

Úna Gan A Gúna	
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Pat: Hello, this is Pat Rodwell from the Úna Gan a Gúna Project and today I'm interviewing Frances. Hi Frances.

Frances: Good morning. Hi.

Pat: Tell us who you are, the year you were born and where you live now.

Frances: My name is Frances Nyutten. I was born in Bray, County Wicklow, Ireland in 1950. And I now live in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Pat: And how long have you lived in Canada?

Frances: I moved to Canada in 1959 [laughs] so it's been many years.

Pat: Let's, let's start there then. You were born in Bray and who was in your family?

Frances: At the time of my birth I was the third – the child, so there was my mom, my dad, my older brother Christopher and my sister Doreen. My father was a tailor and he had a little tailor shop on Main Street Bray that he inherited from his uncle. And so he lived there. We lived there until 1957, and my mom had twins and then my dad realized he couldn't make a living, having six children, so he headed off to Canada to look for greener pastures [laughs].

Pat: We will come on to that. What memories have you got of those first years in Bray?

Frances: We were so happy. We were so happy. We lived in a very little, tiny house. My dad had this shop - on the bottom floor and then the second door took us upstairs to our living area and I would say that we were out in the backyard playing all the time. You know, because we had both parents with us, you know, my mum was home and my dad was right there and so, I would say that we were very happy living there, yeah, good memories. Good memories.

Pat: You must have gone to primary school?

Frances: I started primary school there. I think I went for one year because then in 1957 we ended up moving to Dublin and we lived in, on Bride street in Dublin for two years. So, [Laughs] after dad left Bray we all moved.

Pat: So did your dad go to Canada in '57?

Frances: He came in '57, he came back again in '58 hoping that he could make a living in Dublin, but it wasn't to be so he came back to Canada and so my mom was left with six kids to raise. But my dad was very – they had a very loving relationship, so he was very supportive of her. She got the cheque every week and you know, he could hardly wait to get his family together.

Pat: Do you have memories of when he went to Canada and you were in Bray and Dublin when he was there? Do you have memories of that time?

Frances: I do and I think that's when things kind of changed a little bit, I think my mum was trying to cope the best she could and – yeah, I do have memories of it, you know? I think it was difficult for her, but of course I was just young, I was only seven or eight at the time so I really didn't notice too much. But I did sense there was a difference, when she was alone trying to raise six kids. I think it was very difficult for her, I think it was. She had a very high standard as to how we were to behave and look and you know, she wanted us to – what's the word? She wanted to be proud of us. She was always bragging about her children and proud of her children.

Pat: Do you remember being told that you were going to move to Canada as a family?

Frances: I remember when I was about – when I was nine and my mom got this crazy telegraph from my dad saying "Got house, start packing." So, that's how we knew we were coming to Canada.

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Pat: Was it a shock for your mum or was she expected that?

Frances: She was hoping for it, but I – in those days we didn't have phones like everybody else did and so we ended up – "got house, start packing". My dad being a tailor had made all these coats – winter coats and such for us to come to Canada because this was December. When they came to

Canada – or when they went to Ireland the tariff or whatever they call it now, on the jackets and everything else that my dad made were so exorbitant that because they were all handmade, tailor-made clothes, my mom sent them all back to Canada. She wasn't going to pay for the tariffs so when we did meet my dad he had all the jackets in his arms [laughs].

Pat: At least they were at the right end for you, the right place.

Frances: Yeah, exactly.

Pat: And how did you feel about leaving Ireland? Were you too young?

Frances: I was more excited to see my dad because everybody said I was my dad's little girl. I was my daddy's girl. And I was. I loved him, I loved him dearly. He was a quiet, very soft-spoken man and so he was missed. It was not easy.

Pat: In what way?

Frances: Well, there were times – there was one time where we all got sick and there were six of us in the hospital and here was my mom – oh no four of us in the hospital, so beg your pardon, and two sick at home. My mom was trying to visit and be with each and every one of her children and I think if my dad would have been there, it would have been easier for her. She was a strong woman though. She did what needed to be done.

Pat: Tell me what it was like arriving in Canada?

Frances: That was a funny story because when we went we came over on a ship. It was – how can I put it? Everybody got sea-sick except me. I was the only one who figured out that if I went upstairs and if I could see the horizon, I'd be fine. I ran upstairs, because we were down in a passenger well – tourist whatever, down at the bottom [Laughs]. I'd get up and I'd be the only one sitting at the dining room table, when I got up because it was our time to eat. I loved the ship, because so long as I could get up and walk around, I was fine. Everybody else was seasick because I don't think they had the stabilisers on the ships that they have now [Laughs] and this was in December. So we're going across the North Atlantic in December. So that was quite an experience.

Pat: It must have been. Did it put you off travelling by sea or not?

Frances: I get seasick now. No, I like to be – I'm not a great person for cruising. I don't want to be on the ship all the time.

Pat: And what was waiting for you and your family when you got to Canada? Where did you live? What was it like?

Frances: Well, we got to Canada. We arrived at Pier 21, now that's a famous Pier in Halifax because everybody that came over from Europe into Canada went through there so – I do remember going through that and my mom was getting us all ready and she said to us "Okay, you sit here in the room, I'm going to go down and fill in all the papers now and I'll come back and get you." And the customs fella said "Oh no you're not going back on that ship" so [laughs], she had to gather us all up and take us down to the customs officer and if you can imagine, the youngest were twins, Brian and Brendan, and they were only three. So she – there she was gathered up all her chickens and down we went to the customs. Just after we got through the customs and everything else then we got on a train to take us to Montreal. Which was quite a trip and then from Montreal we went to Winnipeg. So, all in all I think we were on the train maybe three days – three or four days.

00:10:04

Pat: And that was your mum with all you children?

Frances: Yeah, and so every time there was a stop along the way, mom would run off and get us egg salad sandwiches and milk [laughs]. She was poor, she didn't have a lot. Interestingly, the whole family loves egg salad sandwiches and milk [laughs]. I do remember meeting a lady on the train and she was German and for some unknown reason I understood what she was telling me, but I think – I don't know if it is because of something to do with when we started school in Ireland

they started Gaelic. I didn't start school in English. I started it in Gaelic. The nuns were speaking to us all the time and I often wonder if that's why I understood what she was saying.

Pat: Can you remember what the country looked like when you were going along the train?

Frances: Oh, well it was just vast. A lot – it was snow. There was snow everywhere, right across the prairie or right across Quebec and Ontario. Because it was Christmas I do remember all of the Christmas lights, you know, because I don't remember seeing that in Ireland. I remember seeing all of the houses being lit up and the colour of the roofs. I mean in Ireland everything is slate, but over there the colour of the roofs were green and blue and red and brown [laughs]. And that stuck in my head. It was beautiful. It was actually quite lovely to go across.

Pat: It must have been. It must be, it sounds like a film.

Frances: Yeah.

Pat: It sounds like a film scene.

Frances: That's what I was seeing, that was my interpretation of it, yeah.

Pat: And where was your dad? Where did you meet up with him?

Frances: We met up in Winnipeg and we arrived at about four o'clock in the morning and there was my dad with his best friend, Jimmy Campbell. He had all the coats [Laughs] in his arms.

Pat: You needed those.

Frances: We needed the coats so we all ran up to him and everything else. Of course, the twins didn't know who my dad was because they were only three at the time. Interestingly enough, we had to get a cab to take us to our house as well as Jimmy Campbell. I can't remember. But anyhow, the cab driver was black right? And my brothers kept calling him dad and it was so funny because my mom said "that's not your father" [Laughs]. That was it yeah. We arrived in Winnipeg I think it was about two or three days before Christmas, so that was basically my Christmas gift. I got my dad.

Pat: How nice. And how did things go for you and your family after you had arrived? What was life like then?

Frances: Very cold. Very very cold. I remember we all dressed up to go to church and we had to walk because we were a good Catholic family right? Off we go on Christmas morning to church and my mom had tears rolling down her eyes – her face because it was so cold and they were frozen on her face [Laughs]. I guess we just didn't quite understand what the heck we were gotten into. But the coats that my dad made, they were great. We were fine, the kids were good.

Pat: What was the church like?

Frances: It was a French-Canadian church. It was called Holy Cross and it was very similar to a lot of the churches in Ireland. Of course it was full so we trunked in there around fifteen minutes late and there were all of us, eight of us trying to find a seat [Laughs]. It was okay. It was church.

Pat: Did your dad know people there?

Frances: We did. Interestingly enough my dad did stay with a lady while he was here and her name was Margaret LeDouin, and Margaret actually – we started calling her Auntie Margaret and she was a very big part of our life and also my dad's friend Jimmy Campbell. He was from Scotland. So my dad gathered up, he was a kind, outgoing, fun person. So he made friends everywhere he went.

00:15:24

Pat: Was he working as a tailor there or had he found other work?

Frances: No, he actually got a job at a place called the Manitoba Clothing Company, and he worked as the designer, the head designer in there. He ran the company. So, they would do a lot of the – this is interesting, they would do a lot of the RCMP officers coats and uniforms and the city police uniforms. He got to know a lot of the police in the city because of that.

Pat: Was there a big Irish community in that area?

Frances: There was. He was one of the ones that was involved in getting a whole group of Irish people together. So we did end up having an Irish club in Winnipeg. So we would meet people coming in from Ireland.

Pat: So that was your mum and dad. Did they make friends easily? Did you make friends easily?

Frances: I think I do. I'm always open to meeting people. When I first went to school though, people would – the kids would kind of laugh at my accent [laughs]. It makes you shy, it makes you not want to speak because you didn't know what you were saying wrong but they – I entertained them every time I spoke [laughs].

Pat: How did that affect you as a young girl?

Frances: It did. It did affect me. I made sure that I said my T-H's because, the Irish, we don't say our T-H's at all [laughs]. So I worked on that really, really hard. Also, I found that because in Ireland, I was learning Gaelic first, that was the first language they were teaching us. I didn't read English very well at all. That was a bit of a problem. It was interesting though because one of the nuns said to mum that all her children are illiterate and my mum got quite angry and she went back to the school to speak to the principal and she brought the school books that we were learning from in Ireland and she put them down on the table and she said "look at that, can you read that to me?" And she says "No" she said, "well my children can, they are not illiterate, they just don't know how to read English yet." So from then on, I was getting extra learning – extra help with the English - learning to read English, which didn't take very long.

Pat: Tell me about moving up into, say, teenage years and what was life like then?

Frances: Well, my mum and dad were very strict. When I was in school with all my Canadian friends and everything else, that actually became a bit of a problem because I'd come home and I would act the way they did and I would come into the house and mum would tell me "Don't you come in here and acting like a Canadian" [laughs]. Okay, I'm not sure how else I'm supposed to act. So that - that was always a bit of a contention. They weren't sure what to do. They didn't know that my friends had a lot more freedom than I did. When I finally got a job at fifteen I used to have to hand my money over to my parents, right? Then they would give me an allowance, because they were poor they needed money. Well, my friends never did that. So there was that bit of a – I felt selfish, but for my thinking, because I felt like I should be able to keep my money [laughs].

00:19:55

Pat: Well at that age, you do. It's the first money you've earned, isn't it?

Frances: Right, right. It became a difficult time for me, because once I started earning money and handing it over to my parents, that was the expectation. Education, my parents valued education for my brothers [laughs]. Yeah, I had five brothers and that's why my dad came to Canada so his children could have an education. But that didn't include the girls. The girls, just marry somebody with a good education and you'll be fine. Yeah. Learn to be a housewife. But that was the time.

Pat: So did you feel torn between your Canadian friends and your Irish family?

Frances: Definitely. I loved being Irish, but I also loved the independence that the Canadian girls had. They could just say "Mom I'm going out with my friends, see you later" and they'd say "Okay see you later" and off they go. I would get the third grief. Where are you going? Who are you going with? Why are you going? Who are you going? When? What time you are going to be home at? Nope, you can't go.

Pat: That must have led to some conflict at that age?

Frances: It does. I think back and I think it was kind of scary because there were times when I wasn't honest with my parents about where I was going. I'd be saying that I was going off to A and I would head off to B. I think, that's not a good thing because if I had gotten into trouble. There was – I was out there alone, kind of thing.

Pat: But I think that's fairly normal, isn't it, for teenagers?

Frances: Yeah. I used to see what my brother and sister got in trouble with. I just thought I'm not doing that. I got smart, because they were, poor things, every time they opened their mouth, they were in trouble because I don't think my parents knew quite what to expect.

Pat: Were any of your friends from – were any of your friends had families who came from Ireland as well?

Frances: Actually, I did have a friend and I, of course, came from the south and her name was, if I remember correctly, Elsie Tweedy and her family came from Northern Ireland. They came from Belfast, right? This was in 1966. Well, we all know what was happening in Ireland at that time. And we, Elsie and I were just so sad because we thought, here we are at the same school chumming around, having a great time and people in Ireland are not doing that. So the whole troubles in Ireland did upset me, that – I mean, I had nothing to do with it, but I had a wonderful friend. If I was living in Ireland, I wouldn't have been able to see her.

Pat: Was she from – she was from Northern Ireland. Was she from a Catholic or a Protestant background?

Frances: I think she was from a Protestant background. Because in Canada, that's not a question you ever asked. You never – when you went to school – when I went to high school I did go to a Catholic school up until grades eight, and then grade nine and forward I went to a public school. Everybody was there, you didn't ask anybody that question, that was just – that was private. It's none of your business.

Pat: So it's a different approach, a different sort of philosophy in Canada?

Frances: Oh definitely. Yeah, definitely. When granny came to Canada because she came in '62 to help mom and she never went home. She used to say walking into our house was like walking into United Nations, because she said "I can't open my mouth, I can't say anything about anybody" [Laughs]. Because everybody was welcome. We lived in that kind of environment we were very blessed in that.

Pat: Did you have many visitors from Ireland when you were young? Or was it just your grandmother there?

Frances: Well, from Ireland, our parents, our grandparents, no. They were as poor as we were. Nobody - everybody was struggling in the 50s. So coming to Canada, no, nobody came to visit us. If anything my parents went back to Ireland to visit.

Pat: That was going to be my next question.

France: Yeah.

00:24:56

Pat: How often or if ever were your parents and any of you children able to go back to Ireland?

Frances: Well my parents went back I think twice, and I've gone back numerous times because of course I've got Aileen [cousin] and I've gotten to know my cousins, which is just great. I love my Irish ancestry. So as long as I can get back there once or twice [laughs], I'm happy.

Pat: Right. Let's go back to when you were 15. So you were at secondary school in – still in Winnipeg, was it?

Frances: Yeah.

Pat: And you were having some conflict between the sort of Canadian way of life and Irish upbringing.

Frances: Right.

Pat: What were things like for you at school? How did you get on at school?

Frances: I actually loved school. The problem is from the time I was 15, I worked and unfortunately I think I spent more time working than I did studying. School became a chore because I, well, just

because of the situation. The household was very busy. There were eight of us kids living at home with my granny. It wasn't encouraged. As soon as I came home and I'd say, well, I've got homework to do. My mom would say, "well, you were at school all day, what do you have homework for? I've got things for you to do." So my grades and everything suffered. When I went back to school as an adult that I realised that, oh, all I need to do was a little, just a little bit of work. I would have been fine. So there was that conflict.

Pat: And was it, you said earlier, it was different. Your parents expectations of your brothers were different than you?

Frances: Oh yeah. My brother would be studying for the same exams as I was, but I'd have to go and make him some tea.

Pat: A sign of the times

Frances: Yeah [laughs]. It's just a – yeah. Doreen and I, my sister and I, we were the two girls. We got to do most of the housework, a lot of the cooking, a lot of the cleaning up, a lot of taking care of the babies. Because my mom after Liam was born, that was number seven child, she went to work. Granny was there to give us a hand, but Doreen and I had to carry the load.

Pat: Tell me about these jobs that you were doing. What sort of work were you doing from 15 onwards?

Frances: Well, the first job I ever had, I was 15 and I worked at the old Dutch potato chips factory [laughs] and it was a summer job and it was 90 degrees outside and it was 120 degrees inside this, because I was working over the ovens, like the fryers and picking out all the dead chips, all that, that was my job [laughs].

Pat: Oh my goodness. How did you bear that?

Frances: It was horrible. It was the worst job. I'd get home and be on the bus coming home. I stunk of you know oils and the potatoes [laughs], and then I'd go home and I'd wash them all and then go back to work the next day and that was my motivation to stay in school. Yeah, because I knew people that worked there full time and I thought there is no way on this earth. I'm so – I'm not finishing my education. I don't care what anybody says. I'm finishing school.

Pat: How long did you stay at school? I don't understand the Canadian system. How long did you have to stay at school and what did you do?

Frances: Well 12 years I did. I did grade 12 and so I did get my diploma and everything but back to when we first came to Canada, I was a year behind because when we all came to Canada for some unknown reason we were all put back a year. I was a year behind so I was eighteen going on nineteen when I finished school, but that's okay. A couple of years later I did go to university. Yeah, I took some university which surprised the crap out of everybody that I went to university, but there you go. Yeah. Stubborn soul.

00:30:01

Pat: Yes, it sounds like it, but that worked out for the good. What sort of subjects and things were you interested in? Did you enjoy studying?

Frances: Actually I ended up in nursing. All the people, all the nursing related courses, when I did go back, so biology, anatomy and physiology, psychology, sociology. I loved all those courses. And I did well.

Pat: Was that when you were in your teenage years or was that later when you returned?

Frances: No, that was when, by the time I got into my 20's. I didn't – by that time when - I married at twenty-two, so I had a husband that saw my potential [laughs].

Pat: Okay, good. Right. Tell me, when you were sort of in your late teens and when you were at school and left school, what was your social life like? What sort of things were you doing with your friends and others?

Frances: Well, we would go to dances. I don't know if people go to dances anymore, but that's what we used to do. School dances. I met my best friend when I was in grade 10. Her name is Christine and just a brilliant girl, just always the top of the class. We would, we did everything together. We would walk, we would sing, we would go to dances and at the time everybody was looking like hippies. I had the long hippie hair. You'd hang around, in the parks with all the other hippies and sit around. But I never smoked marijuana. I never did any of those drugs because I was too afraid to come home to hide. You never did that. But I loved the music, I loved the sitting around and singing and we did that. That was our entertainment, listening to music and meeting up with our friends.

Pat: Now that's good. Tell me what you looked like at that age. You had long, hippie hair. What were you wearing?

Frances: What was I wearing? Probably blue jeans. I don't even know if I wore a bra. I don't know. Well, I didn't need one, but and yeah [laughs], I think I was like that. You know, the sandals, yeah. Those kind of things.

Pat: What were your – what was your favourite music or bands at the time?

Frances: Oh my favourite music at the time would have been the, was the Mamas and the Papas and who else? Who would have been the – Mamas the Papas, and the, Peter, Paul and Mary, that kind of stuff. The Beatles, of course, they came out at that time. Love them. I actually had a very eclectic music style because when I was studying, I always listened to classical music. Well, it blocked out the noise. So there you go.

Pat: What about boyfriends and your sort of love life at the time? When did you start?

Frances: Well, I did have a couple of boyfriends. I had more friends. I liked it better when I had friends and, it became less complicated, because boyfriends always – I always felt like there was pressure when you had a boyfriend. When you had a friend, there was no pressure. So I prefer to hang around with a lot of, just friends that ended up being friends of my husband. That's actually how I met my husband was through all these friends that I got. But it – I'd hang around with my brother and my sister. We had a way of, because Christiother, my older brother, was very popular. So he had a lot of friends and, that. Yeah. So, boyfriends. I think I had three or four before I met my husband. Yeah.

Pat: Okay, we'll come on to him later.

Frances: Yeah. Oh, good.

Pat: What was a – what was your – you and your friend's attitude to sex and contraception at that time?

Frances: Well, I didn't want to have sex. I decided that I wasn't going to get trapped because so many of my friends, young gals that I went to school with, all of a sudden, they're getting married at 16 and 17 because they've got babies. I thought, yeah no, I don't want to do that. I was always referred to as being cold, a tease [laughs], because I just thought, no, this is going to be something I'm going to share with somebody that's very special to me. So I didn't, sure you'd neck and kiss and whatever, but I never, I never wanted to have sex before. Not before I got married, but before I met a very special person.

00:35:21

Pat: If your friends were interested in accessing contraception and having sex was that easy to do?

Frances: I think it was. I think in the 60s it was. I had friends that were starting on the pill and stuff when I thought, good for you. That was my attitude. We were starting to change, right? It's just whatever you chose to do is fine with me. We weren't – I didn't judge other people, because why? You know, yeah.

Pat: You mentioned that – sort of drugs didn't particularly appeal to you. What was your attitude towards alcohol and drinking?

Frances: Well I didn't drink very much either because I was afraid to come home drunk. I didn't drink. I'd have like a dribble of, what was it? Rye or something and a big class of Coke and that would be my drink. Unfortunately I did start smoking cigarettes, but who didn't? We all did.

Pat: Who didn't, right?

Frances: Oh yeah, oh yeah I was because I was working and helping them and I was basically told you move out, you're not coming back. So I'm thinking, oh, okay. I did have a lot of friends that had moved out on their own. But again, it was different. I felt like I didn't have the freedom to move out. My dad would have hauled me back home in a minute. They were, they were strict. They were very strict.

Pat: Were they strict with their daughters as the sons or just strict with one of you?

Frances: No, I think, no [Laughs]. The daughters were, I think they, my dad didn't know what to expect raising daughters. He used to say that he has five sons and two daughters and he's, his daughters gave him more worry than his sons did. And I'm thinking, well, maybe he should be worried about them too [laughs]. Yeah.

Pat: You mentioned that you were working around that age. Were you still at the potato chip factory or had you moved into other jobs?

Frances: Actually, I ended up working in the hospital. There was a hospital just at the end of our street. It was called the Municipal Hospitals. I ended up working in the kitchen there, probably every day of my high school experience.

Pat: Did you?

Frances: I went to work because they would hire us from four to six. We'd go in and set the trays up for the patients and stuff. Then I would work on the weekends. I worked there. Then when I turned 18, I got a job there again as a nurse's aid. So that was when I started taking care of people that had polio. That was a really interesting time because those people were in iron lungs. You know?

Pat: Yes, I do. Those big machines where they move.

Frances: Yeah. I used to take care of the people that were in those machines and on walking beds and such. That was my introduction to nursing and that is when I knew that I wanted to be a nurse.

Pat: That is what I was going to ask. Had you thought of nursing before or was it doing that work that made you realise?

Frances: No, I had thought of nursing prior to that because even when I was – I think I was eight and I went in and I had my tonsils removed [Laughs]. I went to the Adelaide hospital in Dublin to get my tonsils removed, and at that time I thought that I would like to be a nurse. I saw them and I thought, yeah, that is what I want to do.

00:40:01

Pat: That stayed with you through the move to Canada, through your education, and then you were working as a nursing aide in the end of your teenage years?

Frances: Yeah, so that is what I did and I did try to get into nursing, but unfortunately my grades weren't high enough. I just worked.

Pat: Right, okay. So did you continue working as a nurse's aide or did you go and do other things once you had finished?

Frances: Yes as a matter of fact, after I got married. That is a story in of itself [Laughs].

Pat: I will come back to that.

Frances: I worked in a bank. I was working in a bank for quite a number of years. For about five years. I did some working in a bank and it made me realise I don't want to be taking care of people's money [laughs]. I would rather take care of people.

Pat: You mentioned earlier that you went on to university after school. What did you study at university? Which one did you go to?

Frances: I went to University of Manitoba and I studied, science, but I didn't complete it. I knew I wanted to go into nursing. I did take some science courses, but I didn't complete my science degree. I got married instead [laughs].

Pat: While we are on the subject, let's go back to how did you meet your husband and how old were you when you did?

Frances: When I first met my husband, again, we used to have parties. Remember I was saying? I was 15 and I was at this party at one of our friend's house and there was Robert, and I thought, oh, he is a nice boy. I stood beside him. We were playing some stupid game, pass the orange and all that other stuff. I'm standing beside him eyeballing him and he is standing beside this blonde girl eyeballing her. That was when I was fifteen. Now he tells me that he did notice me at the party, but I was too young for him. So I think, oh, okay. I'll use that for the rest of your life [Laughs].

Pat: When did you meet him again then? When did your paths cross again?

Frances: Well, our paths were crossing all the time, like back and forth because we had friends. There was a group of us that were friends and then finally in 1970, going into '71, I met Robert. We actually started dating.

Pat: How old were you at that stage?

Frances: I would have been twenty.

Pat: And how old was he?

Frances: He was twenty-two. Then I thought, okay, I guess he finally recognised me or noticed me. We started going out at that time.

Pat: Did you take him home to meet your parents?

Frances: I did, but they already knew who he was because he was a friend of my brother's and he was going to university. Oh go for it.

Pat: So no opposition there then? They encouraged you?

Frances: No opposition whatsoever. Some of the boyfriends, my parents didn't like, they didn't want me going out with, but this one, they liked.

Pat: That's good. Is your husband Catholic too?

Frances: Yeah. His family is of Belgian origin. They were definitely all Catholic so there wasn't that conflict about, although neither one of us are practicing.

Pat: Would it have made a difference to your parents?

Frances: Oh, I don't know. I think it might have. I remember going out with one young fellow who was Jewish and, they weren't sure what to think of it, because I think they were afraid I would end up being a Jew or something. That would have been fine.

Pat: So tell me about Robert. What was he like as a young man? What appealed to you about him?

Frances: Well, I thought he was good looking, but also kind. He was very soft spoken and I remember my brother telling me, Robert is very shy. I'm thinking, he's not shy. He talks to me all the time. But he is a quiet, thoughtful man and smart, very smart. Just somebody I admired, nonjudgemental. He accepts everybody.

00:45:25

Pat: That sounds lovely. How long were you going out before marriage was mentioned?

Frances: About two years. We dated for about two years and then we got married. He is a geologist. After we got married, we ended up living in a place called Flin Flon, Manitoba.

Pat: Goodness, I've not heard of that one.

Frances: We got married in December. December seems to be a keynote for me. But anyhow, we lived up in Flin Flon for about six months – seven months, but he was gone in the bush. He worked

away. I had to figure out what to do with myself for seven months in Flin Flon, Manitoba. I got a job at the bank. I worked as a teller in a bank. Interestingly, I had already had my high school education and been to university so I got hired on as a teller and the person - man that got hired on the same time as I did, didn't have a high school degree already. He was hired on as a management trainee. This is what we were beginning to see, I was beginning to notice things like that. I worked there and thought well, what else am I going to do? So I joined the Glee Club when I was in Flin Flon and we put on the Fiddler on the Roof. I was one of the daughters.

Pat: Had you been interested in singing or drama before?

Frances: Oh yeah. I love singing. Oh yeah. Singing is my go-to thing when I'm down. [Laughs] I sing.

Pat: Do you still sing? Are you part of the choir or anything?

Frances: I was, but not at the moment. I haven't been a part of a choir for about five years. I used to sing at church and sometimes I would do the cantor and stuff at church. Well, my mother had a very operatic voice.

Pat: Oh did she?

Frances: Oh, yeah. She could out sing everybody.

Pat: Oh that's good. You said there was a funny story, something funny about when you got married?

Frances: Then we ended up living in Flin Flon and then we moved. We moved off to Timmins, Ontario, and then we moved back to Winnipeg and then we moved [laughs], all because Robert was a geologist in the bush.

Pat: Was he away from home all week or did he come back at weekends?

Frances: No, he didn't come back on the weekends. There was one time he was gone for, oh my God, I think it was about three or four weeks without coming back in. It was too hard on a newlywed.

Pat: It must have been.

Frances: Yeah.

Pat: Could you keep contact through the telephone or were you writing letters?

Frances: Sometimes through the telephone, but most of the time I would write him a letter or he would write me a letter and then it would be sent out to him.

Pat: Have you still got those letters?

Frances: I don't know if I do because I think Robert went through a cleaning stage once and they are gone [laughs] "We gotta get rid of this stuff".

Pat: That's why with him being away and you being newlywed, that's why you got a job and that's why you joined the Glee Club?

Frances: Right. Yeah. That's me. I have to be out there doing things. I can't be sitting at home, drives me crazy.

Pat: Were you able to find friends through work and throughout?

Frances: I found moving to Flin Flon was hard to find a friend because I was the outsider, and it was a very small town. Very, very small town. Interestingly, they had a smelter there too. I don't know if you know what a smelter is, but it melts down the ores, right?

Pat: Oh yes.

Frances: Anyhow, this smelter in town used to blow smoke all over the town and it was horrible. The smell of it, the taste of it was horrible. I remember thinking, I've got so bad breath. Why do I have bad breath all the time? [Laughs] Somebody said, Fran, that's the smelter [Laughs].

00:50:27

Pat: You said you felt like an outsider. Why do you think that was?

Frances: Because everybody else knew each other for years. They had all gone to school together. Interestingly, when I joined the Glee Club, it was all the outsiders [Laughs] that got together. They were the ones that started the Glee Club. We put on Fiddler on the Roof.

Pat: Did you make some friends from amongst those other outsiders?

Frances: Yes, I did. I did and it became easier, to be by myself, but I was glad when he came home.

Pat: That's nice. Now, let's go back to when you returned to education at some stage when was that?

Frances: Well, I think I was, I was actually in Calgary after the boys were born that I decided, that I wondered what am I going to do when they are off to school? So I thought, well, I'll start school again. I went back and that's when I took my nursing. Upgraded my class and then I went into nursing when I was thirty, so beyond my 25....

Pat: How long did you work as a nurse then after that retraining?

Frances: Oh I worked up from 1980 well 1983 until I retired in 2007.

Pat: So it was a lifelong career?

Frances: Yeah it was a wonderful career. I was so happy, I loved it. I loved the girls that I worked with. Nurses are an amazing group of women and I was very fortunate to be a part of that.

Pat: That's lovely. How did you end up in Calgary where you are now?

Frances: Again, because my husband is a geologist and he got a job in the mining. He got a job in the petroleum industry. So that is when we moved out here and raised our children here.

Pat: All right. Did you say you have got three sons?

Frances: I have two sons and I have four granddaughters.

Pat: Are they interested in your Irish heritage and your Irish background or do they just see themselves as Canadian or Belgian?

Frances: It was interesting because my husband has been doing his genealogy and discovered that part of his, there is one grandma who is Métis. I don't know if you know what Métis means, but that means part Indian, yes part indigenous. So the girl, Robert has been talking about that and they said that they relate to being Irish more than they relate to anything else [laughs], because of my ancestry.

Pat: Have they visited Ireland themselves, your sons and your granddaughters?

Frances: My son, Paul has been there. My other son, Andrew hasn't. No they haven't gone.

Pat: Okay, that sounds good. Now, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to tell me that we haven't touched on yet?

Frances: Let me think. Oh yes. Love singing. I think we got it. Yeah. When Granny came and never came left. Well, you know, in 1966, we all became Canadian citizens. So that was a big production because we ended up going down to the legislative buildings and we got sworn in, that we were Canadians now.

Pat: When you say we all, that was your mum and dad and all of your siblings?

Frances: Yes, we all became Canadians, and all the ones that could - I was the youngest that could actually make my vow. The rest of them, the parents did on behalf of the children.

00:55:09

Pat: You would have been 16 or so at the time?

Frances: Yes. That was a big - that was a big event in my life, becoming a Canadian citizen and knowing that I'd always be Irish [Laughs].

Pat: How did you feel after that? Did it make a difference to how you felt? The fact that you have got citizenship?

Frances: Not really. I already felt that I was becoming more Canadian than I was Irish just because I was going to school, I was working with all these people and I love the Irish music we were always listening to the Clancy brothers and the Dubliners [Laughs]. We were always, I mean, it was always

a part of our life. My mom would make her soda bread and, my girlfriend Christine, said she never had anybody in her life offer her a cup of tea when she came into the house, because she was Canadian right?

Pat: Yes. It didn't happen.

Frances: What's that?

Pat: So it didn't happen elsewhere, but in your family, she was offered a cup of tea as soon as she came in?

Frances: As soon as she came in, oh Christine, would you like a cup of tea? She just thought that was just the neatest thing, that she got offered tea.

Pat: That's a really good illustration of a difference, isn't it?

Frances: Yeah, exactly. She just couldn't understand that. So she used to love coming to our house, because it was always, always a lot of activity in our house.

Pat: I know that you said you have still got strong family contacts in Ireland because you visited your cousin and things recently.

Frances: Yes. Unfortunately, every time we go, there is one less relative.

Pat: I know. It is awful isn't it? But it does happen.

Frances: It is. It is terrible. But I have good memories. My grandparents that stayed in Ireland, my dad's parents. I remember visiting them, but we used to have to sit out on the doorstep [Laughs].

Pat: Oh? Why was that?

Frances: I don't know. That was kind of bizarre, so we would be all dressed up. My mom would have us dressed up, in our little dresses and okay you could, okay you now - sit there and she would go in and talk with mom and dad, my grandparents, and they would come out and look at us and then off you go. They were, it was bizarre. My other granny that lived with us was so different.

Pat: What was she like?

Frances: She was kind. She didn't want anybody cuddling her, but she loved it. You go up and you give her a big hug or something, and she would go, oh, go on with you, go on, go on. But you knew she loved it. She had a ton of Irish sayings that you know people were just amazed at things that would come out of her mouth. I can't even remember half of the things that she would say. Her Irish sayings were great.

Pat: She must have been an important part of your life while she was living with you?

Frances: She was. She was almost like my soft space to land, which is really too bad because sometimes we would walk in the door and granny would be the first one there and we would tell her everything that was going on in our life. Then mom, she would say to mom or to us, tell your mom what happened today. Well that is okay. I felt bad for mom as a mother, when I think back. We did prefer granny because she always looked interested and she was, she wanted to hear what you were doing all day.

Pat: And there you are now, a grandmother yourself.

Frances: I am and my girls call me granny.

Pat: Oh how nice.

Frances: I love it. Yeah. Some of them call me grandma because they're getting older now.

Pat: Well, Frances, that has been lovely. Thank you so much for telling us your story and sharing that with us. It has been really great. The time has just whizzed past.

Frances: What time is it? Oh, it was only an hour.

Pat: Yeah, but it has gone really quickly.

Frances: It has.

01:00:02

Pat: Is there anything else you would like to add about your life? Particularly between 15 and 25? Is there anything else that you would like to say or share with us?

Frances: Let me think. All I remember is that I did not always feel good about myself. It's interesting because I always thought I was the ugly duckling. It is interesting because right now I look at some of the pictures and I'm going, who is that? Was that me [Laughs]? Why did I have that attitude? But I think girls do. We look in the mirror and I don't know what the heck we see. That's the only thing I do remember. I was very insecure. Insecure as a little girl.

Pat: Why do you think that was?

Frances: I think it must have been a bit of the accent. Just lost in the crowd of eight kids. You sit back, I know my mom said of all her kids, I was the easiest one to raise and I'm thinking, yeah, because I didn't do anything wrong. I saw everything that was going wrong.

Pat: You kept quiet. So that is why you were the easiest one.

Frances: Yeah, probably.

Pat: You have also mentioned that you thought at home and in the workplace, men were treated differently than women?

Frances: Oh, definitely. Definitely. Always. I always felt that way. I think that was generation 1960s, that women were burning their bras. Things were, I think it was out there. People were beginning to notice it more, that things just weren't fair. We weren't getting the salaries. I remember once going to a party with Robert and it was the geology group from the university and one of the profs got up and said, women have no place in geology. Well, I felt like applying for geology that day [Laughs]. What do you mean women have no place in geology? That was the thinking as we were growing up. It is not like that today. I mean, there is a hundred women - hundreds of women in geology now, you know?

Pat: That sort of attitude can affect your confidence, can't it? Or your view of what you are able to do?

Frances: Oh, yeah, exactly. It was a traumatic – that time things were changing and, people were becoming aware of it but it, and yeah, it wasn't always fair.

Pat: No, but I think you did tremendously well by going back into education and then having that long career in nursing. You proved them wrong.

Frances: Oh I did. I did. I ended up in neonatal intensive care. I was with the wee babies. That was pretty high tech. I felt proud of that.

Pat: That's good. Well, I think on that point, we will say thank you. Again, it has been brilliant talking to you. What I will do now is I will stop the recording and we will have a chat and wait for the files to download to make sure we have caught it all.

Frances: Thank you.

Pat: So let me stop it.

[End of Interview 01:03:42]