

ÚnaGanAGúna	
Interview Summary Sheet	Title Page
Ref No: 0UNA-U1X0005	
Collection Title: ÚnaGanAGúna Phase 1	
Interviewee's Surname Mitchell	Interviewee's Title -
Interviewee's First Name(s) Billy (Her sister Dorothy notes that her birth name was Rose-Ann but by dint of the fact that she was born in Belfast on 11th July, she was always thereafter known as Billy.	Interviewee's Gender Female
Occupation Nurse	Interviewee's Date of Birth 11.07.1938. (Sadly, Billy died on 04.04.2020).
Mother's occupation Housewife	Father's occupation Post office/ Councillor
Date(s) of recording 02.04.2018	
Location of interview: Interviewee's home, Twickenham, London	
Name of interviewer: Dorothy Duffy	

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Total number of tracks

1

Recording format

48 kHz, 32 bit

Mono

Total duration (HH:MM:SS). 01:21:00

Additional material (e.g. photos, documents)

Photograph of Rose Ann (Billy) Mitchell circa 1954, aged sixteen.

Copyright/ clearance

Signed consent form and additional email from Dorothy Duffy indicated final consent for recording, transcript and photograph.

Editor's comments

Four WAV files:

0UNA-U1X0005XX-0001M0.WAV; 0UNA-U1X0005XX-0002M0.WAV; 0UNA-U1X0005XX-0003M0.WAV; 0UNA-U1X0005XX-0004M0.WAV combined into 2020 05 25BillyMitchell WAV Final Muted.WAV. 2020 05 25BillyMitchell MP3 Final Muted.MP3

[Start 00:00]

DOROTHY: Ok I am Dorothy Duffy and I'm here talking to my sister who I am about to— she will introduce herself right now so do you want to introduce yourself?

BILLY: Righty oh. My name is Billy Mitchell, Rose Mitchell as well, and I live at [address redacted and muted on audio] Twickenham.

DOROTHY: And where are you from in Ireland?

BILLY: I was born in Belfast on the 11th July 1938 but whipped out of there the next day and taken down to the south of Ireland [laughs].

DOROTHY: To the badlands of Mayo [laughs].

BILLY: Oh my God.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: I'm the only one of the ten children born in Belfast.

DOROTHY: And where do you come in the ten children Billy?

BILLY: Number two.

DOROTHY: Number two, with an older sister Maura. Ehm, ok so you came over to London many years ago but the purposes of this recording, I'm just going to ask you to think about your life between the ages of fifteen and twenty five. So cast your mind back to that flighty young thing you were of fifteen. So that would have been in nineteen fifty— I can't add— thirty eight, forty eight, fifty three. That would have been 1953, you were fifteen.

BILLY: 1953?

DOROTHY: 1953. If you were born in '38—?

BILLY: '53.

DOROTHY: Ca— What were you like as a fifteen-year-old. Can you remember?

BILLY: Oh I can.

DOROTHY: So tell me about your life. Where were you living when you were fifteen?

BILLY: At home in— in Ireland, in Mayo.

DOROTHY: And what were you up to? What was your life like day to day?

BILLY: Mad [laughs]. I was really helping my mother with the— I was the second of ten children and as the babies came along, I took over and looked after them. Ehm— and I was— you know, I adored them, every single one that came along, I adored them.

DOROTHY: How did that impact on your school life? What happened about your school?

BILLY: Well it didn't. I— to be quite honest with you, Mammy was always so tired because she was having so many babies, it was— she'd send me out to school in the morning and then I'd go round the back of the house and come back when daddy was gone. And then I— he didn't know it at the time but mammy was so tired and so worn out, if she wasn't pregnant, she just had a baby and I helped her. I get what— I loved it, make no mistake about it, I loved it, I loved every child that came along and— so I left school really at sixteen. But I— do you know, I never had— I never took an exam, and I remember the nuns saying to me when I was leaving, she said to Mammy, “well Billy didn't get any A levels or O levels.” At that time it was—

DOROTHY: The leaving cert and the inter cert, yeah.

BILLY: Yeah, and— “but she was possessed of some very fine qualities.” They're the exact words that the nuns said to me— At that age.

DOROTHY: And that's pretty good for the nuns to say. [laughs].

BILLY: Very, very. And, I mean everything was so hard at that time, ah the education was very, very good but if you didn't excel, you were put to one side. And it was— it was very,

very hard and of course we had to learn Gaelic and as well English and the cane was used with great vigour. The least mistake that you made. And—

[00:04:45]

DOROTHY: Can you remember what life was like at school at fifteen, you said the cane was used with great vigour?

BILLY: Yeah.

DOROTHY: Did you like school? What was it like?

BILLY: Well, you didn't to be quite honest with you. I never liked school because to me it was— I never had a chance to sort of— to get my exams, because I was the one that was looking after the children because my eldest sister Maura, she was thirteen months older than me. She was very, very clever and she lived with my grandmother [address redacted and muted on audio] and we lived in [address redacted and muted on audio]. So there was always one child looking after the granny and that was—

DOROTHY: Yeah, and that was tradition?

BILLY: That was very much the tradition. But there was a great sense of— you know, everybody helped everybody else. And— but it was very— I mean I realise now that it was hard but— and I— it was— that's— everybody suffered like that. But because at the time, I'd say there was about fifteen per cent of the whole country that were wealthy and the other lot were liv— barely living at all.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: Although we were very lucky in that my father had a job in the civil service and— but he started work at fifteen as well. And he was a councillor. And—.

DOROTHY: You were about to talk about your education and you were talking about Maura because you said your elder sister had a very different experience of education to you. Because you were the person who was—

BILLY: I was the second mother.

DOROTHY: You were the person who was to look after the children. She didn't. She went to—

BILLY: She was very clever and she loved— she loved— she loved school. And granny was— adored her. And she had a very— even though it was only a few houses— she would come home from school, come to Mammy's house, have her dinner and go back to granny's. So, granny always had a good meal for her and she was a wonderful, wonderful woman you know. But everybody was like that in those days.

DOROTHY: But how did that affect your relationship with this sister who lived in a different house to you growing up?

BILLY: It didn't bother me funnily enough, I had the babies. And I loved it. I loved it and—

DOROTHY: But she got the education.

BILLY: She got it and Tommy [brother] got it and everybody else got much better education than me, much, much better. And then when we were old enough we scooted off to England. But the older— I mean Dorothy, you, and Deirdre [sister] and the younger children. I mean they— they had I think an easier time, didn't you? I mean it was hard enough—

DOROTHY: Yeah, we did, we had an easier time.

BILLY: Yeah, yeah. But the boys all shot off to England and I was there but we would— the older ones, when we got to England, we worked seven days a week and we'd send a half a crown. I used to send a half a crown to Mammy every weekend, when I got paid, I'd send a half a crown. And it would feed the whole— all the children for a couple of days. A half a crown, that's two and six pence.

DOROTHY: Yeah, twelve and a half p. Can I take you back to when you were fifteen? Between fifteen— You left home at what? Eighteen?

BILLY: Eighteen, yeah.

DOROTHY: So between fifteen and eighteen, what was life like sort of religious-wise? And the influence of the Church at that time?

BILLY: Oh well, you just did what you were told. There was no— I mean, there was no gentleness or no love, you know. There was just— you know, get on with it. There was the cane and— which was— it'd nearly break your hands, you know. But that was the time, that was the time, every place was like that, you know, the Church ruled with a rod of iron. Thank God it's not like that today. Well, they have their own problems even now but I was very, very lucky, very lucky, I— do you know, it sounds as if it was awful but, I don't know, I just put it behind me I suppose and thought, you know, get on with your own life.

[00:10:12]

DOROTHY: What did you think about religion when you were fifteen, sixteen? Yourself, personally? What did you think about religion?

BILLY: Well I was—

DOROTHY: Catholicism.

BILLY: Well I was— sure I didn't understand it at all, I don't think anybody did. But I was a singer in the choir at home and I was always very lucky because they loved someone that had a good voice.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: And they were very, very kind to me because of that. If you had some—

DOROTHY: Talent.

BILLY: Talent at all and I had, at that time, believe you and me, not now. I had a very, very good voice and so I used to get away with, you know, I was always the chosen one when it came to the— I was head of the choir and I loved it.

DOROTHY: And was this when you were about fifteen, sixteen as well. Because you entered a lot of competitions and won them, didn't you?

BILLY: Oh I won them. I won every competition under the rising sun. And of course, fathers in those days, and especially my father—

[00:11:21 recording paused and restarted]

DOROTHY: Ok, carry on telling me about the competitions for singing that you were in— involved in. Because you had a beautiful voice, I hear.

BILLY: Yeah, I did, I did and I literally— I sang for the CIE [Córas Iompair Éireann, Irish Transport company] Variety Club [laughs] and I sang for competitions all over the south of Ireland. And won them. And of course, that was my claim to fame and what my father loved, you know, the fact that he could say, “well my daughter won this and my daughter won that.” He was a holy terror for that.

DOROTHY: I think I remember the Moore's Medal or something like that.

BILLY: The Moore's Medal, Thomas Moore's Medal which, you had to be a gen— have a beautiful voice to have that. But the thing is that he used to take me round the whole country and I was only a child really. And when— even when I came over to England and Daddy and Mammy had come home and we'd go to the pub and the next thing you'd hear “Billy, [noise in background] Billy, get up and sing a song.”

DOROTHY: Oh.

And that put me off singing for the rest of my life, when I was about eighteen, nineteen. I just— because as soon as I walked in the door and visitors came, “Billy, sing Danny Boy for them.” [Laughs].

DOROTHY: You were like a little performing puppet.

BILLY: Yes, yes. But it was great you know because I had a very easy time and you know, I used to, to wait— Daddy used to wait for me to come home to see if I got first, second or third and if I didn't get first, he was disappointed. That was it. When I think of it now, I think “my God Almighty.” But mind you, I sang in the choir at mass and I sang at my mother and father's funeral.

DOROTHY: I remember. But in terms of your— singing voice wasn't just good, it was exceptional, wasn't it?

BILLY: It was, I can say that without being big-headed about it, it was just beautiful. And I couldn't sing a note now.

DOROTHY: But also, the reason that you stopped was because you just felt under pressure from your father?

BILLY: Terrible pressure. I felt as if I didn't have this voice, that I wouldn't have been looked at.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: But. when I say that, every second child in Ballina, was— it was the same, it was what you could give that your father and your mother would be proud of. You know what it's like Dorothy, I mean, you were always the genius from the time you were born.

[Laughs]

BILLY: And— and he was so proud of you. He was literally— but there was that other side— but then he had had an awful hard life himself. And I can forgive anything because Ireland at that time was so hard. And he had a wonderful—

[00:14:53]

DOROTHY: Tell me what you mean about Ireland being, "it was so hard," what was hard about it?

BILLY: It was hard because there was no money. And there was all these babies coming into the world. And nothing to feed them. I mean we were lucky because by the time— Daddy was a civil servant, that's what they— that's what he was— and he was a councillor. And he was mayor of our town so he was very well respected. And that's what I cling onto all the time because I know that he was— if he'd had a chance at all, he would have— he could have been President of Ireland and that's a fact. Well, Sean T. O' Kelly, the prime minister of Ireland [Editor note: sounds like Sean Keogh Kelly on recording and Billy says 'prime

minister' but think she meant Sean T. O'Kelly, second President of Ireland] said to him one day, "Jack if you were in my place, you—" because he was giving him the address of welcome in Ballina—

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: — That time. And he said, "you would be where I am standing and I'd be standing where you're standing." You know, sort of— It was really hard and the men ruled the roost. I never— never saw a man walk down the town with his wife when she was pregnant. That was all hidden. And no man would ever be allowed into the maternity ward. There were— all the babies were nearly had been born at home. And when Maura was born that's my— that's the eldest sister— when Maura was born the doctor was called for and because she was living with my Grandmother, Granny at—

DOROTHY: Yeah

BILLY: — At that time. And she was screaming like— she didn't know where the baby was coming from I don't think, to be quite honest with you. And they had to call the doctor, Doctor Kane. And he was still— Mammy told me, he was delivering the baby upstairs in the bedroom and granny was telling— Da— Granny was with her— with the Doctor. And Granny was saying to— to Mammy, "Oh Greta, be quiet, you'll upset the men downstairs." Daddy and Uncle Ned. And— and he was delivering the baby, he had the cigarette in his mouth and the ash fell on her belly. I mean that's how horrendous it was but everybody was in the same boat.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: Everybody was in the same boat.

DOROTHY: Yeah

BILLY: And I don't know how half of them lived.

DOROTHY: Mmmm. Well I think there was a lot of mortality.

BILLY: Oh there was.

DOROTHY: Maternal mortality wasn't there?

BILLY: And there was a lot hidden. I don't know wh— If there was an illegitimate child born, they'd be found outside the hospital wrapped in swaddling clothes actually because they would be the illegitimate babies of some of the rich men in Ballina.

DOROTHY: Mmm mm.

BILLY: That's a fact that is. Because my own father told me that. Our father. So, yeah it was—

DOROTHY: So in terms of religion, the Catholic church ruled with a rod of iron you said?

BILLY: They did. They ruled with a— with a rod of iron.

DOROTHY: And did you have to go to mass every week and do the whole—?

BILLY: Oh yes. but the craic was— Daddy— Daddy hardly ever went to Mass but if we didn't marry a Catholic, or get married in the church— you know, there was all hell let loose. But— everyb— this is why there's nobody in the churches nowadays.

DOROTHY: Yeah

BILLY: But I always loved it, I always felt there was a hand over my head, all my life. Because I met some of the most wonderful priests and people that you could meet.

DOROTHY: Yeah

BILLY: I mean when— when— when Karen was pregnant—

DOROTHY: So we'll go— we'll stick with when— between fi— at home in Ireland age fifteen.

BILLY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DOROTHY: So day to day sort of— you know, when the summer holidays— how did you— how did you amuse yourselves? What was social life like and?

BILLY: Oh my god almighty. Sitting on the doorstep and running up and down, running up and down the street. There was nothing to do. And to be quite honest with you, we all had to help, it didn't matter whether it was— Well it just no matter, you know. It was the same, for me anyway— it was the same for me being at home looking after— helping Mammy with the babies. And the others would be up playing football or camogie or whatever it was. It was just the freedom. It was just the freedom.

[00:20:05]

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: But it was— there was some really— what I thought were terrible things like we never knew about having periods.

DOROTHY: No.

BILLY: Never. And I didn't know and I was fourteen when my periods started and I didn't know what was wrong with me and I thought I was bleeding to death.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: And my Uncle— my Uncle Ned had died about three weeks before that. And he had— he'd died of "bleeding kidneys" they used to call it in those days. And to think of it now, I just, oh— And my mother sorted me out but she never told me I would get it every month.

DOROTHY: Right.

BILLY: I mean—

DOROTHY: So what happened the next month, were you just as terrified or—?

BILLY: I was just— And I remember giving— giving Tommy a hiding because Tommy was hitting me and it was only because I was having my period. She wouldn't have hit him otherwise. And so the boys got it as well.

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: And years later when they used to say it to me, "Now I know why I was always getting a thump." You know. But it was— I mean it sounds like hundreds of years ago.

DOROTHY: So when you were fifteen, sixteen what did you know about sex?

BILLY: Nothing.

DOROTHY: Nothing at all?

BILLY: Nothing. I thought that the baby came out of your belly. I didn't know anything. And I remember when Eddie was born, I mean I was only— what was I? About—

DOROTHY: You were about ten or twelve.

BILLY: Something. And I loved him so much that when Mammy would go out and do a bit of shopping or go up to Mrs Clarke or something, I'd have the tin bath out. I must have bathed him about four or five times day. *[Laughs]* I just loved him, I just loved being with babies.

DOROTHY: Yeah mm.

BILLY: And I think all of us were like that. Even the boys. Had a tremendous love of babies.

DOROTHY: Just as well.

BILLY: Isn't it just as well?

DOROTHY: Just as well [laughs]. So you knew nothing about sex at fifteen?

BILLY: Nothing.

DOROTHY: When did— when did you discover what sex was all about?

BILLY: Well—

DOROTHY: When would that have been?

BILLY: On my wedding day.

DOROTHY: But did— no, but did you know about— when did you sort of know about sex, sexual intercourse, sexual relations? What— how old were you?

BILLY: Well I didn't— I— That's the one thing. Well I knew that— first of all I thought it was out of your belly it came.

DOROTHY: But how did it get in there Billy?

BILLY: Well I never thought, I mean I must've been so thick.

DOROTHY: [Laughs] Innocent.

BILLY: I just don't— But then you talk to all the girls. And— and I used to— when— when they'd tell me about the babies that were born and all of a sudden they disappeared because they were illegitimate. And they went— they were sent off to— these babies were adopted by Americans. And it was the priests that sent them over there to the women that didn't have— that couldn't have babies. And ehm—

DOROTHY: Do you think women got pregnant because they didn't know what they were in the middle of doing?

BILLY: They— They didn't have a clue. They didn't have a clue.

DOROTHY: So when did you have your first boyfriend?

BILLY: Oh. I had loads of boyfriends. My God. I'm sure—

DOROTHY: Got no idea about sex, Jesus...

BILLY: No. If a fella—Somebody said to me one day— I must have been about seventeen at the time and they said, "Oh so and so— so and so french kissed me" and I just thought it was a Fre— I said, "he's not French."

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: I had— I swear to God, Dorothy, I couldn't have been the full shilling—

DOROTHY: [Laughs] You were just innocent— ill-informed.

[00:24:12]

BILLY: Oh my God. So— And I hear my grandchildren now you know. My God they— Anna said to me, oh a few months ago, "When did you lose your virginity Granny?" And I said, "You cheeky little moo" And she said "No." I said, "well I'll tell you, I went to my— to my— when Colin and I— before we were married I remember that I was— I had a bedsit and he came in. We used to— it was all bedsits in those days— You had your own bedroom and your— And Colin came in and stayed the night and we had two separate— a single bed, the separation of the two parts of the bed for the two of us—

DOROTHY: The pillow—

BILLY: Yeah. And Josephine— I didn't even think it was— I didn't think it was terribly wrong because I wasn't doing anything. We were just hugging and kissing and— nearly— you know, hugging and kissing. The windows were not locked and led onto the street. And Josephine came over and lifted the window up, nearly died seeing me in the bed. And I said, "it's alright." I said. "I've got the pillow in between us." Well she nearly had a heart attack.

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: Because she was very innocent as well.

DOROTHY: Yeah, she was, yeah.

BILLY: She was very innocent.

DOROTHY: So going back to when your first boyfriend when you were a teenager [indec]—

BILLY: Oh, I wasn't— I don't— I must've been— I had half the boys from the school following me home from school at the age of twelve.

DOROTHY: Because you were a beautiful girl, you were a beautiful girl.

BILLY: Oh, well I don't know about that but I mean, and—

DOROTHY: So what was it like, you know, dating? And was Daddy strict? Or what was the— what was— how? Tell me a little bit about what it was like to go out dating with a boy.

BILLY: He never— Oh, I know what happened where I got another hiding. My Uncle, Daddy's brother had an illegitimate child and he was so handsome that boy. We didn't know about it, nobody knew about it. And the mother of the child went to England and the child stayed at home with the Grandmother which was very unusual.

DOROTHY: Unusual or usual?

BILLY: Unusual for them to keep the child.

DOROTHY: Right.

BILLY: And so he was raised in Ballina by his Grandmother and he was my first boyfriend. And he was so lovely he was. And I went every day I would have— you know, they'd walk behind you. Or you'd go to the cinema and it's no wonder my shoulders bad because—

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: —they'd hold your arm, you know, behind your shoulder. It's no wonder my shoulder's bad.

DOROTHY: [Laughing]

BILLY: And that's what they'd do, they wouldn't— I had— I was out with the boys, the boys followed me but they— they never dated as such because if Daddy found out he would have— But anyway— I found out that that boy— the boy that I thought I loved you know— He was sent off to England at sixteen— seventeen years of age. And I found out later that he was Uncle Paddy's son.

DOROTHY: So he would have been your first cousin?

BILLY: He would have been my first cousin.

DOROTHY: But then what happened?

BILLY: And well. He— we—

DOROTHY: When Daddy found out?

BILLY: Oh Daddy didn't know that.

DOROTHY: Okay.

BILLY: Oh mother of God he didn't know that.

DOROTHY: And how did you find out?

BILLY: I'll tell you— Mammy told me, Mammy told me. And she said, "don't tell your Father."

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: And he knew that Uncle Paddy had a son.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: An illegitimate son. As they say— said then. And oh, it was— God Almighty when I think of it really. He was so lovely. And he came over on holidays a few years later to see— I think, actually he came over to see his Grandmother, the— the woman that raised him. And he saw me and he said to me, "why don't you come back and—" because he was up north, at the north of England. "Why don't you come, why don't you come to England with me?" And I couldn't tell him that he was my cousin.

DOROTHY: You didn't know?

BILLY: No. I didn't know then.

DOROTHY: He didn't know?

BILLY: And he didn't know then. But no, I knew then because that's when Mammy got worried— got worried. In case something would happen. He was so such a lovely— What was his name? [Laughs]

DOROTHY: Oh well hmm.

BILLY: Yep but it was. It was lovely, it was just—

DOROTHY: You used to tell me as well about the dances that you went to.

BILLY: Ohhh my God.

DOROTHY: Where you'd have to sneak— Tell me a little bit about those.

BILLY: Well the dances, that was heaven to us. The fellas were one side, the girls were the other side of the hall. And the boys or young men would go up and down the row of women to see who they'd pick out.

[00:29:50 recording paused and restarted]

DOROTHY: We're going back to the dances, you said—

BILLY: Yeah, and then they'd take you out for dances and they'd walk you home. And— oh I was at every dance and went out with every fella and had a great time. But Maura was the— the Virgin Mary you know— And I said, I was at the Melody Aces and—

DOROTHY: The Melody Aces being a band?

BILLY: Being a band and I was— they lived in the north of— in— just over the border to the north of—

DOROTHY: The north of Ireland?

BILLY: Of Ireland and— where Aunt [indec] lives. And they were— they were one of the most famous bands in Ireland and when they'd come down, I'd go up and sing for them, you know. And I— Pat McGonagle, one of the fellas, he took me out. We'd stay an extra day and we'd go and have dinner and that was heaven. Jeez we'd have a meal, a good meal, you know.

And Maura came to the dance with me, Maura was too busy studying you know. And I said "come on there's a dance." And one of the fellas in the band was Italian. And he was very handsome and she said, "oh Daddy'll kill us, Daddy'll kill us for going, you know, out with these two men." Because they were men.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

[00:31:34]

BILLY: And so you know the— the alleyway—

DOROTHY: The alleyway between the two houses?

BILLY: Between the two houses. I said to Maura "come" and the two— I was the one instigating the whole lot and I used to think I was so holy Mary. But Maura was the one— she belonged to the Legion of Mary and everything else. But I was wild, I really was wild.

DOROTHY: But innocent—

BILLY: But innocent. Innocent beyond, oh my God. You'd think I was retarded really. So anyways, we went into the alleyway to have a snog.

DOROTHY: Mm. A court.

BILLY: A court, yeah. We'd have a good old snog and the next thing was our house was [claps] next to— was right— the alleyway— the house was on the right. And all of a sudden, our door opens. And Daddy must've heard somebody in the alleyway.

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: And he's going, "Billy. Billy." and Maura nearly fainted. And she said— I said "shut your mouth up, don't say anything, he won't come down the alleyway because that alleyway is supposed to be haunted."

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: And that's true, he thought that.

DOROTHY: Ohhh lovely.

BILLY: And so Maura was nearly dying. I— Mammy said I never worried about anything. I would come in at twelve o'clock at night, Daddy would think I was in bed. And if I had a date I was out.

DOROTHY: Yeah. Did any of the men ever try it on because you said you didn't know anything about sex?

BILLY: No.

DOROTHY: You didn't know what what sexual intercourse was?

BILLY: No, no.

DOROTHY: And the men never tried anything?

BILLY: Never. Never.

DOROTHY: So a different era?

BILLY: I mean french kiss as— kiss on the mouth with the gob closed.

DOROTHY: Yeah, yeah.

BILLY: No, never.

DOROTHY: And you had loads— and tell me because so— You left Ireland when you were eighteen?

BILLY: Yes exactly.

DOROTHY: You'd had all these boyfriends, left a string of broken hearts behind?

BILLY: I did, oh I did. And in fact, the fellas that came over from the— "Oh you broke my heart Billy, you broke my heart." I didn't— I mean I was really cruel. I didn't— I didn't know until years later what I was doing to them.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: There was one fella that he was German. And he said— there was a dance hall over here in Richmond and he asked me out to dance and then he said, "I'll take you home." And we were standing outside the door, we did all the courting outside the door, you know. And he was kissing and I thought to myself, ahh, yo,u know, he's going a bit funny. And he said— I said, "oh I've got to go indoors," and he said "you can't leave me like this," he sai. He was German. And I said, "like what?" And so I said, "oh what's that over there?" and I opened the door and ran in and left him to it. Yeah, I— That—

DOROTHY: So you knew something was afoot... [laughs]

BILLY: I knew something was going on.

DOROTHY: But not quite what it was [laughs]?

BILLY: But I just thought it was just— I don't know what I thought because— Nobody ever explained it to me and I knew a few girls that had— ehm, sex and, ehm—

DOROTHY: But did you know what sex was at that point?

BILLY: I did.

DOROTHY: By the time you were seventeen, eighteen?

BILLY: Yes I did. Well anything was sex, kissing was sex.

DOROTHY: Oh really?

BILLY: Yeah, oh yeah. And this girl said to me, she was an Irish girl, she said, "don't start it Billy" she said "because, if you do, you'll like it and you'll be doing it forever more."

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: And I said "Oh I won't then, I won't" you know. I mean, God Almighty.

[00:35:20]

DOROTHY: What was— what was the fear of getting pregnant? If you got pregnant in those days and you weren't married—?

BILLY: I would be shot. I would be murdered, I would be shot, literally. And yet, when I think of Karen's baby.

DOROTHY: Yep that's another story.

BILLY: Another story, yeah that was just—

DOROTHY: But in your era, in your day, as a teenager—

BILLY: Yeah, yeah and I always think— I think, even if I did, well God, [indec] it probably would kill me. But it's the way you go at things. And even though it wasn't that many years of that— how old was I when Daniel was born?

DOROTHY: You were forty-eight.

BILLY: Forty-eight, oh well I was a good age then. Because Daddy absolutely worshipped him.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: From the day he was—

DOROTHY: He did but back in the 1950s, if you had gotten pregnant, it would have been the end of your life and the end of your world.

BILLY: It would have been. It would, it would. It would have been the end of my life.

DOROTHY: Did you know anyone who got pregnant outside of marriage when you were growing up and what happened to them?

BILLY: The babies disappeared.

DOROTHY: Yeah?

BILLY: Yeah, the babies disappeared. The ones— Oh, what's her— [Name redacted]'s husband's name?

DOROTHY: [Name redacted].

BILLY: [Name redacted]—

DOROTHY: [Name redacted].

BILLY: [Name redacted] was illegitimate. And the Grandmother raised him and that's the one thing about her—

DOROTHY: Pretending that he was hers?

BILLY: No.

DOROTHY: I thought that was the situation in that often when—?

BILLY: No.

DOROTHY: No.

BILLY: No, no.

DOROTHY: Mmm mm.

BILLY: And because [name redacted] knew— I mean the whole town knew and [name redacted] told him when— when they were married— That— and he— he never knew it.

DOROTHY: Wow.

BILLY: He never knew it— [name redacted] never knew it. But it was—

D:: So—

BILLY: Exceptional mothers took on the illegitimate child.

DOROTHY: Brave.

BILLY: Very, very rare, very—

DOROTHY: But very brave and very courageous.

BILLY: —very rare. But do you know what Mammy said to me? She said—no it was Granny that said it to me, she said in the summer there would be sometimes babies wrapped in swaddling clothes and— very expensive ones— and put outside the hospital. And they were always the illegitimate children of the very rich and they were put into homes and given away to people. And—

[00:37:59]

DOROTHY: So you left Ireland when you were eighteen. Tell me the circumstances, what was— what's the story about you and your leaving?

BILLY: Oh well I— me— me doing a bunk?

DOROTHY: Tell us about that, tell us about what happened.

BILLY: Well me and one of the girls that the father— the father owned the— where you sell— make the wine— not wine but the beer and everything—

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: The Kilcullens. She was having a hard time with her with her mother and father, very much so. And she said— she said, "I'm going to leave home." I said, "I'll leave with you." And I nicked ten pound out of Daddy's drawer upstairs and I'm waiting for her and she said, "Oh I'm not going." Well I had done the— done the deed— you know. I had literally got into— on the train, the late afternoon train and got in— got into Dublin and I knew a fella [laughs] in Dublin and I knew where he lived, and he put me on the train that night to Dublin.

DOROTHY: To Dun Laoghire from—

BILLY: To Dun Laoghire, yeah. And I just arrived and I thought I— literally, I thought to myself, well now it's— I'd already taken the money, the ten quid—

DOROTHY: And what made you— why— why did you want to leave?

BILLY: I was just— I just, I just— There was something in me that just wanted to know what life was like someplace else. And also, I was fed up with the arguments and the— everything. And I just thought— Maura thought it was wonderful and God Almighty when I think of it really. [Laughs].

[00:40:06]

DOROTHY: Why did you not feel able to be open about it? Why did you have to do it quietly? What would have happened?

BILLY: I'd be battered. I'd be battered.

DOROTHY: Because you were expected to stay at home?

BILLY: I was yeah. I would have been the Old Maid sitting— sitting at home looking after the— the children and the— more than— than you, he thought you could stay and live with them—forever in their old age and look after them.

[Laughs]

BILLY: And I thought, "well, I'm — I don't want that."

[00:40:38]

DOROTHY: You arrived in London at eighteen?

BILLY: Yeah.

DOROTHY: What did you do?

BILLY: Got myself a job, oh I— the Clarks were there and—

DOROTHY: Didn't you go to St. Charles' Hospital?

BILLY: I— I went yeah but I had to wait for until the PTS— the next lot of PTS group started their PTS because they just wouldn't take you in.

DOROTHY: So you went to St. Charles' Hospital?

BILLY: Oh I went to St. Charles' Hospital but that's where Maura was—

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: And she saw the matron and she said "Well, the— the next PTS lot will be starting in about two months' time."

DOROTHY: This is for nursing?

BILLY: For nursing. And then, she— she got— she rang up the— one of the Clarks, you know Mrs Clark?

DOROTHY: Umhm.

BILLY: And they said that they'd put me up there. I— the next day I got a job in the— where was it? Ehm, oh I can't remember now funnily enough where it was but anyway I got a job and a penny for a bus ride— in those days. And then I got on PTS.

DOROTHY: So what did you think of London? When you arrived in London, the first time you'd been out of Ballina?

BILLY: I thought it was bloody beau- brilliant. I thought it was brilliant.

DOROTHY: It didn't frighten you? Overwhelm you?

BILLY: No. That's what I can't understand. I just love- and I was saying hello to everybody.

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: And I just thought it was fantastic. And I had my— the first time in my life I had my own bath and my own toilet and my own bedroom. But you couldn't, you couldn't put any make up on in those days.

DOROTHY: As a nurse—

BILLY: No, and you had to be in by eleven. And no way could you take a boyfriend in. So—

DOROTHY: So did you keep to all those rules Billy?

BILLY: Oh I did. Oh I did. Oh I was so glad that I had such a beautiful home. And such a beautiful— oh I just loved it, I just loved it. And Mammy then was expecting, who was she expecting? Who was before— who was after you?

DOROTHY: There was nobody after me.

BILLY: Oh no, there wasn't.

DOROTHY: It was me she was expecting.

BILLY: No, Liam was after you.

DOROTHY: No, Liam was before me.

BILLY: Liam was before you.

DOROTHY: I think it was she who was exp— you were— you were twenty when I was born.

BILLY: Yeah. Mm.

DOROTHY: So it might have been Liam?

BILLY: It might have— It was because Liam was a baby when Maura got married.

DOROTHY: Yes.

BILLY: And you were in her tummy.

DOROTHY: I was.

BILLY: Yeah. And Daddy brought over salmon for the nurses and—

DOROTHY: So when you left, I mean you did a bunk and you went to London, what was Daddy and Mammy's reaction when they found out?

BILLY: Oh, I remember the letter I wrote them. Mammy sent me nearly all her clothes.

DOROTHY: Aww.

BILLY: She did. And because I had only one change of clothes. And she sent it straight away. And I said to Daddy, "I'll make you proud of me Daddy" you know, in the letter. And always— because I was always putting myself up against Maura because Maura was so clever. And— and I went home on holidays for the Christmas. And he was brilliant.

DOROTHY: He didn't, didn't ehm—?

BILLY: No. No. And in fact, I mean, I had very little money, I— you know when you're— even, as long as I had food and I had a home, what was it? It was about £9 a month we were paid but we were fed there, you know.

DOROTHY: You had your accommodation.

BILLY: We had our accommodation. And we had great food— oh three meals a day. We had breakfast, dinner and supper. And that's all I was interested in. And the fellas if I— if we ever went out with fellas, they always paid. Always in those days. I mean now, you know, [laughs]

DOROTHY: Now it's not like that [Laughs]

BILLY: It's different, yeah.

DOROTHY: So tell us about what was it— what was it like to be a young nurse in those days when you started your training? How— what did you think about nursing?

BILLY: Oh I thought it was— I thought it was lovely. I found it very, very hard though. I found it very, very hard. And Mammy was expecting you. And I thought— then I saw Mario, you know Mario that had the c—

DOROTHY: Cafe in Kew?

BILLY: Yeah. I said to Mario, "could I work— work for you at the weekend?" I was working seven days a week. And then somebody offered me a job. Who was it? In Kew. And so I worked all five days for him— for them. And I used to do Mario's at the weekend.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: And then I could send some money home to Mammy. Yeah.

DOROTHY: So, when did you leave, you left nursing didn't you?

BILLY: Yeah.

DOROTHY: And then you went to work with Mario then [indec]

BILLY: Yeah.

DOROTHY: Who was an absolute sweetheart, wasn't he?

BILLY: Oh he's— he's Karen's godfather.

DOROTHY: So he was an Italian— Italian immigrant wasn't he?

BILLY: Yeah. And his wife was lovely as well?

DOROTHY: Mm yeah.

BILLY: Yeah, they were lovely.

DOROTHY: What did you get a sense of the way Irish people and Italian people or immigrants were treated in those days in the '50s?

BILLY: The same as the Irish.

DOROTHY: In what way?

BILLY: Well, they were as thought of as just illiterate gobshites really [laughs].

DOROTHY: Was that what the attitude was towards Irish people then?

BILLY: Yeah oh my, there was big massive things—

DOROTHY: Signs?

BILLY: That size to put, hang up on the windows—

DOROTHY: Mmm.

BILLY: "No Blacks, No Irish and No Children."

DOROTHY: No dogs.

BILLY: Or no dogs. Yeah.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: But it was the West Indians were the— and the Irish, were the first lot of nurses—

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: To start there. And it was the first time I'd ever seen a black person. And they were lovely. They were so lovely. Great sense of humour, brilliant. Well they care and they— the Irishmen, some of the men that came over were illiterate. And Bohola, remember Daddy was telling you about Bohola?

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: The smallest little town in Mayo. And within ten years— ten, fifteen years, there was five millionaires living there.

DOROTHY: That had come from there, yeah.

BILLY: That had come from Ireland. And in fact, they're the ones that made all the roads and everything else.

DOROTHY: Yeah, yeah.

BILLY: In— in England. And they sent their children to school and universities. And educated their children.

DOROTHY: So who were your friends at that time? Where were your friends, who were they—?

BILLY: They were always very wealthy, funnily enough.

[Laughs]

BILLY: They were. I don't know why.

DOROTHY: How did you meet them? Was it through nursing or how?

BILLY: Dancing. Oh dancing. I could dance every night.

DOROTHY: And did you? [Laughs]

BILLY: Oh I did if I had somebody to pay for me to get in [laughs].

[Laughs]

BILLY: I literally love dancing. And ehm—

DOROTHY: What was it like in comparison to the dances in Ballina?

BILLY: Oh no they were very, very sweet, the men were— And very cultured and lovely.

DOROTHY: Now I know before you got married— and you got married at twenty-six,

BILLY: Yeah I was— it's the day after twenty-six. After I was twenty—

DOROTHY: I know you were engaged a handful of times.

BILLY: Oh I was.

DOROTHY: Tell me about those engagements [laughs].

BILLY: Oh. Ehm, what's his name? What's— what's the fella, the first fella I was engaged— the first fella I was engaged to? I was at the hospital. And then his friend fancied me so I said "No, no no." I said, "I'm leaving nursing," and I was engaged to him. And then, what the hell was his name? I'll think of it now as I'm talking— He was— his family were lovely, they were third generation Irish. And Terry Driscoll.

[00:50:00]

DOROTHY: Terry Driscoll.

BILLY: Terry Driscoll. And he was very, very clever. And he was— he was going to— we got engaged, and there was no hanky-panky there either. Not even a bed. He was a love— his family were lovely. And I used to go over there every weekend. I used to go over to his house— his flat where he lived with his mother and his father and his brother. And I used to stay overnight with them but I slept with the mother. [Laughs].

DOROTHY: Did you? [Laughs]

BILLY: I did.

DOROTHY: There was no hanky-panky going to happen there.

BILLY: I did. And, and the brother moved in with— because I would— the father and the son, other son left— slept together bec— Oh there was— Oh and I used to go to Mass every Sunday there, you know. And— and they'd...Even if I thought I was tired and I thought "Oh God I don't want to have to go to Mass today" I would never miss it, never miss it and he'd pick me up afterwards. And then he said to me "I've got a wonderful job over in—" what part of Africa? Where—

DOROTHY: It was Africa wasn't it, yeah?

BILLY: It was Africa and he was going over there teaching. And he said "We'll have— We'll get married before we go there." And all of a sudden I got— oh I got the nerves. I couldn't leave home, oh I got the nerves.

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: And I had visions of Africa, somebody eating me, you know.

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: And I said to— I said to Daddy— I mean I had great times with Daddy and awful times with Daddy. And I said— I was home on me holidays and I said to Daddy, "Terry Driscoll has asked me to marry him." And he said, "And he's got a job a very good job teaching in Africa." And I said, "Can you take me down to the church I want to say a prayer." Oh God when I think of it really. I was telling Father from Kew— Hillary, and he was killing himself laughing. And I was down there praying like anything. You know, what should I do? What should I do? And I came out and I said to Daddy, "I can't, I can't marry him. I just can't marry him." And I had to go ba— He was in Africa at the time and then he was going to come home and marry me. And I had to write to him and the day that he came back was the day I met Colin.

DOROTHY: Ahhh. Your husband to be.

BILLY: My husband to be.

DOROTHY: But you were engaged to somebody else as well in the meantime?

BILLY: Oh I was. Now, who was that now?

[Laughs]

BILLY: [Laughs] Let me see...

DOROTHY: How many engagements, you had two engagements before you got married didn't you or was it three?

BILLY: Three.

DOROTHY: Three.

BILLY: Three.

DOROTHY: That's what I thought. Where are the other two then?

BILLY: Oh. When— when I was nursing as well, there was another one. There was two. I just thought it was lovely having a ring on your finger.

DOROTHY: [Laughs] Jesus.

BILLY: I re— I must've been a raving lunatic and I thought I was great and—

DOROTHY: So tell me about the other two.

BILLY: He was— where did I— I met him actually at the— when I was nursing but I left nursing as well. And because Terry Driscoll came back and begged me to marry him and said you know "We'll have a great life; we'd have a great life." And I thought I can't. I said, "I can't." And the day that he came home on his holidays, Terry, that was the date I had the first date with Mitchell.

DOROTHY: Yeah your husband to be.

BILLY: Yeah and—

So why did you break up with the other two fiancés that you had?

DOROTHY: I don't know. I— I think I just liked the idea of a—

DOROTHY: Being engaged?

BILLY: But some of them I even sent home to Ireland to ask Daddy for— for permission.

DOROTHY: Really? [Laughs]

BILLY: Yes.

[00:54:50]

DOROTHY: So you don't remember them as much? The other two. Terry you do but the other two you don't—

BILLY: Terry, yeah, yeah.

DOROTHY: —*remember so much.*

BILLY: But what the— Oh the other was— yeah, I was definitely nursing at this stage. In fact, he was a patient. He was a patient. And we got engaged and anyway when that broke up, I was in— you know the hotel in Kew?

DOROTHY: *Yeah.*

BILLY: Didn't— didn't he turn up with his mother, not his mother, his— mother or father. They were back from— no Ter— Col— it was Colin's parents I was going out with Colin at that time. And Colin's parents came back from where they lived abroad for years. And I thought to myself, "oh my god," and I had the— Terry Driscoll had come home from Africa— And so I had the two of them.

DOROTHY: *In the same place*

BILLY: In the same place at the same time.

DOROTHY: *Oh dear.*

BILLY: So— but anyway. And he was nice as well. They were all lovely. And I had to marry the lunatic that I did.

DOROTHY: *So how old were you when you met Colin, about twenty-four? Twenty-five?*

BILLY: Twenty-four.

DOROTHY: *Mm— and how did you meet him?*

BILLY: I met him working for Mario at the weekend. And he used to sit there for the whole day just watching me. I sounded a right little floosy didn't I? And yeah. He had that— because I loved redheads, I just was mad— I wanted a redhead baby as well. When I got— got married and as soon as it came out, "what colour hair has it?" I— it was absolutely beautiful. And his family were very, very wealthy and he had a private education and he went to the same school as some famous actor over here. And the family were very wealthy. But I didn't like her and she didn't like me.

DOROTHY: The mother?

BILLY: No, she said to— when he— when he told her that he'd— when she was home from holidays and that he was going to marry me. He said— but don't change her religion— don't change to her religion. And so the next day I said to Colin, "Right, down to see the priest, you're going to become Catholic."

DOROTHY: And he did.

BILLY: And he did.

[Both laugh]

DOROTHY: So what was different about Colin to the other three fiancés?

BILLY: I don't know. I thought, thought he was just beautiful. You know and he was, he was just lovely. Oh God Almighty, I must've been really— And he was— he was— everybody loved him. That was the thing and— because Ella still says to me to this day, "Did you have to divorce him?" I said, "well you could have had him." I literally, I— twice I gave him— you know, a chance. But the third time I couldn't cope.

DOROTHY: So when you when you first started going out—

BILLY: Mmm.

DOROTHY: There was something obviously that you felt differently towards him than you did to the other three that you gave the boot to.

BILLY: Oh yeah definitely. I absolutely, genuinely— And he used to say to me "when the— Billy when the children are grown up," he said, "I'm going to take you round the world" because he was so well travelled.

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: And I said "Oh I don't know I couldn't leave my children," you know? And he said "Oh no it's when they're grown up."

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: Oh my god now I know. Ehm— but it was— it was terribly sad. Because everybody said "you'll never divorce him." But my children were far too precious to me, more than him.

DOROTHY: So that's a tale for another day.

BILLY: Yeah.

DOROTHY: So when you were going out with Colin and when you married him?

BILLY: Yeah.

DOROTHY: It would have been in 19— the '60s wouldn't it? '65? '66? Because I was your bridesmaid.

BILLY: You were, weren't you? Oh you were a beautiful bridesmaid. You were a little doll.

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

[00:59:39]

BILLY: When did I?— see I'm— how I— How I forg—

DOROTHY: '64 I think was it?

BILLY: '64.

DOROTHY: Because you were born— yeah because you would have been, that would have been twenty-six then.

BILLY: Yeah. I was twenty-six on the— the day, I was twenty-six the day after.

DOROTHY: So, you were still twenty-five— just about. What was London like then? The [indec], was it had it hit the swinging sixties by then or—?

BILLY: Oh yes, and I had the skinniest legs. And I was— I was mortified because my legs were so skinny and everybody had the skirts right up, you could see their backsides. And—

and they just said "skinny legs, skinny legs." And I thought, if I get hold of one of them, I'll skinny legs them. But yeah, it was mad. But I was never mad—

DOROTHY: The sexual revolution didn't— you were still a virgin?

BILLY: No. Yeah. No, I mean I was literally—

DOROTHY: A virgin on your wedding night.

BILLY: Oh, oh the— went to bed with the nightdress on and the knickers on and the bra on. And— oh I did. I— I— I was telling An—

DOROTHY: Did you— did you understand what— you know, I mean this is 1964 Billy?

BILLY: Yeah.

DOROTHY: This— this was—

BILLY: I know.

DOROTHY: This was the swinging '60s.

BILLY: Yep.

DOROTHY: The whole bit— you've been living over in England for six years.

BILLY: Yeah, yeah.

DOROTHY: And you were still as innocent as anything.

BILLY: Well I wasn't—

DOROTHY: Despite the fact you've been engaged three times.

BILLY: I wasn't innocent.

DOROTHY: You knew about sex then?

BILLY: I knew about sex then but it was this fear and of course I had to wait until I was— I had four children and I said to Colin, "we've got to do something about this, I can't have four children in four years, nearly five years." And I said, "I can't have a chi— can't go on, I don't want to end up like my Mum," even though I loved children. But I knew then that Colin wasn't as—you know—

DOROTHY: Reliable.

BILLY: Reliable as he should be. And I thought what oh— so he said, "well, we'll use the condom." And I thought— oh, I'm getting a pain in my stomach now thinking about it— So anyway, we went to bed that— we went to bed— I shouldn't be saying this really—

DOROTHY: Go for it.

BILLY: It's the kids. But the kids all know it.

DOROTHY: Yes.

BILLY: Ehm, ehm— we went to bed that night and he's fum— fumbling with something— you know and we started making— you know, making love and I said to him, "oh it's different, it's different." He said, "Billy I haven't put it on yet." Now that's how stupid I was. That's how— and I told that to Anna. And Anna said to me, "well Nanny I wouldn't marry a man unless I tried him out."

DOROTHY: Mmm, this is your granddaughter of eighteen?

BILLY: Yeah, yeah. And she said, "Oh God no, and I wouldn't— I wouldn't marry a man unless I'd lived with him." Yeah.

DOROTHY: And what do you think about that?

BILLY: Oh, I think it's the most— the one that started it was Sean. He was with the Swedish girl— yeah Swedish, wasn't it Swedish, the Swedish girl he was—

DOROTHY: Yes.

BILLY: —With. And he was living over— living over in Sweden. And she was— she was a lovely girl and he always came over for Christmas Day every year that he was there but she stayed at home because they celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve. And then she came home— over here to me the day after. And they were— but they had been living together over in Sweden for a year or two. And— but—

DOROTHY: But—

BILLY: — had never slept at my house.

DOROTHY: Thinking about your upbringing and thinking about you saying that if when you were a youngster that you'd— if you'd gotten pregnant you would have been shot—

BILLY: I would—

DOROTHY: — and over the next forty years—

BILLY: I—

DOROTHY: But what are your—?

BILLY: I would have been— I would have been murdered and they would say "she's gone to America."

DOROTHY: But you— you feel that the way it is now in terms of the openness about sex and sexuality and relationships is healthier, do you?

BILLY: Oh God yes. I'm the one that was an— an eejit. But I was terrified.

DOROTHY: Of getting pregnant?

BILLY: Oh yeah.

DOROTHY: That was the fear?

BILLY: That's the only thing.

DOROTHY: That was the ultimate fear?

BILLY: That was the only thing. If I felt anything— thing [laughs]—

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: To the trousers or anything like that, I was backing off like anything.

DOROTHY: Mmm, mm.

BILLY: Yeah. Ah it was terrible.

DOROTHY: So did you miss out?

BILLY: Ah but Maura was the same. Maura didn't have sex before she was married— near it. Ehm— but ehm— and I think because she got pregnant the night she got married. Yeah.

*DOROTHY: Yeah. So she didn't go to bed with her nightdress, her knickers and her bra on?
[Laughs]*

BILLY: Oh no, I had the whole lot on. And Anna, what— she said, "oh Nanny you're—" And then I start— I'd forgotten I'd told her and she said "Nan, you've told me that fifty times if you have told me once." So I said, "we'll know that you'll be alright then." So yeah, oh God yes. And it's so— because when I was married, I think Colin was— I had nothing to compare him to but from what I'd heard from friends and girls that had had sex before and after marriage, he was a great lover. He— and he was kind and he was gentle and he was— he was lovely.

DOROTHY: Well that's great. Mmm mm.

[01:05:29]

BILLY: So I haven't had a bad—

DOROTHY: Because men when you were growing up in Ireland, you mentioned earlier, they ruled the roost and—

BILLY: They ruled the— the women, they would not be allowed outside the door with their husbands if they were pregnant. They stayed in or they'd go down with the grannies — you know. Because the grannies nearly always lived with the— with the some— with one of the children.

DOROTHY: And— and— and sort of leaping back a bit, boys were treated a lot differently to girls growing up as well, weren't they?

BILLY: Oh yes. Oh my God yes. And my fath— Daddy just adored— the only—

DOROTHY: Wasn't there something about the girls having to polish the shoes for the boys and things?

BILLY: Oh, you had to give them their dinner never mind— they got first go of the dinner. Oh God.

DOROTHY: How did you feel about that at the time?

BILLY: But it was all natural. Daddy had the first— you know with the— there was always a massive big pot put on the table. Daddy was the first to get his, then the boys, and then Mammy and then the girls. Yeah. But Granny was a wonderful, wonder— Ah Dorothy you would have loved her. You would have loved her, she was so— And she was— her husband— you see, I literally don't blame any anybody for anything because nobody knows what it was like in Ireland at that time. My Grandmother left her husband all those years ago.

DOROTHY: Because she would have born in about eighteen—?

BILLY: eighteen—

DOROTHY: —eighty.

BILLY: Yes.

DOROTHY: Roughly. Yeah.

BILLY: Yeah. And she left her husb— my gr— grandfather.

DOROTHY: Our grandfather.

BILLY: And she—

DOROTHY: And why did she leave him?

BILLY: Because he was cruel. He'd be— fought. But then, he'd fought in the Boer War and he was terribly damaged. You see, you have to think about these things and she was— her— when she got married her husband, our— our great grandfather— her brother— they were living in Ballina instead of— she came to live in— not out of Belmullet to Ballina [in county Mayo]. And she was— what was she? Well, whatever age she was but he used to knock her around. And I found out later about him, you know, years and years— when I was a grown woman— that he was in the Boer War and he was really damaged. And so she— she left, she had the guts. Imagine granny having the guts in those days to leave— and she went out to Belmullet, daddy was a baby in her arms and it was the winter. Aunty May was a year and a half or something like that and she lived with her mother in a little house that was— you know, had about two beds in it and everybody slept in in those beds. And she used to work— she used to walk in from just outside Belmullet every month and— with tea and big kettle. And make tea for the people that were at the— getting the food, you know, from the— from the farmers. And— but then when she was expecting daddy, was it dad? Yeah. Ehm, she couldn't have three children to look to look after in her mother's house and so she had to go back but she had the bishop and the priest knocking on the door saying, "get back to your husband."

DOROTHY: Really?

BILLY: And she wouldn't. It wasn't until its— he went— he went back— to smooth— you know, to cajole her and daddy was born and there was no way she could ask her mother to have her three children. So she had to go back.

DOROTHY: Ah sure tough woman—

[01:10:20]

BILLY: She was brilliant. She was absolutely brilliant. Ah but it was such a hard life, it was such a really, really hard life. And I remember daddy taking us out to Belmullet because daddy was the first Post Office man to have the— the first van. He drove the first van that was ever brought into Ballina. And he took us all out to Belmullet and he had— whoever he met in Belmullet and where he was drinking. And he took us all in the back of the van— and took— we went out to Ballymullet with him sober, and he was langered by the time he got back in the car. And he said— I said, "daddy will you stop the car or drive it slowly." And he— "because you're— you've had a few drinks you know." And he said, "no, I'm not." He said, "I'm going from pole to pole."

DOROTHY: Oh Jesus.

BILLY: And I said, "daddy, the pole is in the— in— in the—," what do you call it?

DOROTHY: In the middle of the field.

BILLY: In the middle of the field. He was in the middle of the bloody field.

DOROTHY: I remember you telling that story.

BILLY: And Granny was there— and poor Granny. The age she was then. Well, she was an old woman at thirty she was and oh my God almighty. It's all— it's all coming back now. I've forgotten an awful lot of it but I— I can remember a lot as well. And I can only think now, God it was great. [Laughs].

DOROTHY: [Laughs] You've got a nice sort of rosy glow when you look back rather than a bleak look. Because your childhood wasn't easy.

BILLY: It wasn't, oh it wasn't. It wasn't. But the boys were just treasured by my mother and father.

DOROTHY: Did you feel that you were—

BILLY: No.

DOROTHY: Lesser? No?

BILLY: No, no, no, no. I just thought I was wonderful.

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: I did, I really and truly did.

DOROTHY: And where did you think that came from? Because that must have come externally as well, mustn't it?

BILLY: Yeah.

DOROTHY: So where— so where do you think that came from that you thought—?

BILLY: I don't know.

DOROTHY: Were you told? Did Daddy tell you?

BILLY: No.

DOROTHY: Or Mammy tell you?

BILLY: Daddy always told me I— I used to see Daddy up at the Post Office when he was going to deliver the— he'd be outside the Post Office for— for the evening post. And I used to run from the technic at the school all the way up King— King Street. And he'd be there with his arms open. And I'd jump on him. And— and— and he was always very proud of my singing and you see, everybody loves to be loved. And everybody loves to be made a fuss of— And— and— but we had like the time that he tried to run after me—

DOROTHY: Mmm. How old were you?

BILLY: — to give a good hiding to. I was about seventeen.

DOROTHY: Tell us about that.

BILLY: Well, whatever I did, he wanted— he wanted to get hold of me and give me a clout and I start running and you know the old road?

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: I was running out the old road and I got out the old road before— about two minutes before he started following me and I was— had— you know because I was so tiny and so thin, I had great— I could run like anything. And he's running behind me, "Billy get back here. Billy get back here." And I was saying, "Dear God, dear God, please help me, please help me. Let him have a heart attack."

DOROTHY: [Laughs]

BILLY: "Let him have a heart attack." I did. I've told that to more people and I did.

DOROTHY: But he never caught you?

BILLY: He never caught me. He never caught me to give me a hiding. And I could tell him anything and I was very good to him as well. I was— I was— I was very good to him. And I was very good to Mammy.

[00:14:32]

DOROTHY: Wasn't there a story about you going to a dance with one fella and leaving—?

BILLY: Coming home with the others?

DOROTHY: Tell us about that one.

BILLY: Daddy nearly killed me.

DOROTHY: I know. [Laughs]

BILLY: Oh but he never got hold of me.

DOROTHY: What happened?

BILLY: Well I went out with this fella and I forget his name as well. Jeez, if I could remember all their names, I'd be a millionaire. He was— came home from England. He was from a family that were a very handsome family and he took me to the dance. And I met

somebody that was better looking and I just said to him, "come on, let's go." And he came looking for me and that's the first—

DOROTHY: The next— Daddy came looking for you the next day.

BILLY: Yeah.

DOROTHY: Because he'd heard.

BILLY: Bec— yeah. And because if this— this fella had caught me, he would have given me a clout.

DOROTHY: The guy that you left behind?

BILLY: Yeah.

DOROTHY: The guy you stranded?

BILLY: Yeah, yeah. And so Daddy— and that's when I got a clout from Daddy as well. Because that was a terrible thing, you'd be a floozie. You know— A right floozie. And ehm—

DOROTHY: So you went to the dance with one fella?

BILLY: And came home with the other.

DOROTHY: [indec]. And Daddy found out about it?

BILLY: Yeah and came—

DOROTHY: And came to find you the next day?

BILLY: Find me, yeah.

DOROTHY: Was it when you were working in Woolworths or something?

BILLY: I was working in Woolworths. But he didn't get me, I mean he got me outside but I started running—

DOROTHY: [Laughs] you spent your life running.

BILLY: I spent my whole life running. But honest to God, I look back on it, do you know and laugh about it?

DOROTHY: Mmm. You always said you were a bit of a wild child.

BILLY: I was, the wildest.

DOROTHY: You loved being out.

BILLY: I was the wildest in the whole family.

DOROTHY: Mmm. But wildest in a very tame way as well.

BILLY: Oh yeah, I mean—

DOROTHY: You were never, never naughty.

BILLY: Oh no, no, no.

DOROTHY: But wild insofar as you didn't stick to the rules?

BILLY: And the funny thing is— once I got married, I was as calm— I mean I just loved being married, loved the children. And I never wanted anything else. But I got it all out of my system [laughs] the day I was born. And even to this day I— you know, I would never, you know, sort of be naughty or anything like that. I just— my children were my life. And if it wasn't— you know, and— and my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren. I just— I don't know, I was just a one-off and Granny lov— adored me because she knew that I was a wi— and that I had the guts.

DOROTHY: It was it was very brave to do what you did.

BILLY: Yeah. Oh my God.

DOROTHY: Against a very strict Father.

BILLY: Oh my God, yeah. God almighty and poor Mammy she suffered at the—

DOROTHY: You used to—you used to sneak out to dances when you were a teenager as well, didn't you?

BILLY: Yeah, you name it, I did it.

[Laughs]

BILLY: Except nookie.

DOROTHY: Except sex. [Laughs]

BILLY: Except nookie, nookie. Yeah and everybody used to say, "when is Billy getting married? When is Billy getting married?" And I wasn't a bit interested, I was having such a wonderful time. Here and over there. Oh, when I think about it, my life seems to have flown by and I'm still flirting today.

DOROTHY: I know you're a flirty Gerty. Mmm

BILLY: I know.

DOROTHY: The young priest [laughs]—

BILLY: Oh the—I'll never forget **Father Hillary, God adore him, chase me round and Rose Blackman, but he wasn't chasing Rose or another women that was— she's dead now. And Mo, and Mo Walker.** And ehm— chasing me round out at Windsor, he took us to dinner. He was such a good person. I mean he was a very, very good person and chased me round the g— chased me round the garden, chased me round Windsor Park.

DOROTHY: Mm. Why?

BILLY: Just to give me a clout.

DOROTHY: A clout?

BILLY: Well no, a smack, you know.

DOROTHY: Why?

BILLY: Because, well I said something to— oh yeah. I had a car that I used to drive and it wasn't insured or anything else. And another priest, one of the priests that was going back to Africa gave it to me. And— but that was insured at that time and everything else. And I— I never insured anything. My goodness even I think of it now. If the kids did that, I'd kill them. And I said to Hillary— he was sitting in the front with me, and **Mo and Rose Blackman** were in the back. And I said to him— you used to have cars that had— you could flick them, you know—

DOROTHY: Little indicator to come out—

BILLY: To get to go— indicator, yeah. And I said, "don't touch the— don't touch indicators and don't close the window, just leave it open." And we got into the car and I started driving and I said, "Hillary put your hand out the left— Mo put your hand out the right when you have to indicate because the indicators don't work." And he nearly went mad and he closed the window and I couldn't get the window open then. But it was opened about that much. And he— he said, "how are we going to get out? How are we going to get out?" And there was— who was left outside? We were all outside. But we had— one of them had closed the— Hillary had closed the— we couldn't get in. And he said, "let's go to the hotel out there." And he said "ask them to ask the police to come to open." I said "I can't. I'm not insured, I'm not this, I'm nothing."

DOROTHY: when he chased you?

BILLY: And that's when he chased me.

DOROTHY: To give you a belt [laughs].

BILLY: And, honest to God— But he was—

DOROTHY: Billy you have to have your lunch love—

BILLY: Yeah, but also as well he was so good to Karen—

DOROTHY: Yeah.

BILLY: He was so— he was a good man.

END [01:21:00]