or whatever. So that was— Yeah, the social scene, and then every so often I'd maybe meet up with whatever friends from Trinity that were left. Because I suppose the difficulty with that was that a lot of— well, you know, a lot of people went on to, like, to do further studies abroad, or they went back home. Yeah, that— especially the friends that I had.

Ruth Beecher *Were you involved in any drama groups or theatrical productions while you were at Inchicore?*

Stephanie Blythman Um, I was. What. Oh, I did— I volunteered with the Dublin Fringe Festival. There was this aerial dance company. So, I helped out making the costumes for them. That would have been around 2013— that summer, autumn. And then in my final year at Inchicore, I designed and made the costumes for a theatre production that went up in Smock Alley Theatre, which was a devised piece, which— I think the girl who was doing it, directing or directing it, had been in Trinity as well. I can't even remember how I got involved with it.

Ruth Beecher *You kept your hand in a little bit.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Like, I feel like maybe it was something that she posted that she was looking for somebody on Facebook or something like that because I hadn't known her in— in Trinity. But yeah, like, maybe she posted on some forum somewhere that she was looking for a costume designer. And then just after I finished, I designed the costumes for production in the Project Art Centre of *Timon of Athens*. And then through that, I got put in touch with another director who was putting on another Shakespeare play, pretty much just after that in the Iveagh Gardens, of *Much Ado About Nothing*. So, I did that as well. And then— Yes, and then after that, I— I got work experience on a film, on *Sing Street*, and I did a few weeks on that. So that was after I graduated. That I got through our pattern draughting tutor, actually, because she works for— she works for RTE. So, I think she had, like, contacts and they were quite good at, like, trying to get every— each person who graduated, like, at least one placement and then it was up to you to build your contacts.

Ruth Beecher [01:30:18] *Yes.*

Stephanie Blythman And be doing that. And then towards October of that year, so that would be in 2014, I had written to a costume rental company over here in the UK, called Angels. I think I'd written to them around the time, like, in May of around the time I was finishing up, asking about work experience or internships or potential work. And they just got back to me at that time saying that they didn't have anything, sorry. And then around the end of October, start of November, and I got an email from them asking if I was still interested. And that they had a few internships coming up. Would I be interested in coming over for an interview? And so I did.

Ruth Beecher *How did you feel?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, it was—it was great. I was actually working nights in Penneys at that stage because. Well, you got paid a lot because they had a night shift over the Christmas period, which started in October, October–November. And it paid—you got paid extra for working unsociable hours. So, I'd, right, well, I'll do this, and I'll save up, like, all this money, and then I'll be able to properly get into film and stuff. So, I think I must've finished my shift on the Sunday morning. And I think I flew over to the UK on the Monday, maybe, because I must have— or maybe yeah, I can't remember when I had my interview, but I flew over anyway because my— At that stage, Jenna and I were— much, much better place, and stuff. So, I came over just partly to see her and spend time with her and then also do this interview. And so, I went in and it was, it was really nice. It was quite an informal chat. And basically they told me the next day that I'd got—

Ruth Beecher *Yay!*

Stephanie Blythman —that I'd got the internship. And so that was due to start the following March. And so, I chatted to my mum about, like, 'oh, you know, I've got this internship' and she's like, 'right.' Well, you know, we're working out how I was going to afford living because it's an internship, so they weren't paying anything. They were going to pay travel expenses while I was doing the internship, so I wasn't going to have to worry about tube journeys and that kind of thing. But, yeah, it was a matter of where I would live and how to afford that. But my aunt, my mum's sister, she lives over in the UK around Balham. So, I got in touch with her and she said, 'yes, that's

absolutely fine, you can come and stay with me.’ So, that's yeah, that's what I did. I think I yeah, I handed in my notice to Penneys in January and I finished up there a few days before I was due to come over here. And then, so, I came over and did the internship and then. Yeah, I just decided to stay.

Ruth Beecher So before you go on to why you decided to stay. How did you feel about leaving? I mean, were you scared, sad to leave certain people behind? Anxious? How did you feel? Excited?

Stephanie Blythman I was very excited, I think, because when I— when I initially came over for the internship, I don't think it necessarily occurred to me that I was moving permanently. It was— yes, it was very much a really exciting thing, because the company is like, they're really big, quite prestigious, one of the mainstays of costume rental. So, I think I was very excited about, like, the experience I was going to get and, like, hopeful for, like, where it might take me and all of that. Yeah, taking that next step in my career and. Yeah, I think that was the main feeling, the excitement and—

Ruth Beecher And how did your mum feel about her daughter going?

Stephanie Blythman [01:34:39] I think she was, yeah. She was like—I think my parents were always quite— I remember having a conversation with my dad at some point that, like, he was— very much of the opinion that at some point, at least one of us would end up leaving Ireland and, you know, that like, it might prove too small or whatever or that like, our ambitions would take us— take us out. So, I think they were— they were quite excited about us. They've always— they've always been really, incredibly supportive of us in whatever we wanted to do. And, if there's ever been anything that we've wanted to do, they've generally helped us find a way to make it happen. Like, if it means getting in touch with their friends or, like, their contacts and be like, ‘this is what, you know, Stephanie or Tim or Uills want to do and—’

Ruth Beecher Lovely.

Stephanie Blythman ‘Do you know anybody?’ And so, yeah, it was in that sense, like they, yeah— They’re really, really supportive and very much like, ‘OK, right. This is what— this is what you want to do. How are we going to make it happen?’

***Ruth Beecher** And did it help that Jenna was in London? Or in terms of having someone you know, because often that's the thing that makes people anxious about leaving friends and making a new network, that sort of thing.*

Stephanie Blythman Yes. Yeah, absolutely. I think, yeah. The fact that, yeah, my best friend was here and then also, like, I was going to stay with my aunt, I was like— I didn't really know her that well at the time. But, like, it is that comforting thing of, like, well, I'm going to my auntie and then my cousins on my dad's side, they also— they live here, my first cousins. And so, like, I wasn't necessarily, like, really close to them, but, like, they had used to come back to Ireland and visit during the summers when we were kids and they're a bit older than me. And then when I— when I moved over, they basically just adopted me and just took me in and involved me in their— whenever they would get together and be doing things. And my eldest cousin, Pete and his wife, they were just about to have a baby when I moved over. So, I ended up being quite involved with her. Like, I've been ended up being quite involved with with Alex. And then I'm godmother to her younger sister now as well. So, yeah, it's quite— In that sense, I think it was much easier for me maybe than necessarily other people in that, like, UK didn't feel strange or, like, foreign or far away in that sense, because I had, like, family, I had friends, I had that support network already there. And so, it was quite easy, like, it was more about getting to know the geography more so than trying to— trying to forge any social networks from scratch.

***Ruth Beecher** Mm hmm. So, the internship went well?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes. Yeah, it did. It went well. It was— at the time I was a bit disappointed, in the sense that, like, there had been two internships and there'd been one that had happened just before my one. And that girl— the girl who did that, actually got kept on because there had been a vacancy. And so, I think basically the internships were sort of almost like an audition. So, she ended up getting kept and I didn't. I didn't resent her in any way. It was one of those, like, oh, like— Darn. Like, if I'd— if I'd been able to do that first one then maybe that would have been me. But yes, I

made kind of good—made friends with her. We still are sort of in touch and we'd meet up every so often. And so, I finished off the internship anyway and I wasn't really sure what I was going to do. I didn't really have anything lined up, but I think I— in my mind, I was afraid that if I went home to Ireland that I'd fall back into— that it would be just very easy to walk back into my job and Penneys. And I was a little bit afraid of doing that. I didn't want to. I didn't want to take the easy way out. I suppose it felt— it felt too easy to, like, oh, well, I'll just go home and then I'll end up back in my comfort zone. And so, I was like, well, you know, if I— if I don't have anything lined up, I might as well try and make a go of it in London. So, I looked around and I got a job at a fabric and haberdashery store in Soho. And I ended up working there for the summer. And I did work experience with Opera Holland Park while I was there. And then towards the end of the summer, in September time, my supervisor who—at the internship—he got back in touch and was like, 'oh, well, would you like to— we've got somebody,' one of the one of the girls who had— somebody had left. And so, he was like, 'oh, will you come back and cover the vacancy while we're sort of looking for somebody?' And initially that was supposed to be for three months, but they ended up finding somebody and basically gave me my marching orders after a month, which I was a little annoyed about, because I'd basically quit this job on the premise that I'd have work for three months. And I felt like— It was awkward because I didn't have time to work out my notice either, so I felt like maybe I'd burned bridges in that sense.

Ruth Beecher [01:40:59] *Yes, oh, that was tough.*

Stephanie Blythman So I thought that was very naughty of them. And so, but I did— that was— I worked there for the month and— a month and a half, because I ended up helping out in the work rooms for another couple of weeks after. And then I was unemployed.

Ruth Beecher *Oh, scary.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Which was very scary.

Ruth Beecher *Were you still at your aunt's?*

Stephanie Blythman And I'd found a flat— or not found a flat, but found a houseshare that was— I'd moved in there in August time. But yeah, it was quite scary being unemployed. It was really because it was the first time that— It was very much the first time that I didn't really have any direction, and I didn't really know what my next step would be or how to proceed, like, up to that point, I'd always— I'd always had a plan, even if it wasn't, like, a long-term plan. It was like, OK, right. Well, I'm going to— I'll do this, and this will— So, I was just casting about and I was unemployed for about a month. Yeah, November, December, and then in December, there was— a post went up on one of the Facebook groups— the costume and Facebook groups— somebody was looking for, like, a runner or, like, a PA [production assistant]— Costume PA. And so, I applied for that. And the supervisor, she got back to me and she said, 'I've had a look at your CV and I've chatted to Richard at Angels, and I think, actually, you'd be better suited to having a slightly better role.' But she was like, 'I want to offer you this job.' But yeah, so basically I got a job on that. On her job, but, like, it was better than the one I applied for, which was really great. And yeah, it had come through that— that internship and then going back for the month so— Yeah. It was one of those things that it worked out. Like, even if it didn't work out the way I hoped it would initially, it still— it's still— things fell into place. So, I went home for Christmas and then I came back and I started that job on the start of January, like, 4th of January.

Ruth Beecher *And what year are we in now, Steph?*

Stephanie Blythman So that would be— That would be 2016, I think, start of 2016. And I would be twenty-five and a half. Yeah, twenty-five. Yes, yes, I'm trying to remember! And then, even as I was starting that job at that point, I'd sort of decided that I quite fancied the idea of going back and doing that MA — that I'd been looking at all the way back in—all the way back in my BA. So I was sort of applying for that being like, 'oh, I don't know, like, I'll just see— see how I get on.' And then I ended up getting in, and then once I got in, I was like, 'Well, you know, maybe I'll just— maybe I'll just do it' and in the sense, because it was a two year MA, so I think in my mind, I was like, 'well, it's a long time.' And once I get into the the swing of working, I felt like it would be a lot harder to sort of—

Ruth Beecher *Step out.*

Stephanie Blythman Step out, for two whole years and then go back in. So, it's like, well, you know, might as well do it now at the start before it's really got into the swing of it. So, yeah, I did.

Ruth Beecher *How did you fund that?*

Stephanie Blythman I got a postgraduate loan. I had some— I still had some savings from when I worked those nights in, eh, in Penneys and.

Ruth Beecher *[01:45:03] You're quite a determined individual, aren't you?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah.

Ruth Beecher *Yeah, you are.*

Stephanie Blythman I just find— Well, I think it's just that— I think it's— we're like, I think it helps that my parents are always like, 'no, we'll just, we'll find a way, like— Don't—'

Ruth Beecher *No, but you're very hard working and determined and you put in a really solid foundation for your career in terms of the choices you've made, haven't you really?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah. Yeah.

Ruth Beecher *So where was the— I know you said it was at the V&A and— was it Holloway and the V&A?*

Stephanie Blythman It's in South Kensington.

Ruth Beecher *And so, were you based there?*

Stephanie Blythman The Royal College of Art.

Ruth Beecher *And you were based there, going there every day or—?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes. Yes. So, you get part taught by staff from the Royal College of Art and then partly taught by staff from the research department in the V&A.

Ruth Beecher What a privilege.

Stephanie Blythman Yes. It's a really— I really loved it because you get classed as a volunteer within the V&A. So, you get in— you get to, like, get involved with various projects that are going on, like, projects and helping out in archives and stuff. I ended up doing a month with the Theatre and Performance department between my first and second year. I was doing a few weeks on the V&A Dundee where they were doing research and figuring out what bits and pieces from their collections could go up there for that. Where that was being prepped for opening.

Ruth Beecher Amazing.

Stephanie Blythman And yeah, it was, it was really— it was really interesting.

Ruth Beecher What an opportunity. And then we're past our age range, but I'm really interested in, you know, when the course finished and your subsequent career, is that a sort of— Was that easy to get back into, having finished the two-year MA?

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, funnily enough, it was. It was, yeah, it was, strangely— everything started falling into place almost— I— I was working. I got a job at Selfridges before the MA that was partially also how I afforded to live. So, I was working there part time and then, yeah.

Ruth Beecher What department?

Stephanie Blythman In womenswear in the third floor. And in the third floor, there was, like, they were opening up a new, like— it was, like, a department where they were doing, like, new, like, avant garde sort of designers? Yeah, that— not, like, haute couture, that— because that's, like, more like the second floor. That would be— it was more. Yeah. Like, the young, fresh, up-and-coming designers, that, like, idea. So, I got a job in that which was— really was quite fun.

Ruth Beecher I'm a department store freak. Love a department store. So that's, like, my dream job.

Stephanie Blythman It's a really— it's a really mad environment in, in Selfridges because it's a department store. But at the same time, they— It's almost like they, because they have different sort of 'seasons' and they have— like, they'll organise events and at one point they had while I was there— they had, like, a Shakespeare-themed season. So, they were having students from one of the universities come in and do Shakespeare scenes— like, just pop-up Shakespeare scenes through the store and, like, they had various designers that they sold— who, like, whose stuff that they sold in the store. They were like, 'oh, will you design, like, a special Shakespeare-themed line?' So, they had, yeah— It's quite mad. I was working there, and so by when I was finishing up my degree— the MA. At that point, I was sort of torn between whether I wanted to get into museums or continue on with costuming, and it was almost a, 'well, I'll see which works out first' sort of thing, but as the costuming worked out— worked out first, I ended up doing a couple of weeks. I went back and did it, freelanced for a few weeks at Angels for them in the summer. I was— oh, well, I did a talk at a— There was a costume conference, like, a costume— Yeah, costume history studies conference at the Guildford— Guildford School of Acting, called Critical Costume. And I did, like, a— a flash talk at that. And then through that, I got chatting with their costume department there. I said, you know, I'd be willing, I'd be up for doing freelance work for them. So through them, I ended up doing a few weeks on them, and then another friend of mine who I'd worked with— Right. Well, we weren't really even friends at that point, it's just, like, a girl that I'd known through a few days of work that I'd done on a film at some point— I ran into her. I think she'd come into Selfridges, like, doing shop returns or something. And we got chatting and she was like, 'oh, well, you know, we might have dailies' on the job that she was doing. And I was like, 'well, give me a text, because, you know, I'd be up for that.' Yeah, basically I ended up getting onto that— onto that job with her. And so, it was a transition. I did, like, a few weeks with Angels and then a few weeks with— down in Guildford, and then got onto this job, which was initially only going to be a week while she was away on holiday, and then I just ended up being kept on with that film. Yeah, I'd quit Selfridges at some point in the middle of that. And I applied for a trainee programme with Screenskills, I think they call themselves. And so I applied for that while I was in the meantime. And I ended up getting on— getting onto that, so that started the spring of twenty— 2019. And so, they— basically, they find sort of paid placements for you on different productions. I think I'd applied for the TV one, and so,

yeah, I ended up with two placements out of that, jobs. And then yeah, just in the meantime, I'd somehow ended up working as the costume supervisor down in Eton College in Eton. Which was a very strange— literally, I think I went— I was only supposed to be going there for— to be helping out with some alterations or something, and then basically their costume supervisor quit and they'd never— I'd never worked for them, I don't think they'd even ever seen my CV, but they just called me up and were like, 'oh, well, would you actually just be willing to come and cover this vacancy for the rest of the school term?' And I was like, 'yeah, sure, I can do that.'

Ruth Beecher [01:53:30] *But then you ended up in the weird and wonderful world of Eton!*

Stephanie Blythman Yes, yeah. Which was— I mean, I think it's as close to working in Hogwarts as I'll ever— as I'll ever come. It's a very odd environment.

Ruth Beecher *And now do you freelance, Steph?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes, I've ended up freelancing and yeah, it's getting into the— I definitely got into the swing of it with, like, the way it works with film is that it's just mostly word of mouth and getting in touch with somebody like, 'oh hi, I'm free at the moment.' Like, if you're needing anybody on a job. Yeah. You just have to—

Ruth Beecher *You have to be quite confident then to do that.*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, it's a tricky one to sort of get into the swing of, but it's— it gets easier once you've worked for people, like, a few times or, like, if you've worked for them for, like, a few weeks or a few months. So, you feel like you've got to know them a little bit. And then also just knowing that, like, that's just how it is. That's just, like, that they're like— That it's almost helpful for them sometimes— for people sometimes if you're just give them a message and be like, 'oh, hi, like, how are you? Like, long time no see. I've been doing X, Y and Z. I hope you're well. If you're looking for anybody in the next while, I'm free. Would love to love to come and work with you again. dadada.' So yeah, it's quite— Yeah. So, it's quite, it's quite good fun and yeah I've ended up

on my current job was, is really nice. I'm working for a supervisor that I've done, like, bits and pieces for him before, but, like, this one I'm actually on the, on the whole job. So it'll be nice.

Ruth Beecher [01:55:26] *So we're probably coming near the end of our interview and I'm going to ask you in a minute if there are other things that you would like to talk about. But, um, I suppose one of the questions I want to end with, so just planting the seed, is, you know, how do you think about Ireland now? How would you describe your relationship to Ireland now? But before we get to that, was there anything else that you wanted to talk about today that's been important to you from the ages of 15 to about 25?*

Stephanie Blythman Umm, I don't know, I think yeah, I think it's mostly that I was just, just figuring out what I wanted to do and, um, making that happen, I guess, and— Yeah, that, like, I think that's mostly what those ages were of, like, figuring out what I wanted, what I wanted to do, and then with, I guess with my life as such and then. Once I'd done that figuring out how to— how to make that happen. I think, yeah, that's mostly where I was, where my mind was, where my head was at for those, for those years.

Ruth Beecher *Yeah, yeah. And you've really done that with such determination. So how would you describe your relationship to Ireland then, now?*

Stephanie Blythman Well, I miss it a lot. I don't know. I don't know how much of that has to do with— I've not been home since Christmas, 2019. With Covid.

Ruth Beecher *We should just say Covid in case someone years from now has forgotten the momentous year and more that we've been through just now, eh?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes. Yeah. Because usually I'd go home at least twice a year. I go home for a while. When I was doing my MA, I was only able to get— maybe get home for maybe a few days where I'd just bully Selfridges into rearranging my work schedule, which basically was just me telling them, like, 'well, I'm just not going to be here. I'm going home for Christmas. So that's that.' But usually, I'd go home for maybe a week, maybe two weeks, depending how much time I can get off around Christmas. And then again, I'd go home for maybe a week or so in the summer when I

can, but, yeah, I've not been home since Christmas 2019 now, and yeah I think— As the years have gone, I do quite, I do miss it. I'd like to go home at some point if I think if I if I can find— figure out a way of doing that, I don't think I want to go home until I'm, like, maybe properly— more properly established in, like, in my career so that I can because I feel like I think my problem— not problem, I guess, but, hmmm. I suppose with Ireland it is very small. The industry as well is or, you know, like, it is still relatively small, it's that, like, it can be, I think, a bit incestuous and a little bit more — People let their— They're it's, it happens in the UK industry as well, because, like, the film industry is very much on an unofficial sort of word of mouth. You work for people because they like you and they remembered you and they're like, 'oh, I like working with so-and-so, I'll get them on this.' And there's so much less official applying for jobs. I think, you know, that's slightly easier in the UK because it's so much bigger. And even within London, you'll have different circles and networks, whereas I think in Ireland those networks are much smaller. And so, it's yeah, if there's any grudges and they're like, 'oh, you've worked for so-and-so,' then they'll be like, 'oh, well, I'm not, you know—' So in that sense, I think it was— That's something I always found hard about Ireland that, like, if you don't fit in, it's very hard to make a break of it and get— Get higher and, like, if you're not in with whoever it is at the next level, then you're just not going to be able to step up. So, I think people end up stuck on lower, lower rungs for a long— a longer time. But I think, you know— I hope, I think things are changing now, like, I know there's more studios that have been built in the time that, like, since I've been, since I've been away and that are being built. I know there's a new one that's being built near to where my parents are. I mean, quite a lot of the filming is concentrated in and around where— near where my parents are anyway, because there's, like, Ardmore Studios is in Bray, which is quite close to us. And then there's some other studios down in Arklow where they did *The Vikings*. So, they're there. And then I think they're building some more in, in Greystones now as well. But there's also a few that have opened up in the west of Ireland as well. So, I think with, like, this growth of, like, all of these streaming platforms and there's just so much content needed and being made. And in order to facilitate that, I think maybe, hopefully things will sort of open up a bit more that—

Ruth Beecher [02:01:39] *So that be your aim then to maybe be able to base yourself in Ireland again in the future and work from Ireland?*

Stephanie Blythman Yeah, yeah. I think, I'd like that, like, I have— It's — It is a thing, like, I think especially if I ever got round to wanting to settle down and have a family, I think I'd prefer to have raise— raised children in Ireland even just to be closer to my parents. But, yeah, I don't think I'd necessarily want to raise a family over in London. For me, I think I'd like— I'd like to move home at some point if I can, yeah. Work out how that works, not, like— it's not any time soon or necessarily or in the next few years. But I think ultimately it would be nice to go home.

Ruth Beecher *Well, I want to thank you for two fabulous hours of talking. It's been brilliant. It goes quickly, doesn't it?*

Stephanie Blythman Yes, it does.