**ÚnaGanAGúna**

**Interview Summary Sheet** **Title Page**

**Ref No: 0UNA-U1X0016**

**Collection Title:**
ÚnaGanAGúna Phase 1

**Interviewee's Surname**
Dunwoody

**Interviewee's Title**
Mrs

**Interviewee's First Name(s)**
Heather

**Interviewee's Gender**
Female

**Occupation**
Retired - Office

**Interviewee's Date of Birth**
1936

**Mother's occupation**
Home maker

**Father's occupation**
Teacher

**Date(s) of recording:** 03/05/2022

**Location of interview:** Online.

**Name of interviewer:** Stephanie Blythman

**Type of recorder** Online.

**Total number of tracks**
1

**Recording format**
48 kHz, 32 bit

**Mono**

**Total duration (HH:MM:SS)** 28m 33s

**Additional material (e.g. photos, documents)**

**Copyright/ clearance**

**Interviewer's comments**
0UNA-U1X0007XX-0016M0.WAV / .MP3

***Stephanie Blythman*** *[00:00:0] So if you would like to introduce yourself to start.*

**Heather Dunwoody** [00:00:5] I'm Heather Dunwoody. I was born in Dublin, and I've lived in Dublin all my life. I was born in 1936— the twenty fifth of April 1936, so I was 86 last week. Where I was born— where I lived up to the age of 12 was a very small village outside Dublin—which is now a massive supermarket and shopping centre but in those days it was just fields with cows so it was a very—very rural area in those days. So when my dad was thethe teacher in the local national school which had a very small intake, maybe 40 pupils in all. He was extremely badly paid [laughs] and—we struggled financially! My parents sat down on whatever day of the month he got his pay, and they sat down together on that day and worked out where their money was going to go for the next month before the next pay came in. So anyway,we moved from there because he moved jobs— so we moved from there when I was 12, and we went to live quite near to where we had been living but it was much more— it was still rural but it has become, again, very urbanised. But it was still quite rural when we moved there and to such an extent that— I went to quite a prestigious girl's school but basically because I got a scholarship. And to get to school— there was no bus service I had to ride my bike to the nearest bus, which was maybe,a couple of miles away, anyways I had to ride my bike, get a bus into Dublin and,leave my bike at the bus stop where it was always waiting for me when I came back, not locked or anything else. So when dad was teaching,he taught in a school that there was a primary certificate and an intermediate certificate, and a leaving certificate I suppose. So he taught up to primary level and there would have been maybe lads of 14 going to school and that was the end of their schooling after that. But I went on as far as intermediate level, but there was no money for me to go any further. There was no free education or anything like that. SoI left school at 16 and,went on to do a secretarial course, as one did in those days. So, I'm not sure what you want to know after that.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *I suppose and yeah, so — you're 16, you've done your intermediate level and then you left and you're doing your secretarial course. How long was the secretarial course then?*

**Heather Dunwoody** Oh, was a year I think— it was the most boring thing I think I've ever done in my entire life! [laughs] It was dreadful! I just couldn't— I think I just couldn't

believe— because it just sort of been— school had been a bit of a challenge and this was just sitting in front of the typewriter thing on the wall going A-S-T-F-G-F-D-F-A.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Yeah.*

**Heather:** It was just terrible, really terrible! So anyway— but I did get a fairly decent job out of it, which gave me money of my own which was great. And that—I really appreciated having money of my own and eh—I mean the girl was um— the school was an all girls school so— boys were  but— and I had only one sibling, one sister, so we were very much an all— an all women household andno brothers or cousins even because my mother was an only child so we had no cousins on her side. And Dad's cousins all lived very— or Dad's siblings all lived very far away so we had very little to do with them. And so anyway, , I'm just trying to think— I went to work in an insurance company and again in those days— women were not allowed to progress through a career path of any kind, and I used to get very— frustrated by being told what to do by guys, [laughs], that as far as I was concerned were half-wits! But anyways, that was— it was an interesting time of life, but you know in that um— I think as Protestants growing up in what was predominantly a Roman Catholic Country. We were very ghettoised? We would sort of have been in a youth club or there were what we called 'hops' or socials every Saturday night but they would have been in a different church all around the area where we lived— and so we were very restricted— really our social life did revolve around these church activities.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *[05:09.52] Yeah.*

**Heather Dunwoody** Um, and I mean the 'ghettoisation' was because of this *ne temera* decree that was brought out by the Catholic Church that if you married a Catholic you had to bring your children up as Catholics. So that was hugely influential— with our social life and our parents were sort of quite determined to try and keep, [laughs], as many Protestants in the community as they possibly could! Um— so, we were very contained, very contained and ah and also— in the fifties in Ireland there was huge emigration?

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Yes.*

**Heather:** And— I mean there were stories about the entire engineering school from Trinity moving to Canada— I mean there was a story that they actually,hired their own plane to get themselves to Canada. Because there was just no, no future! No future for them in Ireland. So we were, that was it— a lot of the guys had left so we were— and then there was — as I said there was no no working through a career at all and I got married when I was 26 so that was the end. You, you were you were gone then— out of work basically to bring up children and stay at home. Because my sister— she worked in a bank and she actually did break the mould in that she became one of the first— she was the first woman bank manager in Ireland, so that was a huge step forward— and I don't know what else I can tell you about— I mean of course also, leaving out the emigration, there was huge censorship! I mean there's so many books and even *Woman's Own* I think was banned because it might possibly have told you about contraception or something like that or you know encouraged.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Giving you ideas.*

**Heather Dunwoody** [laughing] Yeah exactly! Yes yes! And I've em— I have always maintained that it was BBC television that broke us out of our, our little conformities. You know we suddenly saw people, 'My God they're getting into bed with one another and they're not married!' You know, 'What's happening here?' and I mean there was no— no sex education or anything like that. And I remember one person I knew who was engaged and she'd sent away to I think it was *Woman's Own* or something like that where you could get a leaflet about sex education. So she got the leaflet but she wouldn't share it with the rest of us because none of us were engaged or getting married so she wasn't wasn't going to let us read about it. [laughing] But I mean that you made— the number of books that were banned, films— you would go to a film and you'd say— you'd come out and say, 'What's that about?' because a huge lump had been cut out of the middle of it. So—

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Was, was that a thing then? That, you know, later on you'd go back and watch that film and suddenly realise that there was a whole chunk out of it?*

**Heather Dunwoody** Yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes, so, 'Now I know what it was about!' You know? Now I know. So— and I mean we were so— as I said dancing even was just very formal, foxtrots or— and then we had,rock and roll which was huge! Wow! [laughs] You know that was really a break out! We were just— it was the first sense of freedom I think

really, you know, that you could get up and you could dance in the aisles if you wanted to, yeah.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Just go for it. Yeah yeah, and so would you— would you have learned to dance in school then? Would that have been something you've taught in school or was it just something that you ended up learning by being— going to the dances with your friends?*

**Heather Dunwoody** I think you just sort of— yeah you just picked it up as you went. Some, some of the guys might have gone to dancing classes. But I certainly didn't but— you know we just— you just knew— with the rhythm I suppose you just knew what you— but, but it was very 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 you know that?

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Yes, yeah, and yeah, so did you, would you have kept in touch with the girls you'd gone to school with? Where would, have they been, you're ,when you were— after work— would you have been, , spending time with them, or were you more friends with the girls you were working with then?*

**Heather Dunwoody** [09:45:60] Well both really. I mean one— I'm still very close with one woman that I was in school with after all these years. But we but if we weren't so much friends I think in school aswe were both very keen Girl Guides and we progressed to what was Girl Rangers in those days, which was 18 upwards I suppose, and we would have gone holidays together with Guides and we we went to— we went to France and we— what would have been about 1956 I suppose we went to France— and worked for a couple of weeks only in um— it was a sanatorium for girls who had TB [tuberculosis] of the bone so we were supposed to entertain them. God help them I think we did Irish dancing, [laughs], or something for some— and took them for walks. So, you know Anne and I have, still are, still in touch. Wellyeah, and having money— having my own money was sort of— meant I could go on holiday and I did— I did go and, and again it was quite— you di— you couldn't afford to fly or there weren't that many flights anyway, so I remember going to Austria and you had to go from Dun Laoghaire to Holyhead to London, boat to France, train to Paris and another train— a night train to Austria— we did that a few times andanother time we went to Copenhagen which was equally— I think it took about two days to get to Copenhagen [laughs] and another two days coming back. But it was the um— the fifties and the sixties

were— well the sixties weren't so bad but the fifties were just miserable! They were just miserable.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Mmm.*

**Heather Dunwoody** Just— I remember having one holiday in the west of Ireland with a friend who worked in a factory so she was restricted to two weeks— the first two weeks in August— and the guys who would be— who would have left Ireland and gone to work in England would be coming back to the west of Ireland for those two weeks as well. And every station on the way back— I remember at every station there was a man with a suitcase, and the wife with— I don't know— three or four kids, on their way back to— to get— to earn money in England. It was just awful. It was just awful.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *That it was just— it was so widespread.*

**Heather Dunwoody** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. From all, all levels. They left. The men. Not so much the women but the men left— I think, I suppose the women did as well. Anyway, what else do you want to know about me? [laughs] What else have I got here? Ah, nothing much. Yeah?

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Um, I suppose what— what sort of, ah like you worked in— you worked in an insurance company like, was there— and you were saying that there wasn't really much room for progression, em, was there—*

**Heather Dunwoody** No.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *—any room for progression? Or like, in terms of running a secretarial pool or— or any of that? Was there, like, any sort of room for— for moving up? Like even within the — what you were doing? No?*

**Heather Dunwoody** Um, no yeah no. No no, no. I mean it was in the days when you took dictation and then you typed back what you were told to type back. So the only hierarchy would have been if you were allowed to go to the manager and do— be his, his typist or whatever, but the rest of us was just in a pool. But we had a good social life— sorry [clears

throat]— a good social life in the office, we had good fun. You know, and we did— yeah, and as I say having the having the money, having a few bob in your own pocket was- but I mean it was a case of living at home, there was no— you didn't move out of home. You still lived with your parents.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Yes, yeah, so you and your sister would have stayed, stayed at home then and with, with your parents. And then so you stayed— once you— you said you moved when you were about 12 or 13, so once you moved was that , you stayed, stayed there from then on? And then—I suppo— with the Girl Guides was that — did that give you some sort of, a freedom in terms of— you were able to go abroad with them and see a bit of the world?*

**Heather Dunwoody** [14:19.67] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, well you see the war only ended in 1945, so ten years later things were beginning to open up and I can remember that first visit to France. I mean I was so, so stupid and so naive. I thought, 'There's an awful lot of,ruined buildings here.' But it didn't cross my mind that they'd been bombed because we would have gone to probably Normandy which would have been a big— whatever. What is the word? Theatre of war. That's the right word.I did sort of think, 'Oh gosh, there's a lot of build— a lot of ruined things around here,' but it didn't cross my mind *why* they were ruined because, I mean, the war was something in Ireland that you weren't really aware of. I mean you knew there were, there was a war; there was no petrol for cars. Everybody saved bits of string because you couldn't get— because you couldn't buy things, but it didn't affect us, there was scarcities of things like flour— but we weren't having bombs and— because I remember some cousins coming to stay from England when I was about 8 I suppose, I remember these people came to stay, and this girl every time a plane went overhead she ran— and hit under a bed and I thought, yeah, 'What is wrong with her?' [laughing] So you know, um— but we weren't, as I say, apart from scarcities we weren't aware of any bombs or nasty business like that. There were a couple of bombs in Dublin all right. Um, but it was just I think— growing up it was the power of the Roman Catholic Church—that was the— we all had to conform to that and it was very much in your face, very much processions and when I was younger— in the first house— we had neighbours I think there were something like twelve children and with, to our two, and they were very much wanting to proselytise me and I wasn't allowed into their house unless I used the holy water going in the door and they would, I remember them forcing me to my knees in front of what I thought was a graven image! You know I thought I was going to be, [laughing], struck dead kneeling down in front of this thing. So

that was, that was the level of what was in your face the whole time. So we, we just, just kept a very low profile and mixed with your own.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Yeah. So you wouldn't— you wouldn't— you, you wouldn't really have had many Catholic friends then? You just sort of had your —*

**Heather Dunwoody** Well I mean yeah I did have Catholic friends and my parents had Catholic friends— and they, you know, people— it wasn't that we disliked Catholics, they just did not want— they just did not want their grandchildren brought up in the Catholic Church as opposed to the Protestant community. So that's why there was this sort of- it really was a ghetto. Very ghettoised.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *And then yeah.. and then um— what was I thinking?*

**Heather Dunwoody** [laughs] Never mind!

***Stephanie Blythman*** *[laughs] So I was— oh I was— yes but you mentionedthe Girl Guides, I think one of the one of the other groups that I would have been, I would be aware of would be Girl's Brigade was that— was that anything that you were ever involved in, or were you more um—*

**Heather:** No, no, they were—

***Stephanie Blythman —****Girl Guides?*

**Heather Dunwoody —**you were either one or the other, and then never the twain did meet! [laughs] You know they would. It was a, it was very different I think, it was much more military I think than Guides? Eh, from what I can remember, they did a lot of marching, and they had a band as well. That was the good thing, the Boys Brigade had a band! And— but I mean that, that they would have played in church rather than— these things are falling off my ears! [ed. note: interviewee referring to earphones] Yeah, but I did a lot of, I did a lot of theatre actually when I was first working, and I still do a lot of theatre— I mean not not on the stage or anything— but just— we'd have gone to the theatre a lot. And you could go to- we had a lot of shows that came from London in the fifties, early sixties. And you would

queue to get the cheap tickets and go to the gods where there— you know— there were no specific seats, everybody just crushed in together and— but we saw some great shows, some great theatre in those days. Um, and there was also a small theatre in Dun Laoghaire that did— they changed— the plays every two weeks— a repertory theatre, and they had some, with some great actors there that went on to— you know, I mean with Milo O'Shea who went to Hollywood, and Norman Rodway who went to BBC and, you know, they they went abroad from there because the the place had to close down because it was at the back of the— it was the back of the gas showroom and this fear that we couldn't get out if there was a gas explosion or something so the theatre actually did close, but it was brilliant! You know it did a lot of, a lot Tennessee Williams and things like that— so that was the outlet. That and cinema we would have gone every time to the local cinema, every time the programme changed we probably would have gone to the cinema. Yeah so I can't just— we were, I don't think we were very politically motivated— until I remember sort of— but we were very— a bit obsessed by the Iron Curtain and— that there was a Hungarian Revolution in 1956 that there were a lot of— a few Hungarians managed to escape and come to Ireland and we thought the curtain was coming down at that stage, we got very excited about that, and was sort of glued to all the news bulletins. But I don't remember being any way— there was always the horror of the IRA and what they were going to blow up next— but you — that actually became— was later. There wasn't much going on in the fifties and the sixties, more the seventies— because my youngest child was born in '71, and I can remember being on how— we didn't have television ourselves— and being on a holiday in a house that had television and being— seeing the riots in Derry with her as an infant— so I could sort of— but that was, that was later. That was, you know—

***Stephanie Blythman*** *[21:20:48] Yes, yes, and then, you know I suppose, in terms of— in terms of dating? Like, did— emm— like, how how did that? How did that work? What—what — like courting! Going out with— like would you have gone out— just been going out with your- your girlfriends? Or would you been going on, , dates as such?*

**Heather Dunwoody** No it— both, both. Yeah, we would've— yeah, there was a few boyfriends around you sort of saw for maybe a year and then got tired of them and [laughing] moved on to somebody else hopefully! But we did a lot—we did a lot with— again the youth clubs in in the church that was the main outlet, and a lot of people would have paired off—at that stage, you know, they would have— I mean a lot of that youth group that we were in did

marry one another. And, and most of them I think stayed married as well because again there was no divorce, and no contraception either! So— I thi—I can't remember what year divorce came in?

***Stephanie Blythman*** *I think it was in, 1997, was it? Sometime— it was— it was late enough I think wasn't it? [Editor's note: it was 1995].*

**Heather Dunwoody** Yeah! I think it was eighty something— in the eighties— yeah— And there was the— the Married Women's Property act as well, whatever that was. Yeah, you couldn't inherit! Marry— a woman couldn't necessarily inherit the family home or the family farm. And I think that changed in the eighties as well. I don't know when that changed. Um, no. Anywa,y I got married when I was 26 so— just about out of the timeframe for the 15 to 25 and— again I would have met him in that youth club. But [name redacted] had gone to America and worked there for a couple of years. So he was , exotic in a way, when he came back. He'd gone somewhere and had come back again![laughing] You know so, we're still together! Nearly sixty years now so—

***Stephanie Blythman*** *It obviously— it obviously worked out then! [laughs]*

**Heather Dunwoody** Well again, there was no divorce! So yeah! [both laughing] And I knew in my way— I mean my parents were alive— if I'd gone home to them, they'd have thrown me straight out again, [laughingly], just told me to go back! Go back to where I'd come from! I don't think they'd have care— unless I mean, I mean if if I'd been cruelly abused or treated violently I imagine they would have been happy enough to have me back, but not otherwise just get on with it basically was the message, and so— I don't know— that part of my life was actually quite a slow period, there wasn't— I mean later I would have gone on to march up and down O'Connell Street campaigning for contraception and divorce and joined the Women's Political Association and—

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Yes, yeah.. And was— it was a wrench? Because you, you obviously you had to leave your job when you got married; was that was that something that you found hard? Or—*

**Heather Dunwoody** I could have— yeah— I could have stayed on if I hadn't been pregnant, but once you were pregnant you were definitely gone. I found that very strange, yes, very strange. I really didn't know what to do with myself! You know?

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Yeah.*

**Heather Dunwoody** [24:52:32] And, having my first child was a big shock. I thought I would just pop out and I would go back to— being what I'd been before! Which I didn't, obviously! and so— yeah, it, it was just sort of— well once you— once you had a child that was it, I mean, I don't mean that was it. It was a twenty-four hour job seven days a week. But, and then I did go back when my youngest child was about, I don't know, I think she was 6 or 7 I did go back to work. But again only ever in a secretarial capacity. But I was always— I hated not having my own money, I think that was the holy all of it, it didn't matter whether it was a pittance I was getting, it was just— it was *mine*.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Yes.*

**Heather Dunwoody** I just remember that big shock of not having any money of my own and having to say, 'I need a new pair of tights,' or, 'I'd like some clothes,' you know that's— that was that was— I just hated that! So anyway, from then on once I sort of got my hands on— I kept— I worked up to retirement age then. Not for, not with any great career prospects or anything like that, but—I just wanted my own hands on my own money.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Yes, yeah. Just a little bit of freedom to not have to ask for everything.*

**Heather Dunwoody** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yes, yes. And as I've always said what's mine is mine. What's yours is mine but what's mine is my own! [laughing] I'm having my own bank account and I'm holding on to it! Yeah!

***Stephanie Blythman*** *[laughing] Yes!*

**Heather Dunwoody** Okay! So.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *Yes, well I think I should, unless there's anything else that you, you wanted to talk about? Or a little bit more or— I guess we're— perhaps— if it were— would all of your— would have any of your friends have gone on finished out school or anything? Or, em. Would that have been usual? Or would most of you have, , left around the same time you did?*

**Heather Dunwoody** Ah. Well some of, some of the girls that I was in class with— I mean it was a [audio unclear]— it was an all girls' school— I think I probably said that— and it was actually— I went because I got a scholarship— I think I said that— but it was a very— it was one of the first schools that would have sent women to university, but— there was no free education you see, so— certainly a few of the people I was in school with, in class with did go on to Trinity— it would have been Trinity rather than anywhere else— and became quite— well, one of them certainly became quite famous. I think it was just the— the frustration— frustration of *not* being able to go on with education that I found— With hindsight I think I was probably frustrated by— I would— I'm sorry you asked me something and I can't remember quite what you asked me about.

***Stephanie Blythman*** *[28:17:57] Um, no, it was more just out of interest, it had— you know would there have been many girls in your school who did finish it out or— you know and again, would you have liked to have finished out school which you've said—*

**Heather Dunwoody** [28:29:57] I think I would— I don't know

**End of recording.**

[Editor's note: recording cuts off here - there was about ten minutes more that seems not to have been recorded]