ÚnaGanAGúna

Interview Summary Sheet **Title Page**

Ref No: 0UNA-U1X0026

Collection Title:
ÚnaGanAGúna Phase 1

Interviewee's Surname
Byrne

Interviewee's Title
Dr

Interviewee's First Name(s)
Angela

Interviewee's Gender
Female

Occupation: Clinical Psychologist

Interviewee's Date of Birth: 1967

Mother's occupation: Worked in a flower shop.

Father's occupation: Market Gardner

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Date(s) of recording: 31.01.2025**.**

Location of interview: Online

Name of interviewer: Ruth Beecher

Type of recorder Zencastr

Total number of tracks
1

Recording format
48 kHz, 32 bit

Mono

Total duration (01:07:42)

Additional material (e.g. photos, documents)

5 photos – see photo consent

Participation and recording agreement in place and signed

Interviewer's comments

Ruth: Welcome, Angela. Today is Friday, the 31st of January 2025.

Angela: Thank you.

Ruth: My name is Ruth Beecher, and I'm a volunteer with Una Gan a Guna, the Irish Women's Oral History Collective. I'm so happy to be here today to talk to you and record your oral history for our archive. I wonder if you could introduce yourself, just tell us your name, the year of your birth, and then perhaps give us a little bit of your family background to start.

Angela: Yeah, so my name is Angela Byrne. Um, I was born in 1967. I come from Bray, County Wicklow, which is just near Dublin, a seaside town just outside of Dublin. Um, my family are all Bray people for generations back. So obviously, my dad was Byrne, my mum was a Lawless, and both sides of the family lived in Bray. Um, my dad was a market gardener, so he had a market garden where he grew tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce. And when we were kids, we used to… I've got one brother, he's older than me, two and a half years older. And when we were kids, we used to work in the nursery with my dad at, school holidays, weekends, evenings. Um, yeah.

Ruth: Fantastic, thank you. I actually got my first watch in Bray on a day trip to Bray.

Angela: Did you?

Ruth: Yeah, a Pimax black strap, white face. So I have lovely memories of being very young in Bray and getting my first watch. It was super exciting. And so that's a memory that comes back to me. And that's amazing that your dad was a market gardener. Was he serving like the restaurants or shops, or in terms of where his produce went?

Angela: Um, I think, yeah, well, to the markets in Dublin and, yeah, local shops and things. And actually, my uncles were— or my uncle was also in the business. And then, um, so there's a lot of gardening in the family, you know. Um, but I don't have very green fingers myself, but, um, yeah. So, yeah, yeah.

Ruth: And was your mum a homemaker or…?

Angela: So, um, well, they met actually, she was working in a flower shop that my uncle had, and she met my dad there, so my dad's brother. Um, and yeah, she worked also in the nursery, so it was a bit of a, um, family affair.

Ruth: Family affair. And what year did they marry?

Angela: In 1963, I think, or ’62. Um, how old am I? ‘67. So my brother was born in ’64. I remember... Ah, what year did JFK visit Ireland?

Ruth: Oh…

Angela: ’63. Was he killed in ’63?

Ruth: I…

Angela: It was around...

Ruth: Yeah.

Angela: The reason I’m saying that is because I always remember my mum talking about, um, when they were first married and where they were when they heard that JFK had been killed. And so, like, JFK was, um, revered in our household. And, and yeah, like, I think that early time of optimism, the early ’60s, and they had just got married, and I think things were a little bit better in Ireland economically, and it was before the Troubles. And, um, and obviously, I guess a lot of Irish people revered JFK, and then he visited Ireland, I think, the same year or the year before when he was killed. Um, but yeah, I always remember her talking about that.

Ruth: Were they political people or was it more that he was an Irish Catholic and he was a very charismatic person, or what was your feeling about that?

Angela: Kind of a bit of both. Um, they were political, not very party political.

[00:05:01.16]

Angela: Um, although they were, so my grandparents had been on opposite sides of the Civil War. So my granddad Lawless was in the Free State army, and my, the other side were Sinn Féin. Um, and, my dad used to tease my mum about that and stuff. So it was like light-hearted banter. And yeah, I think my dad always voted Fianna Fáil, but my mum would cross party lines to vote for a woman. She was quite [indecipherable] like that.

Ruth: Ah.

Angela: Um, and they were like, they were people who were really intensely interested in current affairs and kind of politics and stuff. Um, both of them, left like my dad left school when he was 11, my mum when she was 14. And, and, but they were, so in terms of formal education, they didn’t have those opportunities, but they were avid newspaper readers, news

watchers, they passed that on to me, I'm a bit of an obsessive news watcher as well. And we used to always be talking about stuff like that in the house. So, yeah, I think that obviously with the JFK thing, there was the whole, he was, ah, dashing and handsome and Irish Catholic. kind of background. But, um, yeah, I think they were interested in American politics too. Yeah.

Ruth: Oh, that's so fascinating. And one more question, just one more factual question. What—were they young when they got married, or...?

Angela: No, my dad was 10 years older than my mum. Um, so... I don't, yeah, no, so he was kind of older, I guess, getting married, and she was, I guess, in her twenties.

Ruth: And so I guess moving on to you...

Angela: Yeah. Yeah.

Ruth: And taking you into the teenage years, perhaps we can always go back if there are things that you want to go back and talk about. But can you describe what a day would have been like when you were about sort of mid-teens, around the age of 15?

Angela; Hmm. Yeah, so I went to school in Bray, ah, quite near my house, Loreto Convent. Um, and I hated it. Um, but I had some really good friends. And so I had a very kind of best friend, and we're still friends today. And so we met on the very first day of school when I was three years old. So we've been friends for 54 years.

Ruth: Wow.

Angela: And we're still in almost daily contact. Um, she's still in Ireland. Um, so yeah, at school, um, so a typical day would be kind of walking to school, having a laugh with my mates. Um...

Ruth: What sort of a house did you walk out of?

Angela: Um, so the house is like a bit of a ramshackle little house that had, it had been, I think, back in the day, um, like a cottage, like a, probably like a labourer's cottage on a, but by the time we were living there, it was on the main road. Um, and with a lot of other houses and stuff around it. And it had bits built on the back, and so it was a bit kind of ramshackle. But it had a big and lovely garden that my granddad and my dad made. So yeah, so I would just walk to school. Um, and yeah, just I was really into, um, like pop culture, as I guess a lot

of, kids in those days were, we're obsessed with Top of the Pops and stuff like that. I was into all the kind of youth culture things.

Ruth: So this is like 1982, is it?

Angela: Yeah. Yeah.

Ruth: About 1982?

Angela: Yeah. Yeah. 82, 83, that kind of time. So, I had The Jam written on my school bag and, I was into, sort of post-punk and ska, reggae, mod music, uh, and you name it.

[00:10:02.11]

And, yeah, we were really, all of us friends were kind of, uh, really into music.

Ruth: Mm.

Angela: So a lot of our sort of discussions would have been about that. Um, yeah, it was around then that I kind of had my first real political experiences as well. Um, because that was the year that the Eighth Amendment was voted into the Constitution about abortion. And I can remember being really enraged at that time because in my household there was, like, me and my brother, and he was now 18 so he could vote. I was 15, and I couldn't vote. So everyone else in the household could vote on something that was only ever gonna affect me. Um, and I can just remember being so angry about that and I never lost that. And then at school, Um...

Ruth: So just for the historical record, that was about the rights of the unborn child, right?

Angela: Yes, so the Eighth Amendment kind of, um, gave the unborn child and the mother the same status and it effectively outlawed abortion. In the Republic. So, um, yeah. And when I was at school, the nuns, there was just this assumption that you would support that. And they tried to get us all to buy these badges that were put out by SPUC, the Society for Protection of the Unborn Child. And they were like little feet. It was supposed to represent feet of a foetus. Um, and I refused. I took a stance and said, no, I'm not gonna do that because I was against what was happening. So, um, yeah. That was, I remember, like, it was a very intensely political time. And then, only a few months after that, Anne Lovett died. Giving birth to a baby in a grotto. She was a schoolgirl. She was our age, same age as us. And I think that had a huge impact on all girls, my age and my generation. she, um, she concealed her pregnancy, apparently. And this, this was in the Midlands, and she went and, uh, gave birth at

her lunch break from school. And she died and the baby died and, um, so obviously those things, at that time we were just, being teenagers, and thinking about sex and relationships and things like that, it was very, um, very, very difficult and traumatizing all that stuff, I think. Yeah.

Ruth: I can imagine. Was it like, did it affect your thinking about boyfriends and sex and contraception? Like how did it play out in your personal life?

Angela: Yeah, well, I was really lucky because living in close proximity to Dublin, um, we were able to get contraception. So there were these, um, like, Well Woman Centre, I can't remember the name of the other one. I think it was the other one I went to. But anyway, you could go, they were like, Um, sort of centres where you could go and get contraception, basically. And, they didn't ask if you were married or whatever. And I'm sure we were under 18, but me and my friends, went and got on the pill and we were like, well, hey, nothing can stop us now. But then that was also the era of the AIDS crisis. So, the idea that sex could kill you had quite a— it had different dimensions there.

Ruth: Did it permeate your consciousness or—? Or in terms of... I think I had the same journey as you, except my mother took me to the family planning clinic in Tucky Street in Cork, and we pretended I was eighteen to get the pill.

Angela: Right. Right.

Ruth: And I thought then that was fine. And even though I read a lot in the news about HIV and AIDS, I had no sense that had anything to do with me.

Angela: Yeah, it's interesting. I mean I remember myself and a boyfriend, this would have been later when I was at university. So kind of, I don't know, maybe ‘85, ‘86, time, we tried to get an HIV test, and they wouldn't give it to us.

[00:15:13.12]

Angela: They basically said, "Oh, it'll affect, you know— if you even have the test, it'll affect you getting insurance and getting this and that and travel and whatever." And so we, we never took the test. We were trying to be responsible young people, you know. But yeah, so did it permeate my consciousness? Kind of yes and kind of no. I think like teenagers everywhere, you get caught up in the passion of young love and stuff like that. But yeah, I think because of all the, horrendous kind of misogyny that was around in the, politics of the time and the media and there was the Kerry babies case, there was all those kinds of things

were going on around that time. So on the one hand, we were probably having similar teenage years to, uh, people here, say, and in, I'm in, England now, in London. Um, but in other ways, it was very different because the things we had to face as Irish girls and, I can remember during the Eighth, debates on the radio and, men talking about, women's sexuality and saying that, the womb was the most dangerous place for a baby and things like that. And that's, that was the constant thrum, thrum in the background,

So, well, um, but yeah, I mean, I wouldn't say that it stopped me from doing what I wanted to do, you know. Um, yeah.

Ruth: Um, but when you were at school, and between, I guess, were you there from 15 to 18? Like, if we're starting at 15, did you stay until you were 18 and do your Leaving Cert?

Angela: I did do my Leaving Cert, but I left at 16.

Ruth: Because that was the age you were, yeah.

Angela: Oh, that was the age I was, yeah.

Ruth: Yeah. And so those last few years, uh, of school, were you like, going out to see bands, were you in relationships, having romance, having sex, was that part of your school life?

Angela: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, the bands, especially, we were like, and obsessed with, and getting to see any, any bands we could live.

Ruth: And tell us about that, did you? Did you go into Dublin to see bands with your parents' consent?

Angela: Yeah.

Ruth: And

Angela: Not always, no. Uh, no, I mean, we used to, I remember seeing some bands in Bray, I remember seeing The Blades playing in Bray in a hotel on the seafront. But yeah, mostly we would go into Dublin.

Ruth: On the bus, or...?

Angela: Yeah, on the bus, the DART hadn't started then. Um, when the DART started— oh no, the DART started around that time because when I was going to university, I used to get the DART, yeah. But we would go on the bus, or on the DART and go, yeah, to places like McGonagle's and the SFX Centre.

Angela: I remember going to see— around that time, going to see Echo and the Bunnymen— Me and my friend were really into them and we'd hairspray our hair up really high and it was the most exciting gig ever, like you could hardly breathe for hairspray in the SFX.

Angela: You know, things like that. I remember going to see Bob Dylan in Slane—my friend—

[00:20:17.63]

Angela: Um— I did tell the parents about that. [Laughs]. They dropped us down there, and then her parents picked us back up—or the other way around. That was very, very exciting. And, yeah, so that was the thing... yeah

Ruth: And what was— so, you know, like going out in Dublin or going to these big gigs? Was it— was there any sense of danger? Or was it just fun with a big group of young people or—?

Angela: I mean it's interesting because recently I was remembering like those days and I had to check myself and ask my friend, "Did we really go hitchhiking all over the place?" And we did! Like, I find it almost—like, I can remember it but I find it almost unbelievable that we did that because of course there was no mobile phones —

Ruth: Where would you hitchhike? Into the country for—?Or on day trips? Or did you— Not into Dublin, presumably?

Angela: All over the place sometimes. You know, depending on where we were. One of our friends – so there were three of us who were very close when we were teenagers and one of them lived up kind of Wicklow way, so there was no public transport kind of, it was very hard to get public transport up there. So yeah me and her would hitchhike. And, sometimes we did have some quite close scrapes, like get into cars with groups of lads.

Ruth: What's a close scrape?

Angela: One that really sticks in my mind was_We got into a car one night going up to hers and I think we'd been out and probably weren't honest about where we were going or what we were doing but anyway we got in…We were hitchhiking and it was raining—and a group of lads, like maybe three lads picked us up in a car. I think I was sitting in the front, she was sitting in the back. And one of the guys started trying to grope her and stuff like that so she was like fighting him off and we were kind of causing hassle for them, stopping them from,

or trying to stop them from doing what they wanted to do. So they threw us out of the car and we had to walk for miles in the rain to go to her house, way up in kind of Sally Gap.

Ruth: Did you find it very frightening or did you try and laugh it off? What was your response?

Angela: Yeah, I think we tried to laugh it off. It was kind of— It's more in retrospect that I think it was really frightening. I think we had the bravado of youth, you know. And I think we probably were saying to each other 'ah, what a bunch of wankers' you know. But yeah it wasn't great. But yeah so we used to do things like that.

Ruth: Did your parents give you warnings about hitchhiking?

Angela: I can't remember. I can't remember if they did. If they did, they probably would have said "only go, get a lift from someone you know"—Not that that would have meant anything, people you know could be just as bad or even more— . But yeah, I suppose another thing that was…underage drinking was a thing.

Ruth: Yeah.

Angela: So we used to go to the pubs in Dublin where we knew underage drinking was...

Ruth: And what pubs were they?

Angela: So, Bartley Dunne's... That was a place where there was always a lot of very young people. That was where the Goths used to go as well — and we had our Goth phase as well. So, yeah, I don't remember it ever being that much of a challenge to go to pubs and things like that.. I don't really remember really being scared of things like that, but partly it's just not being aware of the dangers as much. I'd be much more scared now. And partly just I was with my friends and we were having a laugh—that was the main thing. Yeah.

Ruth: So was it all about girl friends or was there romance around at that time?

Angela: I mean, not very serious until I started uni. More like fumbling with boys at parties, and things like that. And, we—

Ruth: How big a deal was that in your— Like was it very important to you, like, romance or—? Were you really keen to have that or was it something or was it Something that didn't figure a lot in your life at that point?

Angela: Ehm— I think it did figure, yeah, for sure. I mean it wasn't only— We had boy-friends as well who were, you know, pals that we used to hang around with too like my friend's brother was in a band, and we used to hang around with them and their friends. But that was all kind of platonic really.

[00:25:23.27]

Ruth: Okay.

Angela: But— I think— it's very hard to remember really. I mean definitely having sex and having boys around was exciting and stuff like that but I can't remember being very like 'oh I want to fall in love, I want to have a boyfriend to 'go steady' kind of thing. But then of course I did, you know, when I was at university I had my first big love—and that lasted for a few years. It was very kind of impactful. We did a lot together, we travelled a lot and things like that so, yeah.

Ruth: So before you get to university, tell me about like what interested you—did you—

When you were at school and thinking about going to uni, were you a reader? Were you into— What was your plan for life? Did you have one?

Angela: Yeah, I didn't have a plan for life. No, I didn't. Um, I was a big reader, yeah—that was our other obsession, me and my friends. Yeah, we were all hugely big into reading. Reading novels, reading other stuff as well. And yeah, the things I liked at school were like English, history, languages. I remember, we had—in retrospect now, we didn't like him at the time—I think our English teacher. But he was very progressive in many ways. And he also taught us media studies, which I really liked as well. Um, but yeah—

Ruth: How was he progressive?

Angela Byrne: Ah, I remember something really— well, he was progressive in that I think he set up the first media studies course, that was one thing. But I remember going into his class for the first time— so this would have been probably around about twelve—and he said, "I'm going to assume that you could all go to university, and so the way I'm going to teach is like lecturing, like in university, and you're going to learn how to take notes and stuff." And I remember this being quite a kind of revolutionary idea for me. I thought, wow— university. And so yeah, so I did want to go and I, you know, was the first person in my family to go. But the school— although it was very mixed, people from all kinds of backgrounds—it was still very kind of class-ridden. And I think there was this idea that if you were from a certain

kind of background, that you wouldn't go to university. So even though— and the school was streamed, like, you were streamed according to ability—and even though I was in the top stream, I remember them saying to my mum once, "Oh, Angela's very bright, so she should do a nice secretarial course."

Ruth: And is that because your family were gardeners?

Angela: Yeah, yeah. Exactly, exactly.

Angela: And, my mum had to fight for me. She had to come up to the school sometimes and fight for me to do like honours subjects, even though I was capable to do it. And what happened was my friend—like, my really close close friend—some members of her family had gone to university. And so when it was career guidance, like, they helped, talk to her about university, and not to me. But um, she helped me with the forms and stuff and I applied. And yeah, what I applied to do was psychology and sociology. Um, and I think I had become really interested in that because a lot of people in my family were affected by mental illness. And so there was a lot of that around growing up. And I think in my teens I sort of became very interested in trying to understand that—understand what was going on. And yeah, so I got into Trinity to do psychology, sociology.

Ruth: Interesting, because your subjects were all arts and not sciences, weren't they?

[00:30:31.89]

Angela: Well, the things I was really into, yeah. But I did—for my Leaving Cert, I did like biology, chemistry as well. And obviously you had to do Irish, English, maths. Yeah.

Ruth: So where did you go to do your psychology and sociology?

Angela: Trinity College.

Ruth: And how did you find Trinity when you got there?

Angela: Yeah, I mean, it was—ah yeah, it was great. I mean, literally the first thing I think that happened—me and my friend went together. Ah, she was studying science—so botany, yeah. She was studying botany. And um, we went on the first day and they have this thing that's all like stalls along—like, Freshers' Week stalls. And we immediately hit on the women's group.

Ruth: Mm-hmm.

Angela: Like the feminist society. I was already very much into feminism, and I was reading feminist books and stuff like that. Um, and we just hit it off with them straight away and like, the next day we were sitting on the stall, you know. And we kind of got very much into the political life of Trinity.

Ruth: Mm.

Angela: It was a very—I mean, it's a very strange place. on the one hand, it had that vibes of like Oxbridge and some extremely posh people were there. And, ah, so all of that was very alien. But I wasn't part of that crowd. And yeah, I had a great time there. most of my memories of there are not so much of the studies—a bit of the studies—but mainly, partying and politicking.

Ruth: When you said you were already reading feminist books and things like that, what sort of stuff were you reading? Was it like British feminists, Americans, socialist feminists, radical? What was the...

Angela: Yeah, so—well, kind of all of the above. I think the first thing I probably read was um—ah—Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch. I think one of my friends, her mum had it, and we passed it around.

Ruth: This—

Angela: So yeah. And then I can remember a book that I loved that I bought for myself by Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell. I think they're socialist feminists from here, I think. And it was called Sweet Freedom. But then when I got to Trinity, um, I learned a lot from the women in the women's group who—I was still very young then. So a lot of the women I was meeting there were, quite a bit older. And they really taught me so much about feminism—both in theory and in practice.

Ruth: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Angela: And um, they were very much into what's now called radical feminism, but we just called it feminism, you know—Andrea Dworkin, Mary Daly, those kind of writers.

Ruth: Mm-hmm. Mmm.

Angela: And then we were—obviously there was a lot of kind of activism going on in those days too. And a lot of kind of connection between different political

movements. So, we were all in anti-apartheid and Nicaragua solidarity, Cuba solidarity, and, you know—

Ruth: CND?

Angela: Yeah, all of those. All of those. It was the days of the Dunnes Stores strike, which was anti-apartheid solidarity.

Ruth: Oh yeah.

Angela: And ah, we used to go and—I had quite a light load of lectures, so I'd go and be on the picket line there and things like that.

Ruth: Mm-hmm.

[00:35:57.17]

Angela: Yeah, so.

Ruth: And was your partner at the time involved in all these politics as well?

Angela: Not really, no, no. I mean, he was sympathetic, you know. Um, but I—I don't remember him really coming on sort of marches and demos.

Ruth: So that was different parts of your life.

Angela: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah, different parts of my life, yeah.

Ruth: And how did the activism and the partying and the sort of studying sit alongside each other? And how were you finding the subjects you'd chosen?

Angela: Yeah, well—yeah, incredibly. Um, they seemed to suit me really well. And when—so, the way they did it there, for the first year when you did sociology, you also had to do politics. So I did psychology, sociology, politics. And I got firsts across the board for my first year. And, so I really felt like — even though there were things that happened at Trinity that made me feel like I don't belong here — Like I remember this guy one time saying to my boyfriend, "Oh, you go out with that scumbag, Angela." And I think he meant, like, he saw me as a low-class person, but—

Ruth: Ah.

Angela: Yeah, but I was doing really well academically. And, so that gave me that, kind of confidence and um, yeah.

Ruth: Boosted your confidence. It sounded like you were quite confident as a teen at school as well though, with your mates and...

Angela: Yeah. Yeah, it probably sounds like that—but I wasn't really.

Ruth: Ah.

Angela: I was quite shy. Um, with my mates I was confident, but in—like in class, in school, I wasn't at all. And um—

Ruth: So that early success at Trinity gave you a boost then.

Angela: Yeah, definitely. Yeah. I mean, I wasn't one of the, like, popular girls at school, you know. We were—I think we were cool, but we were sort of nerdy cool, you know. Um, whereas, there were obviously big cliques of very popular girls and we—we

weren't that.

Ruth: Yeah. Yeah.

Angela: So yeah, so I think I actually fit in much better in university than I did in school. Um, because there were loads of other misfits around.

Ruth: Yeah.

Angela: Um, so yeah, but then I, like, one of the things that we, uh, this is probably jumping ahead, but one of the things that all the students used to do in those days was, go abroad for the summers to work, to get money for… And the first summer that I went to work, it was here in London. And, um, there was so much anti-Irishness there and…

Ruth: And what year was that? Do you remember, Angela?

Angela: Yeah, that must have been '86, I think, maybe '86.

Ruth: So tell us about that. How did that manifest itself?

Angela: So I was working in a shop, and what was really interesting,

Ruth: In central London?

Angela: Central London, yeah, um, like a kind of souvenir shop. And there was another girl who was about the same age as me, um, a Sikh girl, British-born, and she was also a student.

Um, um, the manager of the shop used to call me Paddy and used to call her a racial slur as well, which I don't really want to repeat, but I'm sure you can imagine what it was.

Ruth: Yeah, yeah.

Angela: And so she'd always say, "Oh, I'm here with, you know," and say those two things. And, the kind of thick Paddy thing, people mocking our accents. my friend came with me as well. So we spent the summer with other Irish students as well.

[00:40:58.12]

And yeah, people would always be like up in your face, mocking your accent, telling Irish jokes, like you're thick, you're stupid, all of that. And so obviously, my firsts at Trinity College was punctured a bit by that.

Ruth: Were you shocked by it?

Angela: Not really, to be honest with you, because I'd been here before, and I remember coming the first time I ever came was with my, my mum and dad when I was about 12, and, um, yeah, and we, we experienced that as well. Um, I remember my, like, my dad, um, going through the scanner thing at the airport. It beeped because of his glasses case, I think, and these like armed security nearly, like, jumped on him, you know? I guess thinking this is an Irishman, he's a terrorist or something. But I do remember people being kind of, yeah, mocking the way we spoke and stuff like that. Yeah, so it wasn't a huge shock, but yeah, yeah, yes. Yeah, I mean even like…

Ruth: I suppose there were still IRA activities, wasn't there? It was the tail end of it, like the Brighton bombing was '84, wasn't it?

Angela: Even after I'd moved here, it was still going on. It was, it didn't really stop till '98, wasn't it, with the Good Friday Agreement? So even like the early '90s when I was here, that was all going on. There was the bomb in Bishopsgate and, various other things. So yeah, there was all that kind of anti-Irish hostility and stuff.

Ruth: So do you feel it was around still in the '90s in London?

Angela: Yeah.

Ruth: That's interesting, because I'm the same sort of time span as you coming to London.

Angela: Yeah.

Ruth: But I, I felt I was more… I felt I came in '89, but I, and I worked in a very right-wing sort of British armed forces charity.

Angela: Um, but…

Ruth: I felt that we were at the tail end of it somehow. So there were, there were the odd things, definitely, but it wasn't a constant for me.

Angela: No, it wasn't constant. Yeah, it wasn't constant. And I think I had kind of strategized around it, because I think when I first came here, I realized that, um, like even that summer, actually, when we came, we sort of made friends with other foreigners, or, people of migrant backgrounds. So I think I tended to gravitate more towards people like that for my friendship groups. So, and even things like, I noticed, sometimes in shops, like English people would mock your accent, but Asian people didn't. So I would kind of go to the Asian shops rather, so yeah. So it wasn't constant, but, uh, it was there. It was always there, kind of, and, and I did know some people who had some pretty horrible experiences. Yeah.

Ruth: In terms of what being…

Angela: Um, so I knew a girl who was, um, someone heard her speaking. She was in a pub, and a guy came up and threw a pint of beer in her face and called her a murdering IRA bitch. I knew a group of Irish lads who got attacked. They were coming back from watching football in a pub, and they got jumped, you know.

Angela: Um, yeah, and then, yeah, I suppose those things like, when you'd go through the airports and they pull out the Prevention of Terrorism Act to fill out all those…

Ruth: Forms, yeah

Angela:..it was intimidating.

Ruth: Ah, when, when you came for that summer in '86, where did you live?

Angela: But yeah, that, um, sort of Willesden Green area .

Ruth: The Irish area.

Angela: It was an Irish area, yeah. I can't remember how we ended up in that flat, but we had, there was an Irish landlord, and he was letting out the flat, and a load of us were living there. Um, yeah.

Ruth: So you went back to Dublin and to Trinity, and what— what were you thinking then in terms of the future and your plans or—?

Angela: Well, yeah, I guess another really significant thing that happened that year, because I always remember, because I was over here, was the divorce referendum that was defeated. So I think that was actually the first time I was able to vote. And because I

[00:46:10.68]

was in full-on activist mode, I was canvassing, campaigning for divorce. Um, and people voted against it, and that was really hard. Like, it was hard being here because, of course, all the English people were mocking us like we're backward, and priest-ridden and all that. Um, but it was kind of heartbreaking, like, um... I started to think about leaving Ireland then, I suppose. Um, I loved London, like having said that, ah, obviously there was this kind of anti-Irish thing, but at the same time I loved London, and I really loved being here. I think you're on mute. So...

Ruth: Like, what, what were the things that, like, excited you about London or that you loved?

Angela: Yeah, I loved the, um, the multiculturalism of it, because of course, yeah, Ireland in those days was very monocultural. I loved the size of it, just the energy. And of course, that summer, all we did was go and see bands and, stuff like that. So, yeah, I, uh, started, I probably started thinking about it then, um, but I went back. Um, yeah, I think it was also like the late '80s was economically a really bad time in Ireland. Everyone was getting ready to leave. Like, I read somewhere that we were called the lost generation, and like, most of my, not was it most, many of my friends, I would say, went to America, came here, went to Australia, or wherever. Lots of different places, people were leaving. Everyone, it was kind of a normal thing, you know? You grew up and then you left. But I also kind of left with a broken heart. Like, broken heart, in terms of relationships, yeah, for... yeah, that. But also in terms of Ireland, I think, because when we were always on the losing side, all those kinds of things that we thought were progressive, and got defeated. And I think there's something about... there's something kind of heartbreaking about your own people voting in that way. Like, in my lifetime, I was only like 18 by then, but already my... Fellow Irish people had voted to restrict my right to divorce, to, to abortion, to like, as a, as a woman, as a girl, you

felt things closing in on you. And like, I remember when, um, that, then there was that whole thing about even providing information about abortion.

Angela: …was criminalized, but we, that's what we were doing at Trinity a lot. You know? And we had to do some kind of quite guerrilla tactics and, go around stickering toilet doors and that kind of thing.

Ruth: So you needed hope. You needed to move away for some hope.

Angela: Hope and escape, yeah, yeah.

Ruth: I mean, on the practical side, would you have got a job in psychology if you'd stayed in Ireland then or—?

Angela: I don't know. I don't know. After I was over here for a few years, I did apply for a job back in Trinity, and I didn't get it. It was an academic job, I think research or something. Um, yeah. So I don't know really what that would have been like.

Ruth: So, so what year did you actually move?

Angela: So I didn't come straight here. Um.

Ruth: After uni.

Angela: Yeah, I went to Berlin. And one of the other places that I went actually twice was Copenhagen. Copenhagen was one of the places we went in the summer as students because they had a really high minimum wage there. And you could get a job as like a cleaner or a chambermaid or something, and earn quite a lot of money. So a lot of Irish students went there, and I met one of my best friends there. He was Irish as well. But, yeah, this Danish woman was renting out a shed in her backyard to Irish students, [both laugh] and he was living there, and we moved in, and yeah. And so when I left Trinity— when I graduated, I was 20 then. And I'd always had this fantasy about Berlin that was kind of part, sort of David Bowie and part—

Ruth: Oh, I was going to say Christiane F, was it? [Laughs]. Do you remember?

[00:51:13.00]

Angela: Oh my God, Christiane F. I have a Christiane F story. Do you have—

Ruth: Oh great, go on then. I'd love to hear that. But yes, so was it 'Low' or 'Heroes' was the Berlin album?

Angela: Both. Both. So basically when I was at school— this was actually around the time when I was fifteen, very eventful times— So in that early eighties, like, um, Dublin had a really big heroin problem. And we had a teacher for civics and religion— and—

Ruth: I don't think anybody in 2025 will know what civics even is. You'd better explain that.

Angela: Oh God, what was civics? It was all those things about being a citizen—kind of, how to vote, and, things like that. How to be a responsible person. Is that?

Ruth: Maybe it would be in PHSE now, maybe? I don't know, yeah.

Angela: Yeah, yeah, those kinds of things. Yes, exactly. PHSE, yeah, relationships and yeah, all that stuff.

Ruth: So your civics teacher—

Angela: Civics teacher—I think it was the civics teacher—um, had been to see Christiane F, and she thought that this—

Ruth: Ah—she wasn't a nun?

Angela: She wasn't a nun—no, no—but she was kind of nun-adjacent.

Ruth: That's great—but—

Angela: And I think her idea was that if we saw this terrible film, we'd be put off drugs for life.

Ruth: Oh—

Angela: So we all got—it was an 18s film—but we all got permission to go and see it at the local cinema. And, well, you don't need me to explain, but it was so romantic to me—this gritty, these beautiful young people running through the streets of Berlin with David Bowie singing Heroes—that I conceived the ambition then to live in Berlin and be a junkie. And em—yeah, I'm not even joking. I had this very romantic idea. It totally romanticised it for me. So it had the totally, um, wrong sort of result as far as she would've been concerned.

Ruth: Result!

Angela: So—

Ruth: I mean, it was sort of a bit like all the anti-heroin advertising, wasn't it? Because it was

all these very beautiful, emaciated young people looking really cool. So of course she wants to become a heroin addict straight away.

Angela: Of course, of course. And then, like, all these cool—like we used to read people like William Burroughs and—

Ruth: Oh yeah—

Angela: yeah, like those things—

Ruth: All—yeah— Hard-hitting, breathtaking wanderers, basically.

Angela: Yeah. Kerouac, all of that. ah So our heads were filled with that kind of romanticism.

Ruth: So did you go to Berlin and become a heroin addict?

Angela: And yeah, really, I did go to Berlin. I did not become a heroin addict though.

Which is probably just as well. I went to Berlin, and I was working like as a chambermaid and stuff.

Ruth: So is this ’88 or something now we’re at?

[00:56:19.01]

Angela: Yeah, ’88. So the wall was still there. And um—

Ruth: Did you have German?

Angela: And I had learned German at school, um, so I had a bit of German. And um, one of the kind of funny things was because, ah, when I was working as a chambermaid, I worked with a lot of Turkish women and apparently picked up German with a Turkish accent, which the Germans thought was quite funny. But yeah, so I had a bit of German, and if I’d stayed, I probably would have been fluent. Obviously. And then, if, I seem to have a sort of talent for missing major events, by a small, ah, margin, but I went back.

Ruth: Margin, but the coming down of the wall.

Angela: Yeah, I wasn’t there then. And, when I was there, like, the wall seemed so permanent, you know? It was hard to imagine it coming down. And of course, when it comes down — it was quite sudden. I was already here when that happened, and

Ruth: Ah... And, and what did it live up to, your romantic fantasies, Berlin?

Angela: Ye it did—it did exceed it. yeah, yeah, I absolutely loved it. I had the best time ever. And one of my big regrets is that I never had a camera when I was there. you were asking me about photos.

Ruth: Oh.

Angela: I really struggled to find many photos. I did find some, but I didn't have any.

Ruth: Oh

Angela: I have no photos from my time in Berlin. Um...

Ruth: And what, what was it, what, what was the magic of Berlin and why did you leave?

Angela: The magic was, so, West Berlin then, it was surrounded by East Germany. And I think the West wanted it to be fully populated at all times, like an example to the East. You know. And so people could go there if they didn't want to do their national service.

Ruth: Uh-huh.

Angela: You know? There were incentives for students to go there and stuff. And so it had a very vibrant, young culture. It was very like—if people squatted a building, they could keep that building

There was lots of that kind of scene—very DIY.

Ruth: Uh-huh.

Angela: There was a great intensity, great kind of culture, nightlife. Yeah, I mean, the wall itself, I think— Created a certain kind of—I don't know—just intensity, I think, because there was only, like, one road out. And, um...And then of course, going to the East, you could go to the East, like for a day. You could go. It was very interesting. It was kind of shocking as well.

Ruth: Hmm.

Angela: And, yeah, I really, really loved it. It felt like a very free place, but at the same time—like a cage, you know?

Ruth: Contained, or yeah.

Angela: Yeah. The thing that comes closest to what I really remember, in, like, visually and spirit, is that Wim Wenders film— Wings of Desire.

Ruth: Oh yeah, great film.

Angela: Yeah, I remember, yeah, great film. I remember going to see that when I was just on my way back from Berlin. I think I saw it here. And when I came out of the cinema, I expected to be back in Berlin, and I wasn't. I came back because of love. Yeah, so I'd gone there with my boyfriend, my big love.

[01:01:40.62]

Ruth: Oh, tell me more.

Angela: Um...

Ruth: Your university, big love.

Angela: Yes, yes, yeah. And he was the year behind me at university, so he had to come back to finish his degree, and, um...and then I stayed—I think I stayed on a bit, but I really missed him and then I...

Ruth: Ah.

Angela: I went back to Ireland, um, because of him, really, I think. But then we broke up, ah, soon after that. So, um, yeah. Then I started on my travels again, and I, I came, I went to Copenhagen again, um, for a few months, and then I came here, and I've been here ever since. Yeah.

Ruth: And did you come to... Did you come to an Irish friend, and live with an Irish friend, or how did you settle in London?

Angela: No, no, I came to study. Um, so, ah, well, I did, I had some really good friends who came at the same time. So my friend that I met in Copenhagen. And he, he was from Kilkenny, but, and he lived in Dublin. So we were friends again back in Dublin, but then we both came here around the same time.

Ruth: Mm hmm.

Angela: And another friend from Bray, she was here too.

Ruth: Mm hmm.

Ruth: What did you come and study?

Angela: Um, so, psychology as well, yeah.

Angela: And, and, yeah, so I knew a few Irish people here, and, but they were mainly people that I knew already before I came over.

Ruth: Mm hmm.

Angela: And, yeah, in those first few years, I bounced around from place to place. Um, so, ah, where I was studying was just outside of, um, London, so in Surrey. So I stayed there for a while, like a place in East London for a while and moved—just moved around, mostly around East London. Yeah.

Ruth: And did you, like, as a sort of early 20s person, did you seek out Irish culture or, ah, or Irish community, or were you happy to kind of leave that behind and saw yourself as a different generation?

Angela: Yeah. Yeah. Oh, yeah, totally. Like, I stayed well away from all of the Irish community stuff. I think I went to the Irish Women's Centre once or twice, the one in Stoke Newington, but I knew they were feminists, they were a different type. But I never went, I've only ever been to the, like, the Irish Centre—London Irish Centre—in about the last couple of years. We always stayed well away from those kind of things

Ruth: Because...

Angela: Because they represented, I think, that sort of conservative Ireland that we didn't want to be part of. Um, my friend who I was here with at that time, he was gay, and that—it was still, it was still illegal to be gay in, in Ireland. And yeah, so we...

Angela: Yeah, we just didn't want anything to do with anything that we thought might be connected to Catholicism, or, that conservative history. And, and yeah, we were much more interested in, in other cultures, and so, yeah...And in fact the... The thing that brought me back into having any connection with the Irish community—

Ruth: Hmm.

Angela: Um, I mean, I've always had one or two, like, Irish friends over the years. Those friends that I came with at the beginning, um, ah, one friend went back to Ireland and, and the other friend moved to the States, so he lives in New York now.

Ruth: Mm-hmm.

[01:06:47.37]

Angela: Um, but yeah, the thing that brought me back was, um, getting involved with the London Irish Abortion Rights Campaign, around repealing the Eighth Amendment. So it was just a chance meeting. I was at the Women of the World Festival. And just started talking to this Irish woman and she told me about it. I started going along then to their kind of meetings and stuff. This would have been about 2017, maybe 2018.

Ruth: Yeah, yeah, would have been. Yeah, it was repealed in 2018. Yeah.

Angela: Yeah. So it was just before that. And then with them, like, I think the first thing I ever did with them was march in the St. Patrick's Day Parade, which, like, the idea of me marching in the St. Patrick's Day Parade, I was like, never in a million years would I have thought I would do that. But we needed to, you know, obviously represent for abortion rights. And, it was an incredible experience, actually. We expected, I think, to get a lot more hostility than we did, and we got incredible support. It was very moving, actually. And so then, yeah, I think ah most of those women were a lot younger than me. I was one of the real oldsters. And, talking to young Irish women, I just thought they were amazing and fantastic, and I really loved them, and their energy and what they were doing. And so then I just got a lot more connected. And I think repealing the eighth was such a big thing in my life. when that happened, it really made me able to love Ireland again, in a way that I... Ah it was a kind of healing thing.

Ruth: That's so lovely. Yeah. And it was a sort of a circular journey from the 80s to the 30 years later, you're campaigning for the same thing, but having that feeling of success and change, positive change.

Angela: And... Yeah

Ruth: I suppose I'm interested in, ah I guess, The story you've told about sort of

avoiding the conservative Irish, men with beards drinking pints at the Irish centres kind of stereotype. What was your relationship to Ireland in in your 20s? Did you go back to see family? Did you have some sort of relationship? How often would you have gone back, for example?

Angela: Yeah, I did go back to see family. I started off, I think the first few years especially, was that very emigrant thing of always go back at Christmas. And then, that was still quite a wrench, sort of. And I can remember like the first few years being really quite hard because,

you know... You get this sort of you don't really belong here sort of feeling. But then you go back there, and people are saying, oh, you've lost your accent or

Ruth: Absolutely.

Angela: It's like, oh, you don't really belong here either. And, I think there's always tensions between the people who go and the people who stay and friends and resentments on both sides, kind of thing.

Ruth: Ah...

Angela: But also you miss them, and you love to see them. And, so yeah, and so I did go back, but not like all the time. I wasn't one of those people who's always going back and forth, but I did go back quite regularly. Well probably like at least once a year, maybe twice a year. And then my mom would often come over to visit me as well. Um, both my parents died when I was in my 30s.

Ruth: Oh, okay.

Angela: Um...

Ruth: So that was quite, you were quite young when that happened.

Angela: Yeah, so I don't have the same pull to go back now. So for many years, like, I hardly went back at all.

[01:12:29.54]

Ruth: Mm hmm.

Angela: I mean, I do still have some really good friends there. And, I keep saying to myself, now I'm going to spend more time there. And a couple of years ago, I did a really lovely thing which I had never really done as an adult which was to kind of have a holiday in Ireland that wasn't about going to see family. My friends went to Kerry and like I'd been to Kerry when I was a very small child I think but I never, had no memory of it really but um, yeah, we went, and we did a road trip. And spent time in Kerry, it was so beautiful and I really loved it and thinking, oh yeah, I would really love to spend more time in in Ireland, especially in places that I'm um not you know from, that I don't have a history with. Um, yeah.

Ruth: But Where is home?

Angela: Um...

Angela: I don't know really. I...

Ruth; But maybe it's in the middle of the Irish Sea then.

Angela: Yeah, I don't know. I mean, I think London is home, but not England. I don't know if that makes sense.

Ruth: Makes total sense, yeah.

Angela: I think that what makes me say London is home is because one of the things I love about London is it's full of people from other places who really understand that, like, you know...

Ruth; Okay.

Angela: For quite a few years I worked in an organization that was for a Kurdish and Turkish Community and I was the only non-Kurdish, non-Turkish person but everyone there really understood you know we all had the same relationship to our home countries in a way you know like you really can understand that emigrant experience that you know and being sort of betwixt and between. And that's why I love London. um, but if... I would never leave London and live somewhere else in England, I think if I was going to do that, I think I'd rather go back to Ireland than you know do that. It would... just would seem a bit weird to me. You know...

Ruth: Yeah, London is a different country, isn't it?

Angela: Yeah, it is. Yeah.

Ruth: which is what people criticise it for, but also its greatest strength, I guess. Especially for people who are not from here, which is most people it seems.

Angela: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Um, and, and the way people criticize London, and like, when they say ‘Londonistan’, and, stuff like that, I think, yeah, I like that about London. I live in Tower Hamlets, and you know I love the borough, the community here. And I really, yeah, it really gets on my nerves, the stupid racist things people say about it.

Ruth: And what about Bray? Have you been back to Bray in recent decades?

Angela: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, because I still have loads of people like family back there you know aunties and uncles and cousins and um, yeah, Bray it's in some way kind of yes and kind of no.

Ruth: Has it changed?

Angela; Um, in many ways it feels more run down than it was, than it used to be. I think that like the main street is full of sort of two euro shops and things like that, whereas you know I can remember it being more, having more interesting stuff. Um, yeah, can you remember the shop?

Ruth: Well, it was a place where you would get your first watch on the pier. It was like a day trip destination, wasn't it? So no, I feel like it was a little sort of a, like a sort of a little shop window that had glass all the way round, because I can remember going around and looking at the watches. But me and my mum would have definitely been on a day trip from Cork.

Angela: Yeah.

[01:17:33.80]

Ruth: To see my aunt and my cousin who lived in Enniskerry and we would have gone then and met in Bray for a day.

Angela: Yeah

Ruth: And I guess people went on holidays to Bray then, didn't they?

Angela: Yeah

Ruth: Now they tend to go abroad rather than.

Angela: That's right, yeah. I mean, ah yeah, the reason I was asking was because one of my school friends, her family had a jeweller's shop in Bray. I wondered...

Ruth: But I remember it being near the seafront. Does that make sense?

Angela: Yeah, maybe it was the same one... Kelly's. Yeah, maybe. Um yeah, they were lovely people. But yeah, yeah, people used to come for day trips to Bray, and for the amusement arcades and stuff.

Ruth: Mm hmm

Angela: And those are all so well, they're not all still there, but some of them are still there. Um, so... and I think when the there's a big shopping centre built, like a big shopping mall kind of out of town, which I think took a lot of business from.

Ruth: Away.

Angela: Yeah, but um yeah, it's, in some ways it's different, in some ways it's not at all different. And it's very, it's very close to Dublin, so it's got that real commuter thing as well.

Ruth: Is it multicultural now?

Angela: Yeah, it is. Yeah, even when I was um... No, not probably. Yeah, probably. Yeah, maybe when I was still living there, there was a Chinese community that was kind of growing.

Ruth: Mmm

Angela: And I remember um, but when my mom was dying, that was like 2005, I'd say 2006, really. Yeah. And I was going back and forth a lot at that time. And my partner at the time, From here was a British-born Chinese guy. And, um, every time but he would often come with me. And, every time when we were, we used to call this the Chinese bus stop, because every time we were at this particular bus stop, it was like every other person there was Chinese. Um, there's a sort of Polish, Lithuanian community there now. And Filipino, quite a few Filipino people live there and work as nurses. There's a lot of nursing homes in Bray.

Angela: And yeah, so it is it is multicultural. Yeah, I love seeing multicultural Ireland. It really, lifts my heart when I go to Dublin. And again, ah it really upsets me when I see people being racist about it. It really upsets me when I see Irish people being racist and anti-immigrant because we all were on the receiving end of that all around the world. [Redacted 19 sec]. And yeah, I love meeting young Irish people of colour as well. I think it it's really important in the future of Ireland, to move away from that, the orange and the green and, yeah. So...

Ruth: Well, that was an amazing conversation. I suppose I just want to check in with you.

Were there things that we haven't talked about that were sort of important to you between the ages of 15 and 30 say that we haven't touched on?

Angela: Things that were important in that era. Um... I mean, maybe, yeah, I suppose one thing to say is coming back to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. I went to work.. I worked in that field as a psychologist. Um...

Ruth: In England?

[01:22:48.48]

Angela: Yeah, yeah. And lost people to it, and I think it's really, it's really important that we, remember um, those times and those people and um, yeah, it was so from you know I was saying like when we were teenagers it you know it was kind of

around in the consciousness um, you know... And it felt like a catastrophe, especially, a lot of gay people that I knew at the time, obviously, were much more affected by it. And I always consider myself really, really fortunate to have, because I first, um ah in the kind of early 90s, I worked in the drug service over here. And that was the first time I kind of worked with people living with HIV. And it was before treatment was available. I always consider myself really, really, lucky because when I first went to work in HIV services over here, um, it was at that moment when antiretrovirals became available. And it was that moment of optimism and hope and... And actually, a lot of Irish people worked in sexual health services in HIV, sexual health and addiction services.

Ruth: Hmm. Hmm.

Angela: And I think, those are some real untold stories, I think. And I think, obviously a lot of gay people from Ireland came here in those days because,

to live their lives freely and...

Ruth: Hmm. Hmm. Hmm.

Angela: Um, and loads of us all ended up working in sexual health services together. And I think it was, partly because we'd had to think about how society controls sexuality from a very young age, you know. Um, so, yeah.

Ruth: So important yeah, as you say, it's like something that other people can let slip to the

edge of their consciousness but when it concerns you and your friends it becomes so

central and...

Angela: Yeah. And I think people, ah a frustration here is I think how people are complacent about the rights they have. Like, people don't, people here just think, ‘oh, yes, we have abortion. It's fine’. But they don't realize that, it is, you know... It's still criminalized in some cases and, that and how easily those things can be taken away. Um, and I think that's one thing that a lot of us, especially this generation of Irish women, like we don't take those things for granted, I think, because we know how hard we had to fight for them.

Ruth: Absolutely. I think that's a really good place to leave things, kind of, you brought it full circle to the, repealing the eighth. And, but, of course, since the eighth has been repealed, things have moved to the right and become more conservative in so many countries, that it's probably more realistic to end on a more cautious note, I think. And you're right, like who'd have thought that those things that feminists fought for could so easily be taken away and in and maybe they can't maybe that's the message you know that actually you can fight and you can you can put stumbling blocks in the way of people who do want to take them away but yeah and keep calling out I guess which you do very well.

Angela: Yeah, yeah. And that, you just have to keep fighting and keep resisting. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah I was going to say I didn't tell you about my very first ever feminist stance that I took when I was about 12, but maybe.

Ruth: Oh tell us that, that would be a nice place to end then.

Angela: So, I was saying about the... my dad had the market garden, and we used to yeah...

Ruth: Yeah.

Angela: Um, I discovered around that age that my brother was getting paid more than I was for what I considered to be equal work. Um, and so I went on strike for equal pay.

And I remember my dad saying to my mum, ‘you've raised a right little women's libber’.

Ruth: Hmm

Angela: But I won my strike and I got my equal pay.

Ruth: Excellent. So, from ah from an early victory, you went on to a lifetime of activism. How wonderful.

Angela: Yeah.

Ruth: Oh, wow. That's a great story. Well, thank you so much for sharing your story. I'm going to turn off the recorder in a minute. Don't log off your browser, OK? Because we need to make sure that your recording saves on your computer as well as to the cloud. So when I press stop, stay on the line for a minute if you can. I'm going to cut all this bit out of the recording. So just to say, thank you so much. I really enjoyed our conversation

so much. And yeah, it was just fantastic. Thank you.

[01:07:42 END]