

<b>ÚnaGanAGúna Interview Summary Sheet</b>	
<b>Ref No: 0UNA-U1X0008</b>	
<b>Collection Title:</b> ÚnaGanAGúna Phase 1	
<b>Interviewee's Surname</b> Lucey	<b>Interviewee's Title</b> Ms
<b>Interviewee's First Name(s)</b> Helen	<b>Interviewee's Gender</b> Female
<b>Occupation</b> Homeopath, previously academic	<b>Interviewee's Date of Birth</b> 15.06.1959
<b>Mother's occupation</b> Dinner Lady/ teaching assistant	<b>Father's occupation</b> Semi-skilled Factory worker/ Tyre builder
<b>Date(s) of recording:</b> 28.02.2019	
<b>Location of interview:</b> Telephone	
<b>Name of interviewer:</b> Ruth Beecher (introduced to Helen through mutual friend)	
<b>Type of recorder</b> Marantz PDM 661	
<b>Total number of tracks</b> 1	<b>Recording format</b> Format 48 kHz, 32 bit.
<b>Mono</b>	<b>Total duration</b> 01:39:31
<b>Additional material (e.g. photos, documents)</b>	
<b>Copyright/ clearance</b> Consent received in Oct 2018 and e-copy saved.	
<b>Interviewer's comments</b> This was the second interview with Helen. The first one was a QuickTime recording which failed.	

[Start 00:00]

*Ruth: So I'm going to start recording now. So just for the purposes of the recording, it's February 28th, it's 2019, my name is Ruth Beecher and I'm interviewing Helen Lucey.*

Helen: Hi.

*Ruth: So, good morning Helen*

Helen: Morning, hi.

*Ruth: It is absolutely lovely to talk to you again.*

Helen: Yeah, and you, yeah.

*Ruth: And you've signed all the consent and everything, so we don't need— we don't need to do that, we've talked through all of the sort of guidance around the interview etc. Can I ask you a few questions I didn't ask you before, what's your title? Are you a Ms, or a Mrs, or a Dr, how do you like to be addressed? Can you hear me? Can you hear me?*

Helen: No. I can just hear you now. Did something go wrong there?

*Ruth: No, nothing happened on this side. Oh, you're breaking up so let's hope it kind so fixes itself. Yeah, I didn't hear your answer sorry, did you want to be called Ms, Miss, Mrs?*

Helen: Yeah, no. Well, my title has changed because when I was an academic, I was Dr Helen Lucey so that took care of that, but since I've become a homeopath I won't be— I can't use my Dr title because people will assume that I'm a medical doctor—

*Ruth: Ah.*

Helen: So it wouldn't be ethical for me. I don't use Dr at all now which is really interesting. It's something that I had to give up.

*Ruth: Ah.*

Helen: That's quite a big identity thing.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: Yeah, so that's a bit weird. Because I'm married but I never took my husband's name. That's really weird. Because the Dr thing just bypassed everything.

*Ruth: Yeah and everyone's claiming their Drs now, aren't they, women on— There was that Twitter strand about claiming your “doctor.”*

Helen: Oh really?

*Ruth: Yeah, it was called immodest women, #immodestwomen and it was about women using their Dr— to be proud of it, if you see what I mean?*

Helen: Oh, women with doctorates?

*Ruth: Yeah, yeah. If you have a doctorate, to use, to call yourself Dr, you know.*

Helen: Absolutely, I did. Definitely, when I was an academic, fucking hell I worked hard enough for it, you know.

*Ruth: Exactly, yeah, so do you want me to put you down as Ms on this thing?*

Helen: I'm just Ms now.

*Ruth: Ok, great. And your occupation now is homeopath?*

Helen: Homeopath, yeah.

*Ruth: And shall I put previously academic?*

Helen: Yeah.

[00:02:36]

*Ruth: And what's your— what were your mum and dad's occupations?*

Helen: My mum, ehm— well, my dad was a factory worker, he was a tyre-builder, he worked in a tyre factory, Firestones in West London and so he was— I suppose you'd call him semi-skilled factory worker. And my mum started off as a dinner lady but then— in a college in West London, Twickenham, but she actually managed to kind of by a series of happy accidents, end up as a teaching assistant. Yeah, in the special needs department there, but she didn't have any qualifications or training or anything. It was a series of happy kind of accidents. And she did that until she— yeah she didn't retire until she was about, Oh God, I don't know, probably 78.

*Ruth: Oh wow, that was fantastic, wasn't it? Fantastic going.*

Helen: Yeah. They had to drag her out really.

*Ruth: Did they? So she loved it, she loved the work?*

Helen: She really loved it, yeah.

[00:03:48]

*Ruth: Ok, well shall we go back and think about your connection to Ireland and starting with where your mum and dad were from perhaps?*

Helen: Yes, sure, yeah. So my Dad was from Cork, in a tiny— he lived in a— they were farmers obviously, in a place between Kealkil, which is, say he was about ten miles from Bantry.

*Ruth: Ok.*

Helen: But I don't know, he was kind of in between a little village called Kealkil and Goughan Barra.

*Ruth: Oh, it's beautiful down there.*

Helen: That area down there. Yeah, so he was one of twelve I think and they kind of lived up on the side of the mountain, very kind of rough area, you know, rough landscape. And my mum was from Mayo, near Tuam, and she was one of six and they were dairy farmers also. Yeah, very poor, you know what it was like back then. Yeah, so that was it.

*Ruth: And when would they have been born?*

Helen: I think my mum was born in 1921.

*Ruth: Right.*

Helen: And my dad eight years before [1913].

[00:05:16]

*Ruth: Right, yeah, ok. And where did they meet?*

Helen: They met in London during the war. So my dad was on leave from the Navy at that time. He had quite a complicated war history because he actually went and joined up to fight as a volunteer in the Finno-Russian War, which I think was just at the— just before war broke out.

*Ruth: Ah, what, the late, late thirties?*

Helen: Probably late '38, beginning of '39, something like that. And ehm yeah, there was a few hundred volunteers from the UK that signed up to go over, to fight the good cause. But to be honest, I think my dad just wanted to fight to be honest.

*Ruth: Umhm.*

Helen: Yeah, and he became a prisoner of war, became a German prisoner of war, but it's very complicated. Anyway, eventually they let them all go [laughs] and he joined the navy and it was on leave from that during the war that he met my mum. And that was towards the end of the war, that would have been 1944 probably.

*Ruth: Umhm. In London?*

Helen: Yeah. At the Garryowen.

*Ruth: Ahh.*

Helen: Of course.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: Yeah, they met at the Garryowen in Kilburn.

*Ruth: So they used to socialise there, go to the dances?*

Helen: Yeah, they did, yeah. And she lived in West London actually, in Brentford so she used to go to any— all the dances all over the place, she had a great time. She loved the war.

*Ruth: Umhm. And what was she doing in London? Your dad was— had signed up to the navy and your mum?*

Helen: She was— she worked in a munitions factory first of all in Brentford. So you know West London, there was a lot of factories along that Great West Road there.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: Yeah, do you know it? Where do you live Ruth?

*Ruth: I live in South London but yeah, but you still see the kind of refurbished versions of those now, don't you as you drive out?*

Helen: You do, yeah, yeah. So, so there was a lot of big factories along there and she worked in a munitions factory for a while and then somewhere else. So she was kind of recruited, you know they were recruiting in Ireland.

*Ruth: Oh really, were they, yeah?*

Helen: Yeah, because all the men were going off and women were filling the posts but there weren't enough of them, you know, so they— my mum jumped at the opportunity to get away from her mother basically, and came over when she was about twenty-one.

*Ruth: Umhm.*

[00:08:08]

Helen: And she lived in digs, you know, she had a great old time. And then she— until she got— she came down with TB.

*Ruth: Oh.*

Helen: Yeah, because she was like burning the candle at both ends.

*Ruth: Yes, and that was before she met your dad, when she was still single?*

Helen: Yes, yeah.

*Ruth: And did she stay in London with the TB or did she go back?*

Helen: She didn't— well they didn't expect her to live to be honest.

*Ruth: Oh wow.*

Helen: Yeah, not many people lived through it. So she went to West Middlesex Hospital and basically you know I think she was sort of too young and silly to understand that she was dying. And she managed not to but people died every night in the ward.

*Ruth: Oh gosh, how horrendous.*

Helen: Yeah. No, she was there for about six months. And they— she got pulled in because she collapsed at a bus stop on the way to work. After, you know, dancing all night sort of thing through the air raids [laughs] and everything. And they pulled her in and said, “oh my God you know,” and yeah. So she managed to pull through that, which is pretty amazing. And she never really had any— you know, kind of problems with her lungs or anything. Yeah, so it was— And oh yeah, that's right, she'd met my dad before she got the TB, that's right, because when she was in hospital, he stayed very faithful to her and he used to send her his chocolate ration.

*Ruth: Oh, how sweet.*

Helen: How romantic, eh?

*Ruth: Yeah, very romantic.*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, there are pictures of him, you know in the snow in Sweden and places with these kind of very formal notes to her, while she was dying in hospital, so it was obviously, you know, quite a big romance.

*Ruth: A very big romance and your mum's determination obviously got her through that or something you know—*

Helen: Something, yeah, I mean you know her vital force was pretty strong.

*Ruth: Strong, umhm.*

[00:10:17]

Helen: Yeah, so— so then they got married after the war, just afterwards when he— when he was discharged from the Navy and they got a— they ran a pub in St Margaret's which is just near Twickenham in West London, just outside Richmond. And then they got digs in Twickenham I think and eventually they got out of that business and they got a council house in Hanworth which is where I grew up and that was where we all were born and grew up.

*Ruth: And when you say we all, can you describe the family?*

Helen: Yeah, there was eight children altogether, I'm the last. So there was my brother Sean, then two girls Maura and Margaret, and then four boys, Dennis, Michael, Christopher and Peter, and then me.

*Ruth: Wow, so you're the baby.*

Helen: Yeah, I'm the baby, yeah, a very old baby now [laughs].

*Ruth: So what was the age difference between you and Sean?*

Helen: About twelve years.

*Ruth: Right.*

Helen: They came—

*Ruth: So they were quite quick then, the eight\'*

Helen: The biggest gap was between me and my brother Peter, there was two years between us.

*Ruth: Right, crikey, your mother must have been a very energetic person.*

Helen: She was very energetic, yeah, but you know, you know— yeah she was in all sorts of ways. [Laughs]. She was a piece of work I'll tell you in ways.

*Ruth: Yeah—*

[00:11:59]

Helen: But she was brilliant as well, she was great yeah, very lively, and ehm you know, and my, and lucky that she had two girls early on because they picked up all that, a lot of the caring for the new babies.

*Ruth: Of course, so they were her helpers really?*

Helen: Oh yeah, yeah.

*Ruth: And was that the gender breakdown, that it was girls as helpers and boys doing their own thing?*

Helen: Yeah, basically, yeah. Yeah, yeah. So my sister Maura very much kind of was mummy's little helper and really took on that role. And she was lovely, she was a really lovely older sister. But my sister Margaret really resisted it and—

*Ruth: Did she?*

Helen: And, yeah.

*Ruth: So what age, so they would have been what, ten years older than you?*

Helen: Yeah, ten and nine years older than—

*Ruth: Yeah, and was Maura the absolute oldest sister?*

Helen: She was, yeah.

*Ruth: So the next one decided no, that's not for me?*

Helen: Yeah, and she— but really interestingly how that affected the dynamic between her and my mum and kind of how she was seen in the family, as lazy, for instance.

*Ruth: Was she?*

Helen: Air headed— all kinds of things, very interesting. Seen as somebody who had a really fiery temper which she did, which is great actually. But you know...

*Ruth: But she had to fight her corner I guess if she was resisting that.*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, you bet. I mean, yeah, you have to figure out your ways to— yeah— to resist that position, don't you?

*Ruth: Uhhm, uhhm.*

Helen: If it's pushed on you so forcefully. Yeah. So it was great but Maura was very authoritative, the one who did take on the kind of—

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: — surrogate mother role. So she was very authoritative with us, all the other siblings. But very kind actually, steady, she was much steadier than my mum. She was very sweet, I'm still really close to my sisters.

*Ruth: Oh that's lovely, isn't it?*

Helen: Really close.

*Ruth: And so she would have been born in the what? Late forties or 1950 something.*

Helen: Yeah, Maura was born in 1949.

[00:14:00]

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, but I don't know if I talked about this last time but tragically my eldest brother Sean. He— So they— so he was with my mum and dad until my mum then was pregnant with Maura and then they didn't really— they only had a tiny flat in Twickenham at



this stage and I think everything was really getting on top of them and they took Sean back to Mayo to my mum's family and left him there while they kind of sorted themselves out in the UK.

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: And you know I don't think he ever really got over that separation, ever.

*Ruth: And was he a baby? He was— was he one or?*

Helen: He was two. He was just coming up to two then.

*Ruth: And how long did they leave him in Mayo?*

Helen: About two years.

*Ruth: Gosh.*

Helen: Yeah. So he was probably about one and a half when they left him there and he was probably coming up to four when they brought him back. Terrible, terrible.

*Ruth: And he didn't— he couldn't make the attachment back to your parents when he came back?*

Helen: I don't think so. I think, you know, there were two kids there—

*[Both talking].*

*Ruth: Two new kids who were bonded, yeah.*

Helen: He was the apple of my granny's eye, you know, completely, you know—

*Ruth: Adored in Ireland?*

Helen: Yeah, absolutely. Very, very difficult, it's very sad really.

*Ruth: Yeah, I suppose he had two separations when you think about, didn't he Helen? Because first he's wrenched from his mum and then he's wrenched from his new mum in effect, his granny became—*

Helen: Yeah. Really desperate.

*Ruth: Very hard, yeah.*

Helen: So always kind of estranged from the family from when he was a teenager. I mean obviously I don't really remember him ever living at home—

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: But he left really young, he joined the Army I think when he was sixteen. I can't remember what it was, it might have been the Grenadier Guards. At one stage, he was in the Merchant Navy. And then came— and then he was in the Army and he kind of went— moved his way up the ranks and was very successful, he was a— you know, a non-commissioned officer.

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: Sergeant Major in the Paratroop Regiment. But very damaged, yeah, alcoholic - he died of alcoholism.

*Ruth: Oh.*

Helen: Way too young, yeah. Very difficult relationships, difficult marriage, yeah.

*Ruth: Very hard.*

Helen: Well he brought the difficulty I must say, you know.

*Ruth: Yes, yeah.*

Helen: Very odd man, yeah.

*Ruth: And you mustn't have known him very well then because he must have— you were so young when he would have joined the army and he, yeah—*

Helen: No, I don't— I wouldn't say I knew him very well but there was a very strong identification with him I think. As the— we were like bookends you know. I think he was—

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: And he also got out— was socially mobile, you know and very successful and he got away—

*Ruth: Yes. And he wanted different things for himself?*

Helen: Yeah. yeah. And he kind of got away and went into this other world and I think that was how I felt. As well— you know, which I sought through education really.

*Ruth: And you had his example I guess that it could be done?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, exactly, yeah.

*Ruth: So I mean he was brought back to Ireland so there was obviously a very strong connection back to the family even though your parents had been in London for quite a while by then?*

Helen: Yeah, very much. Oh God yeah, I mean Ireland was always referred to as home, always. That was how I grew up, you know, we're going home this year.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: You know, blah-blah-blah, it was always home, you know.

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: Yeah, very interesting.

[00:17:39]

*Ruth: And can you talk about when you first went to Ireland?*

Helen: Well, my first memory of going— I think I was about four. I'm not sure— I think I had been before as a baby but obviously I don't remember that. My first memory was— and we all went except Sean so there was the seven kids and my mum and dad and we had an old Bedford van you know. So we all kind of piled in there, it was like you know, the Clampetts out of— *[Both laugh.]* With everything piled on top of it and that. Yeah, and we went over— yeah, it was wonderful. I remember getting on the ferry and they used to keep the— they'd— obviously it was before drive on so they'd winch the cars up in a— they'd rope them and then crane them—

*Ruth: You say obvious Helen but that actually— I had not realised that that used to happen. I didn't know a world before roll on/ roll off [laughs].*

Helen: Oh gee, right, yeah, yeah, well it was really amazing. So they'd put great big ropes around the cars and then they'd crane them down into the hold of the ship.

*Ruth: But you're not in them at this stage?*

Helen: Huh? No, no, no.

*Ruth: You've got off and you walked on the ship [laughs].*

Helen: Yeah, you're allowed to get out yeah.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: So I don't know how many cars would be down them, probably not that many. Yeah, there was— I remember horses being down there, about twenty or— fifteen or twenty horses being down there.

*Ruth: Oh my goodness.*

Helen: They were obviously racehorses.

*Ruth: Yes, yeah, they must have been.*

Helen: Yeah and ehm.

*Ruth: How terrifying.*

Helen: Yeah, well God, it was so exciting. So we spent the night running riot. All the adults are getting absolutely langered.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: There was a massive session going on in the Shandon Bar, you know, there still was a Shandon Bar then and you know so they were all getting langered. We used to get— we got money for picking up all the jars and the bottles and all that kind of stuff and there were people out sleeping. There weren't that many berths and the sort of seats that you could have— you know if you could get one sort of thing. And there were lots of people sleeping out on deck, loads of— so this was 1964 probably and there were loads of hippies out on deck. They looked like, yeah, they looked like they'd dropped in from either Mars or the bible you know to me. And they had guitars and that and they were singing and—

*Ruth: Oh my goodness, very different.*

Helen: Very different, it was so brilliant and so exotic and exciting.

*Ruth: And where was the ferry? Was it ehm, was it Rosslare or Dun Laoighre or—?*

Helen: It was, where was it, Fishguard to Cork.

*Ruth: Oh, all the way to Cork or to Rosslare?*

Helen: No, to Cork.

*Ruth: Oh wow, it went straight to Cork, fabulous.*

Helen: And it then, it used to come up the river so the dock— it would dock right in the centre.

*Ruth: Wow, in the city centre.*

Helen: In the city centre, yeah. So yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh and I mean God the drama, for fuck's sake Ruth. I mean I remember coming home from that trip and the— oh the wailing and everybody on the side of the— you know, it's like we were going to America and never coming back, you know?

*Ruth: Oh, leaving Ireland you mean, people were devastated?*

Helen: Devastated and the tears and the— Oh God, uh makes me want to cry now.

*Ruth: But was it your family or was it lots of people?*

Helen: Everybody, everybody.

*Ruth: Go way....*

Helen: Yeah. People— oh singing, I'll never se— you know 'Take me home again Kathleen' and oh Jesus Christ, it was so dramatic.

*Ruth: That's amazing, isn't it?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

*Ruth: And now they just jump on Ryan Air every weekend and commute [laughs].*

Helen: I know, oh my God so—

*Ruth: Goodness me.*

[00:21:35]

*Ruth: So you went to the— you went back to the farm then for the summer in Cork?*

Helen: So first of all we went to, we went to ehm, we went to Gal— Sorry to my mum's family—

*Ruth: To Mayo?*

Helen: In Mayo. So we had three weeks I think. We drove up there and we'd hired a caravan, a big caravan so we could all sleep in that so that was great and we all had a great time and ran wild. I loved the farm, I just loved the animals and I'd— you know, give any job that would— anyone would let me do, I'd be right into it. And then we went to Cork and we stayed in the hay, the top of the hay loft, They had put a floor in there at some point to dry food out and keep it away from rats and stuff like that. So we all slept up there so we had, you know, sleeping bags and—

*Ruth: Oh how exciting for all the kids.*

Helen: Yeah, really, oh it was just magical, yeah. So we'd all run wild, you know, and the other farmers would complain about us.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: Especially my brothers you know, who would just sort of try and catch the horse and ride it and all that. [Laughs].

*Ruth: Yes, they just did whatever.*

Helen: Yeah, we used to ride the pig, Maggie. There was always a pig called Maggie somewhere or other.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: It was hilarious, yeah, and just going wild in mountain streams and they wouldn't see us from one— from sort of dawn until dusk really.

*Ruth: Just come back when you were hungry.*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: And did you all go over every year, every other year on holidays?*

Helen: Maura?

*Ruth: No, did you all— all the kids go over?*

Helen: As they grew— as the older ones grew up, it kind of dropped off really.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: So— And they, you know, they all left school when they were fifteen. So they'd be working and you know treated like adults. It was like you come if you want to, you know.

*Ruth: Yes, yes.*

Helen: If you can get time off or otherwise, you're grown up now, you're paying rent so you can stay in the house on your own.

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: So interesting, so in the end it was kind of, over the years, it dropped down just to me and my brother— my two brothers next up from me.

*Ruth: Yes, yes. And did you go with your parents or did you start to go yourselves?*

[00:24:00]

Helen: I— when I was eleven, I kind of made contact with— We went to Cork one time and stayed in a family— It wasn't— It wasn't direct family— cottage. Anyway, which was down the road from one of my dad's sisters who'd married a farmer, just on the road that goes up to Gougane Barra. And I'd never really known them before and they had a bit of a reputation as being really odd, especially my uncle. And they didn't have any children. Anyway, so we were staying in this little house just down the road from them and my auntie Joan said "Oh, would you like to come up and see the new calves?" you know. Oh well, so that was brilliant so I went up and then that was it. Every day of the holiday, I just spent on the farm and Joan was really great, she just kind of put me to work straight away and I loved it, you know, so.

*Ruth: Fabulous opportunity, yeah.*

Helen: Yeah, feeding the calves and then I got roped into, you know, turning the hay and doing this and that and the other and I couldn't get enough of it so I completely sort of abandoned my parents, you know.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: Now I just want to— now I just want to be on the farm the whole time so Joan said to my mum and dad, "Look, you know, she loves it here. If she'd like to come over for the summer next year, I'd be really— we'd be— you know, we'd love to have her." So that's what I did then for the next, you know— I don't know, seven years I suppose. I spent the summer in Cork with them and my parents used to then drive over for a couple of weeks.

*Ruth: At the beginning or the end of the holiday, is it?*

Helen: At some time, yeah, and I would go back with them, yeah. Yeah, usually at the end actually, yeah.

*Ruth: So did you travel over on your own?*

Helen: I did, [cough], yeah, I used to fly over. I'd get put on an aeroplane, yeah. Yeah, so it was amazing actually.

*Ruth: What a lovely thing to do.*

Helen: Yeah, I absolutely loved it, yeah.

[00:26:04]

*Ruth: And back in London, what were things like when you were— Thinking about, you know, that sort of mid-teens age?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah. So, yeah, well even from before then, I'd say from when I was about ten or eleven, things really started kicking off in the family. There was a lot of— my brothers were getting into a lot of trouble. So it was— it was kind of like the Wild West really at home. It was—

*Ruth: And were they like sixteen and seventeen or—? What sort of age?*

Helen: I'd say it started before then. Probably about when I was about eleven or twelve. So they were getting— especially my brothers Michael and Dennis, they were getting into a lot of trouble with the law. Yeah, so they both ended up going to borstal actually and—

*Ruth: And was that like thieving or—? Getting drunk or—?*

Helen: [indec], fighting, yeah, breach of the peace, yeah, thieving. Mainly kind of— mainly fighting actually.

*Ruth: What they would call anti-social behaviour nowadays?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, very antisocial, yeah, yeah.

*Ruth: And what was that about? Was it to do with who they were hanging around with or—?*

Helen: No, I think it was to do with my dad actually on a much bigger picture. I think it's to do with lots of things like the culture on the estate and all that kind of stuff.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: But I think my dad had a part to play in it, you know, I really do. I think he— I think he kind of modelled a version of masculinity that was very, very contradictory, you know. Like on the one hand, he didn't kind of condone their violence but on the other, he absolutely did. And both of those things, both of those messages were kind of given and I think the condoning of the violence as a— as a— as a perfectly normal element of masculinity was the stronger message. And I think it was the stronger because it was much more unconsciously given.

*Ruth: And what was— was it sort of a “boys will be boys” thing or was it a— was it a sort of a quiet pride that actually they can look after themselves or—?*

Helen: Yeah. That too, yeah. No, I think— I think there was a pride, I think there was an unspoken pride from my dad that he couldn't quite— you know— yeah, I don't know what to say about that but yeah, I think that is one of the things, absolutely, you've hit it on the head. That unconsciously he communicated a pride in his sons' aggression and violence, yeah. And—and there's something also that it was all the more potent a message because it wasn't really articulated in words. If he— Does that make sense?

*Ruth: Yeah, I think so.*

Helen: But it kind of infused somehow. It's very hard to put your finger on. But my dad was violent to them, by the way, so—

*Ruth: In the— in the home?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, at home, yeah. Yeah, he was really violent to them, yeah. So they were brought up with that.

*Ruth: And was that a sort of a— when you say he was violent, was it in disciplining them he would say— Or was it to—*

Helen: Yeah mainly, that would be the kind of the vehicle for it.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: But I think in other ways, he—

*Ruth: The justification?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah. I think in other ways he was violent to them. He was very undermining of them. At the same time, he could kind of flip all over the place, you know. This is— If you met him, he was lovely, absolutely lovely and he was, you know, very kind of genial bloke but there was this other side of him. And I think— I think he was definitely shell-shocked, he was a gunner— a gunner's mate. So he kind of loaded the guns on the gun turret for the gunner.

*Ruth: When he was in the navy?*



Helen: Yeah, yeah, an aircraft— On an aircraft carrier.

[00:30:18]

Helen: And because they were an aircraft carrier, they were under a lot of fire, enemy fire. Because they were obviously a target, you know.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: So— so his time in the war was full of all the terrors of war. So they were under attack a lot, they were shooting down planes, you know, all that kind of stuff and he was most definitely shell shocked and he could never obviously like his whole generation really talk about the effect that had on him. About the violence that was done during that time but also the violence that he had to do, if you see what I mean.

*Ruth: I do, I do.*

Helen: Like help shoot planes down, shoot men in the water who'd jumped because they were freaking out. There was a lot of that happening. He talked about that once actually.

*Ruth: Did he?*

Helen: When he was quite old, yeah. So und— when the ship was under attack, it was quite common— I've read about this sort of since then— For men in their terror just to jump overboard.

*Ruth: Their own men?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, the men on the— The sailors on the ship, yeah.

*Ruth: And what—? Did they have to shoot them?*

Helen: And the policy was to shoot them in the water.

*Ruth: So that they wouldn't be captured or—?*

Helen: Partly that, and partly because—

*Ruth: They'd kind of deserted or something?*

Helen: Yeah, as a message to the men.

*Ruth: Oh my goodness.*

Helen: So he was part of that. So you can imagine the— you know, the— There's a trauma in witnessing violence but there's also in the terrible trauma of what you've done.

*Ruth: Yes, and then that everybody came back and just pretended like nothing had happened.*

Helen: Yeah, yeah and then you have to be mis— How does that— how are you touched— that vulnerable part of you is touched when you've got a— you know— a child giving you lip and pushing and going to the boundaries.

*Ruth: Yes, yeah.*

Helen: So in one way, you know, there was one side of him that was very loving, very sweet, you know, and there was this other side of him which was full of rage and violence I think, yeah, and it was mostly directed towards his sons.

*Ruth: And so this was all sort of kicking off when you're in your early teens really? That's the s—*

Helen: It was before that, no, before— It was always there.

*Ruth: It was always there.*

Helen: Always. It was always there from— I mean I remember from my eldest brother, yeah. So when I was a child four or five. No, I remember it there.

*Ruth: Oh gosh, yeah.*

Helen: You know, very frightening, to be around, you know.

[00:33:00]

*Ruth: And was that interspersed with good times in the family?*

Helen: Very much so. Oh my God, yeah, yeah. Lots of good times, yeah, lots of— you know, loved a party, really loved a party. Lots of socialising. The house was always full of people. You know and in between all the kind of “dramarama,” it was very quiet, you know. Lots of memories of just all of us in the living room, you know, it was the only room that was heated in pre-central heating days.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: Yeah. [Laughs]. So, you know, everything happened in that room. All very quiet, reading, you know. My dad used to buy us boxes of books from the Oxfam shop or the charity shop and he'd just sort of— The per— whoever was in the charity shop, he'd go in and say "can I have a box of book?" and they would just fill the box and he'd get it for like fifty pence or whatever. So he'd just bring boxes of books home and we'd read everything— every—

*Ruth: Were you all readers?*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: Yeah, it's funny— my family were all readers as well. I think reading is a very big thing in Ireland.*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And they were— they were not educated were they? I mean he left school when he was fourteen, so did my mum. But they were both big readers.

*Ruth: Yes, yeah, yeah. So there were very peaceful times and then there were lots of sort of what, music and drinking and partying times as well?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah. And lots of kindness, you know, the house would often, often have kids from the estate who were having a really tough time. But they would come and stay, they'd come for their meals.

*Ruth: There was a sort of an extended family nature to your household then?*

Helen: Yeah, very much. My mum was very kind of— She'd take in all waifs and strays. And then when she started work at the college, you know, even when she was a— because it used to be a technical college, they had a lot of overseas students. So this would be in the sixties and seventies and she— yeah, so yeah, it was in the sixties. She was always bringing people home, kind of African students who were— hadn't had any money for three weeks or whatever. So they used to come and she was very kind. And my dad was always really su— you know, really supportive of that. Yeah, so it was— there was lots of contradictory things going on, not just—

*Ruth: Yes, yeah, yeah.*

[00:35:28]

*Ruth: So can you tell me a little bit about— so where you were living and what school was like and that sort of thing when you were about fifteen?*

Helen: Yeah. So when I was fifteen— Well I went to grammar school, I was the only one— So I was from— We all went to the same primary school, it was a Catholic church school attached to a local church and I was kind of— I was going to say groomed— [Laughs].

*Ruth: Yeah. Well, you could say groomed, it used to be a more innocent word. [Laughs].*

Helen: I was groomed for the eleven plus and I passed it and I went to a convent grammar school in Isleworth called Gumley House. But actually, I remember talking to you before about how class ridden this was because actually the nearest grammar school was in Twickenham, St Catherine's, and up— you know, why didn't I go there? It was only one bus ride away. For Gumley, [recording skips here] it took me over an hour and two buses every day and home. But the headmistress, the primary school headmistress said— basically, said to my mum, "You know, I don't think we should send Helen to St Catherine's, it just wouldn't be suitable for her. For a start, Mrs Lucey, you wouldn't be able to afford the uniform." So that's a— so that was that. But that was a real class thing because St Catherine's was this incredibly middle-class Catholic environment there and, yeah, amazing. Yeah, really amazing. And it was in the old grounds of like, you know— God I can't remember now— where Walpole used to live.

*Ruth: Right.*

Helen: You know, by the— on the— So the grounds kind of swept down to the Thames at Twickenham. It was really, really interesting in terms of class, yeah. So I went to the much more working-class Gumley House where there were loads of Irish. Loads of [indec - recording breaks up].

*Ruth: Oh, you're breaking up a little bit Helen, I don't know whether you've moved position or—?*

Helen: No, I haven't.

*Ruth: Okay, let's see if it comes back. So, you went to Gumley, sorry— And it was more working-class than St Catherine's?*

Helen: Much more, looking back. But actually, to me it was like going to Mars. It was so— it seemed so middle-class to me and I couldn't— You know, it was just like a really big culture shock [Laughs]. And it took me years to get over it, I think. Yeah.

*Ruth: And how would you— How was that— manifest itself if you know what I mean? Like were the girls different? Were the teachers different?*

Helen: I think it was the teachers really and the whole kind of culture of exclusivity and that we're all really special and, you know, we had an English teacher who used to actually say to us, "you're the creme de la creme of the borough." I mean how fucking Miss Jean Brodie can you get, you know?

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: But— So academically I just plummeted basically and I didn't— I was really confused.

*Ruth: Did you lose your confidence then?*

Helen: Completely lost my confidence. I spent most of my time not really knowing what was going on. From being, you know, a really good student at primary school and being considered sort of very bright. I'm looking back on this now because at the time I didn't have any sense that I was bright or anything.

*Ruth: But you must have felt the change obviously when you moved to the secondary and suddenly—*

Helen: Oh God, yeah.

*Ruth: People were treating you differently and—*

Helen: I wasn't used to being so confused and flummoxed by everything in class. You know, I was used to basically getting it with a bit of effort. Now I didn't get anything. Except English, you know, that was the only thing I got, really. And so— So it was— academically it was all a big disaster but socially— Oh God, I loved it. I absolutely loved being in an all-girl environment. It was just fantastic, and I think that was about the— what was going on at home, you know, it was so male, so— all the argy-bargy and the murder, murder and all of

that. Every weekend at home and quite a few times during the week as well [laughs]. It was so brilliant just being with girls. I loved it, yeah.

*Ruth: It was like a refuge.*

Helen: It really was, yeah. So it was great. Really, really, really enjoyed it socially but academically I was a completely duffer and— yeah.

[00:40:24]

*Ruth: And I think you said you were— I think you said last time that you were behaving badly as well so the school were—*

Helen: Um. [Noise]. Yeah, not too— I mean I wasn't wild but I was just kind of— I was naughty, you know, I was kind of disruptive in a low level way, I didn't do any homework, I didn't really engage with anything and so yeah, when I was sixteen— I didn't get any GCSEs, I got English, that was— So I got English language and English literature, the lowest grades, and everything else I kind of, you know, flunked. So they asked me to leave, they said, "you can't go into sixth form, we don't really want you."

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: But, yeah, so over the summer I realised, I thought, "fuck me," you know.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: I lined up a place at my local FE college or Further Education, yeah, the local college to do secretarial studies or something like that and then I kind of realised, what am I thinking? You know, if I do this I will never get off the estate. And I realised that all my friends were kind of looking at these other futures. And I just thought, no, I need to go back there, I need to be with my pals for a start. So I went back and said— On the first day of term, and they just sort of went, "what are you doing here?" And I said, "well, I'm coming back" and they said, "no, you're not." I said, "look, I am, and I want to do these A levels," and they said, "okay." I think they were so flabbergasted, they said, "okay, if you can get those teachers to agree to take you on in your— in their A level classes, then you can stay but, you know, you've really got to sort yourself out." So the— I went to the English teacher and she said, "yeah, I'd be delighted." Went to the geography teacher, she said, "well, okay, but you know, you'd better pull your finger out." And I went to the economic teacher and she said, "no way, I'm not having you in my class." And so then I thought shit, what's my next option so I sidled up to the home economics teacher. So she [laughs], she said, "yeah, alright," you know, "okay." So that's when I— yeah. I went back and my parents were completely un— not engaged in any of this. They didn't know about any of it. I don't really know how— how I kept it from them but—

*Ruth: No.*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: That's quite amazing.*

Helen: Yeah, I— yeah.

*Ruth: Do you think they'd just got very relaxed by the time they got to you because you were number eight?*

Helen: Ah, to be honest I think they just thought as long as I wasn't bringing the police to the door and—

*[both talking].*

*Ruth: — they were pretty consumed with what was going on with the other— with the— with the boys?*

Helen: Yeah. Absolutely, yeah, really. So I was kind of considered no trouble, you know?

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: Yeah. Meanwhile, you know, I was having sex and smoking dope and taking acid and— you know. This was actually before— this was before I went into sixth form. So up until— between fourteen and sixteen, I kind of— you know, was quietly going off the rails really but nobody noticed so— you know.

*Ruth: Nobody noticed in school or in your family?*

Helen: No, I think they probably noticed in school a bit—

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: But not at home, no.

*Ruth: Yeah. So you were having a wild time. Was it an enjoyable wild time or was it—?*

Helen: It was in some ways. I mean full of the angsts of— you know, kind of adolescence. But made much easier by it only being girls at school.

*Ruth: So were you— were you doing all your partying and taking acid and smoking dope with your school girlfriends?*

Helen: Yeah, with a couple of them and with sort of older boys outside, yeah. And bunking off and stuff, yeah.

*Ruth: Yes, yeah.*

Helen: But also— yeah. And also lots of us used to go to discos and stuff at the weekend which were great, and we used to go ice skating and— you know. So we'd sort of— there was lots of innocent fun as well but ehm— yeah. It was kind of a real mixture. I was very interested in sex [laughs] quite early on so by the time I was fourteen, fifteen, you know, I was very interested in sex and sort of exploring all of that. And— and that was in a way again being in an all girl environment at that time, that was fine. So you didn't— you weren't kind of seen as a slag or anything. This was in London because—

*Ruth: It was separate.*

[00:45:11]

Helen: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it was cool. So were we— so now it's kind of 1974, 1975, things are happening, you know, feminism's getting a bit of a tank on and there's all these ideas around and punk is revving up and it's like— it's like a really interesting time to be a girl, there's lots of like really interesting ideas around. And I think we— me and my mates at school kind of picked up that zeitgeist and were like— yeah.

*Ruth: We can do what we want.*

Yeah, we can, kind of.

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: Not exactly but we can certainly do things. We can have sex, there's contraception available even to very young girls, you know.

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: I went to our family doctor when I was fifteen and said, "I want to go on the pill," and he was so shocked.

*Ruth: Was he?*

Helen: He was but, you see, we'd all talked about it, all our— all my mates, you know, they had sisters and blah, blah, blah, and we'd all talked about it so we knew what to say to the doctor and I said— He said, "oh, well, blah-blah-blah," and I said, "well, I've got a boyfriend." I didn't, at all, imagine the face of it and I was about fifteen.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: I said, "well, I've got a boyfriend and I'm going to be doing it anyway." And we all knew that that was the golden—

*Ruth: The key phrase?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah.

*Ruth: So he felt obliged then to protect you from pregnancy and STDs. [Laughs].*

Helen: And it's not like, you know— And we were very good girls because we had one boyfriend.

*[Both laugh].*

Helen: As far as he knew, yeah. So that was really interesting, you know. To be able to— Yeah, I think we were bold, you know, in our—

*Ruth: Well you had a certain confidence or some kind of a self-realisation perhaps?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah.

*Ruth: Which was different from the family maybe?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, and different to some of the other girls that we were at school with as well. There was a boldness, I think, in that old-fashioned sense of the word, that we were— we were kind of pushing boundaries. You know, my sisters— my older sisters didn't do this even though they were like girls of the sixties and they wore amazing outfits and— But they weren't having sex with people that weren't their boyfriends or— They weren't taking drugs or anything but—

*Ruth: Why do you think you had a different awakening? Do you think it was to do with the education and maybe that feeling of wanting to move— you know like you said you were a bit inspired by Sean. Do you think it was that “wanting more of the world” that made you more adventurous than Maura and Margaret?*

Helen: Yeah, I think so. Also I think maybe they were adventurous within their time. So they did give me a sense of like girls who can be glamorous and sexy and— you know, they did go clubbing a lot and there was a lot of culture and music and everything in the house of their time.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: Yeah [both talking].

*Ruth: And they were quite a bit older so—*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: Weren't they?*

Helen: They were, yeah. So when I was five and six, they were fifteen and sixteen.

*Ruth: Yeah, so they were—*

Helen: And they were fan— they just looked amazing. They used to take me out to the King's Road and, you know, take me round London with them.

*Ruth: How wonderful, to have that.*

Helen: Oh yeah, it was amazing. Yeah, really amazing, yeah.

[00:48:41]

*Ruth: So what— so you're— so what was happening with your whole relationship then to Auntie Joan and your uncle in Bantry because you're living— you're having a slight touch of wildness in London [laughs]—*



Helen: Yeah, absolutely and then— so then I was still going to Ireland every summer and yeah, I talked about it before didn't I, how kind of I met— what I met there was a completely different kind of view on young— on women's appropriate behaviour particularly around their sexuality. And how they kind of behaved really. So I would go to dances, you know, I loved it but the local kids— Were they— you know they were very kind of— they weren't that welcoming really of me, especially when I got to sort of fourteen, fifteen and started wearing really fashionable clothes and going to dances and getting loads of— lots of local boys wanting to dance with me and snogging a few and then that was it. Then I got a reputation as a slag basically and I guess the local boys had said that I'd had sex with them or done particularly sort of sexual things which I hadn't. And that was really crushing. And then I was kind of ostracised quite quickly by the local girls and boys. Yeah, so that was tough. So I didn't really have a relationship with the local kids after I was probably sixteen. That was it, yeah, they didn't really want to know me.

*Ruth: It's quite shocking, isn't it? When you look— you know, hear that. Because you were just kissing them.*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, occasionally, you know. Not that many either.

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: I mean, also, I must say that I probably thought about and talked about sex much more than I did it in London even. There was much more thinking about it and discussing it and thinking about it than there was actually doing it so it's not like I had loads of boyfriends but yeah. But so very interesting that that was completely not allowed in Ireland really as far as— And I guess, I was this— how they viewed me as this girl coming over who the boys were interested in because I was more exotic and maybe they already had fantasies that I was more sexually available than the local girls because I wasn't from round there and I was from London, you know, there was all sorts of things.

*Ruth: So do you think they were all terrified of you then really?*

Helen: I don't know. They didn't seem it. I don't know. No, they just—

*Ruth: What do you think motivated the behaviour? Was it just how they'd been brought up to see girls as virgins or—*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: Or whores sort of thing?*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: That old fashioned—*

Helen: Yeah, very, very old fashioned, yeah, yeah. And I mean the way that some of the older men behaved around me when I was even fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, was— when I look back on it now, it was just disgusting really. And these were like, some old men, some

men in their thirties, forties. All of them— not all of them but most of them married with kids. They were just, you know, really disgusting actually.

*Ruth: I think you talked about this fellow called Seamus Patsy last time.*

Helen: Oh yeah. Seamus Patsy, yeah, he used to— he was really ancient. He was about seventy and he used to turn up kind of a couple of days every time I— a couple of days after I arrived to say yeah, that he'd come to see a man about a dog [laughs]. Oh God and he'd be all over me and googley eyes and all of that. I mean he wasn't the worst actually, there was another local man who— I think I mentioned this to you. My uncle really fell out with him and I found out years later, it was because he said to my uncle, "oh, when's Helen coming over?" and he said, "oh I expect you'll be taking her to the— to the stud soon."

*Ruth: Uck.*

Helen: Isn't that disgusting?

*Ruth: Umhm, yeah.*

Helen: Yeah. Really disgusting. So lots of small incidents kind of like that basically by men who were like twenty years older than me.

*Ruth: Yes, yes, so it wasn't a teenage boy thing, it was a male thing and a female— from what you've said— cultural attitude towards a young woman who was seen as more free sexually or— more provocative, yeah [tuts].*

Helen: Absolutely. Yeah. It was disgusting. Yeah, so—

*Ruth: And did that— did that change your feelings about the farm and your aunt and uncle and living in Ireland or— Because you'd had a— some— you'd had some— you wanted to— you thought at one stage you wanted to live there when you sort of turned eighteen, didn't you?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, I did, I mean up until then I think I thought, you know, that I would come and live on the farm and take it over eventually. Yeah, that I would, you know, I'd have loved to have been a farmer.

*Ruth: And your aunt and uncle thought that as well so it was a kind of an unspoken thing between you guys or—?*

Helen: They did, yeah, yeah.

*Ruth: So it was quite a big thing, wasn't it?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, it was— I think it was a big disappointment for them when I kind of started to move away from that idea.

*Ruth: And was that the— was that part of it? This kind of reception that you ended up getting as a teenager or do you think you would have grown away from it anyway?*

Helen: I don't— who knows Ruth about that?

*Ruth: Who knows, yeah.*

Helen: I can't really answer that but I think that definitely— I think I started to really understand how I would be put in a particular kind of a cage, you know.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: That there was not room for that kind of development. I started to really get a view of the narrowness, you know, of— of the people.

[00:55:09]

*Ruth: In that area of west Cork?*

Helen: In that area in particular, yeah. Kind of farming people, they're not used to people coming in, I mean— oh, I don't know, just there were so many examples. There was a young girl, she was sixteen actually, I met her on the bus going to Bantry one day and she was English and she was, what they would call one of the hippies, you know, had come over. There was a lot of movement, wasn't there, in the seventies, a lot of people coming over.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: Because they could claim the dole and blah-blah-blah and it's all very like— Anyway, and she was great, you know, and we got on. Of course, I was sixteen, she's sixteen, sixteen or seventeen she might have been and we hit it off on the bus so then we sort of became friends for that summer and I'd go and see her. And she was living with this bloke, they weren't married and— So again, she was coming for that kind of criticism, generally, when people talked. So I'd— you know, I came home full of excitement from Bantry and sort of said, "oh," "I met this girl." And they knew all about her. They went, "oh yeah, is that the one that lives with so-and-so up in blah-blah-blah," up on the side of a mountain somewhere. And straight away it's like "ah," you know, "why do you want to talk to her?"

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: Well hang on a minute, you know. She's not one of us. Who is she? You know, she's just a stranger. Who's he? What's she doing, they're not even married.

*Ruth: Well she would have been even more beyond the pale than you, wouldn't she? Because she wouldn't have even had the family connections?*

Helen: No, exactly, yeah, yeah.

*Ruth: But word had gone around very quickly.*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Very quickly. Yeah. So, yeah, everyone knew, you know. I mean I'd go places or whatever and when I came back to the farm, Joan within ten minutes would say, "Ah, you were down blah-blah-blah this afternoon."

*Ruth: You couldn't move basically without somebody reporting back.*

Helen: Yeah, you couldn't. And they used to— I mean they were hilarious, they used to say, "Ah Helen, you can't have a shite round here without everybody knowing."

*Ruth: [Laughs]. Oh.*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: But you had some cousins in the city as well?*

Helen: They were great, yeah. So they when— So they were brilliant in lots of ways. So they used to— Sometimes I'd go up to Cork City, I'd get the bus up for the weekend or something and I had some cousins there. This is when I was a teenager and they were only a couple of years older than me. I'd be like fifteen, sixteen and they were eighteen probably— seventeen, eighteen, nineteen. And they were brilliant because they were totally on my wavelength. We used to smoke dope together, go down the pub, get completely pissed, go and see bands. And they just— they'd also lived in London for a while. My cousin Con, he'd come and lived with us for a while when he was— oh, only about fifteen, I think.

*Ruth: Ah, so you already had the relationship with him as well.*

Helen: Yeah. I did, yeah. And he— His elder sister Margaret, she was great because she was beyond the pale completely because she left Cork, came to London, took up with an African fella and they lived in a squat in Kensington. [Laughs].

*Ruth: Wow.*

Helen: So she— completely beyond the pale. She was great. Her and her boyfriend used to come and visit sometimes. Because my sister Maura, when she was eighteen, got together with Quentin her partner who she's still with. And he's from Trinidad originally. So it was very kind of multicultural in the house and that was all cool. Yeah, so Margaret was great and— So my cousins, even though their mother was absolutely mortified by all of this, she was so religious, she was completely mortified. But it was great because like all my cousins were totally— They were like my friends in London basically, so they were—

*Ruth: So that culture was much more similar then?*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: Even though it was only— I don't know what— fifty miles away or something?*

Helen: Oh, forty-four or forty miles away.

*Ruth: How different was it? Yeah.*

Helen: Yeah. So that was nice. And I had a really good relationship with Con for years and years. I mean we've just kind of grown apart a bit now but yeah so often— You know, if he— if he— when he knew I was coming down to Caimeni which is where Joan and Michael

were, he'd come down, sometimes he'd cycle down and we'd cycle around together. We'd just have a few days.

*Ruth: Lovely.*

Helen: Kind of having normal conversations and he'd go, "don't worry Helen, I'm coming to rescue you," sort of thing. [Laughs]. So that was good. Oh— [noise]— hallo.

*Ruth: I can still hear you, can you hear me?*

Helen: Yeah, I can, yeah.

*Ruth: Okay, good, so—*

Helen: Yeah, so it was good, yeah.

*Ruth: Umhm. And then so—*

Helen: But—

*Ruth: And so back in London, you did your A levels?*

[01:00:08]

Helen: Yeah, I did. But can I just sort of say—?

*Ruth: Of course you can.*

Helen: You know, on the other side, I still loved being with Joan and Michael. And there was so much kind of going on there culturally and Michael was a really great singer, he had— And he was, you know, he was a seanachai, he was known locally as the storyteller.

*Ruth: Wow.*

Helen: And he was amazing, he was really amazing. His first language is Irish. His brother, eldest brother, was very— you know, and it was a Gaeltacht area so there was a lot of Irish spoken and his eldest brother was very important in the resurgence of Gaelic in Ire— in keeping Gaelic in Ireland after the war and— So yeah, Michael, he used to play the bagpipes and he taught me how to play the tin whistle which was brilliant. That was just fantastic for me and we used to go to lots of sessions together— and it was—

*Ruth: Yeah, that's fantastic so you were like really into the music and—*

Helen: Yeah, yeah. And he was— he was like— Everyone knew him and they'd always, "come on Michael, give us a song," and he always sung unaccompanied and, you know, sometimes I'd be lying in bed in the morning and they'd have the radio on downstairs and I'd hear him on the radio from those old— I can't remember who used to do that local Irish programme where they'd go round recording people.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: Yeah, and his sister who'd died actually in childbirth but she had a really beautiful voice and she often used to be on the radio from recordings that were done in the thirties.

*Ruth: Oh how lovely.*

Helen: Yeah, really lovely. So that was amazing. So everybody knew him. So I'd kind of tag— go around with him and people were— Yeah, it was great, yeah, really nice.

*Ruth: There were so many different sides to your life as a teenager, weren't they really? You know? And even when part of your Irish experience went a bit sour, it didn't all go sour, did it? It was— There was still some really lovely aspects to it.*

Helen: Yeah, really lovely, yeah. Absolutely, yeah, really important as well, yeah. And that thing, you know, back home I think I was very— For years and years, I think I kept the connection with Ireland going for my parents.

*Ruth: Yes. It was important to them you mean?*

Helen: Yeah, really important, yeah. That I kind of held something for them. And I think—

*Ruth: That connection?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah.

*Ruth: Yeah, it's almost like they hadn't fully left it because you were still keeping that alive for them, I guess.*

Helen: Yeah, definitely, yeah. With the music and everything. Because they weren't particularly musical. But yeah, that— I think that was really important for them. Yeah. [indec].

[01:03:14]

*Ruth: Umhm. So back in London— Can I take you back to London?*

Helen: Yes, take me back to London, yes.

*Ruth: [Laughs]. You did your— You got your A levels?*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: And then was it time to get a job or—?*

Helen: Yeah. I didn't do very well in my A levels so I— What did I do first of all?

*Ruth: I'm surprised you even managed to do them at all, you had so much going on in your life?*

Helen: Oh yeah. I managed to get English and the other two, I got O level passes in and I'd also started to realise that there was this thing called university. So during my time in the sixth form, yeah, there's a thing called university that all my mates were—

*Ruth: Were planning to go to?*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: And nobody was talking about it in your family?*

Helen: Yeah, well no one had ever mentioned it to me. It was really interesting. Looking back, you just think, Jesus, the decisions that unconsciously or consciously made by the teachers like "that's not for her" and "that's for her" sort of thing. Yeah, so no one had ever mentioned it to me and anyway— So then, left sixth form which felt really sad actually, leaving that kind of sorority you know, of girls.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: But— but it was 1976 so it was kind of pretty amazing, you know.

*Ruth: Yeah, what a great time to be leaving school and heading into the world?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah. So I got a job in— as a— as a kind of clerk in a local firm. I spent the summer going round France and hitchhiking with some— two girlfriends and that was all very exciting.

*Ruth: Fabulous.*

Helen: And then got deported from France—

*Ruth: What?*

Helen: And blah-blah-blah— Anyhow.

*Ruth: Hang on— So your parents allowed you to go to France or—?*

Helen: Yeah—

*Ruth: Hitchhiking? [Laughs].*

Helen: Yeah, see they— honestly, I think by this time, I was kind of— I think my very quiet stubbornness just kind of meant I could do anything, you know. It's really interesting, looking back now, I just think I was very, very determined but in a very quiet way. I never had rows about anything, I just did it.

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: And I'd kind of either tell them after or tell them when it was all planned and I was ready to go. But again, it was pretty— it was still pretty hairy at home. There was a lot going on with my brothers.

*Ruth: Were you brothers still— they were still at home?*

Helen: A lot of them were, yeah, yeah. Dennis had left. But my sister Maura, she took a long time to leave, you know. So there was Maura, Dennis— Oh no, Maura, Michael, Peter and Christopher still there, yeah. Yeah— so anyway, I came back, I got a job locally and that was okay. I used to spend— I was earning money, it was a really boring job but it was okay because I had a laugh with everyone I worked with. And I taught myself to type, that's right, I taught myself to touch type. My sister Maura had brought home this like course in a book and an old typewriter when I was about thirteen or fourteen and I'd done the course and taught myself to do it just for something to do. So that was good, so I got this job and I got paid thirty quid a week and I had to give my dad some digs money, I can't remember how much. Yeah, and then all the rest of it was mine and I used to— It was a walk up to this job so I didn't have any fares or anything. And I just used to club every weekend, it was bloody brilliant.

*Ruth: Fabulous.*

Helen: Go to all these punk clubs and I used to cut my hair myself really short, I looked like I'd been— had my hair cut by a lawnmower, you know.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: Dye it myself and go up town to— you know, all these punk shops and buy bondage trousers, all that kind of stuff. It was great, I had a really great time and— Yeah, so again lovely, and again full of exciting things and boyfriends and most of them didn't last very long. Yeah, it was good.

*Ruth: Lots of music and fashion?*

Helen: Lots of music and fashion, yeah, and staying out all night and all that kind of stuff. And then I got a job with a— through my friend who worked in the film industry. She got me a job with this producer / director so I worked for him as a sort of personal assistant. He was really involved in doing all these punk films and filming festivals and this, that and the other. And so it was all very exciting, going to gigs and this, this and the other. And I absolutely hated it. Really quickly, I just—

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: — thought, ugh. I'm sick of this, I don't— you know, I don't want to be in this world. It felt really meaningless to me, I just didn't— I just wasn't cut out for it really, psychologically I wanted to do something that felt a bit more meaningful. So then I did— what was it? Community Service Volunteers.

*Ruth: Oh yes?*

Helen: And yeah, for about six months. So that was great and I went up to Cheshire and I was a warden. Can you believe it? I was nineteen and they put me as a warden of a hostel for homeless girls. I mean God knows, it would never happen now.



[01:08:48]

Helen: Anyway, then I came back and my friend Patsy who I'd also gone to school with, she wanted to do geography at university, and she hadn't got a good enough grade in her geography A level and she basically wanted somebody to study with. And she kind of sold me, she said like, "you could go to university too and you could do this, that and the other, so why don't you study with me the geography A level, and you could— if you get a better grade, then you'll be able to go to university." And I sort of went, "oh, alright then," you know. And she was really clever because actually she just wanted somebody to do the— to do the whole thing with.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: Yeah so we studied together and she went up to— Oh, what's that? Oh no, sorry.

*Ruth: Are you still there?*

Helen: Can you hear me?

*Ruth: Yeah, I can still hear you.*

Helen: Yeah, okay. Yeah so, she arranged it all, we went up to Senate House and sat the exam in a great, big, massive hall full of strangers and I managed to get some crappy grade but it was a pass and then—

*Ruth: Enough.*

Helen: — And so then I went to Middlesex— I went to North East London Poly. So, that was amazing. I was just like, you know, how— It's really interesting just the determination I think.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: When I look back, I think, God, how did I manage to do that? You know.

*Ruth: Brilliant. And it was brilliant that she did persuade you to study with her, wasn't it? It was like the— It gave you the impetus?*

Helen: Yeah, and I sort of went, "All right then," you know, I didn't really understand the implications of it, but then really did because I thought yeah, I want to get out of this, I don't want to be a secretary all my life. I don't really want to work in the film industry, it's full of wankers and—

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: It's like the music industry, yeah, okay, but I'd rather just be a punter and go to gigs and not have to— you know.

*Ruth: Not have to hang around and listen to people talking a load of—*

Helen: Yeah, absolutely, yeah.

*Ruth: So how was poly?*

Helen: It was great, yeah, it was great. It was hard, it was really hard. Again, I had that feeling of Oh my God, what am I doing here and I can't— and I don't fit in and I don't understand and I don't understand what anyone's doing. And I was at home, back at my mum and dad's place and my mum caught me kind of crying, I was really depressed and thought oh, I don't want to go back there, it's so awful and— you know. And she said, "Oh, maybe it would have just been better if you— if you just like stayed here and got a job locally." And do you know that— that really—

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: That sorted it for me. I just thought Oh my God, no, I'm getting the first train back.

*Ruth: Was that— Was that your mum's reverse psychology? [Laughs].*

Helen: Yeah, I wonder, yeah, yeah. So yeah, I went back. Not that I'd left but I thought no, I'm really going to make a go of it. And I had a wonderful tutor there who kind of basically taught all these working-class students— a lot of us were working-class— how to kind of do really basic study skills, like read a book for information. You know, read an article. Like really, really basic stuff. And he was fantastic, he was working-class and he was just so able to get through to us. And I— it was— it was— When I learned how to read in that way, it was like learning to fly. I absolutely loved it and I was off, I was just off then.

*Ruth: That's wonderful.*

[01:12:34]

Helen: Yeah, yeah. So Ireland was sort of starting to really recede in the background—

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: In terms of the visits. I still went every year, sometimes twice a year. Often twice a year. But, I knew that it wasn't my life even though back in London, I was playing a lot of Irish music and going to a lot of sessions and stuff like that but I knew—

*Ruth: The place itself, it wasn't for you.*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, I knew that.

*Ruth: Um. Well I think you said when we spoke last time that you just— you felt you wouldn't fit in and that you'd be shunned because of who you were.*

Helen: Yeah, absolutely, yeah. It wasn't somewhere where I'd be able to grow in the way that I wanted to.

*Ruth: Yeah.*

Helen: In that kind of— in that rural farming community. I'd be such an oddity really.

*Ruth: Yeah, yeah. And so, you just went back to see your aunt and uncle then in— you know, by the time you were in your twenties, you went back for shorter visits to see your aunt and uncle?*

Helen: Yes, yeah. Just sort of— I'd go for a week at a time, yeah. And sometimes, I'd take, you know, like boyfriends over with me. My partner at one time, he used to come over quite a bit with me which was kind of okay but— It was weird because we were living together in London but when we went to stay with Joan and Michael, we'd have separate bedrooms.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: Oh God, yeah, so weird, you know.

*Ruth: And they were— were they— how did they reconcile themselves to the fact that your life was going to be in England, do you think?*

Helen: Yeah, I think— I think there was a tremendous loss there actually for them especially—

*Ruth: They'd— they'd married late, hadn't they?*

Helen: They had, yeah. They were in their forties when they married or early forties, yeah.

*Ruth: So they must have felt like you were the child that they didn't have for a while?*

Helen: Yeah, absolutely, yeah.

*Ruth: Or maybe— maybe always?*

Helen: Yes, yeah, yeah. But I think— I think also that I was kind of the disappointing child— I became the disappointing child, you know. Which is like an aspect of parenthood, isn't it— you can't—

*Ruth: Oh my God, yeah. [Laughs].*

Helen: Yeah, exactly, yeah. So the full gamut of things and I think for them— For me, they were the parents, you know?

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: That I—

*Ruth: They were an alternative set of parents, yeah.*

Helen: I was the only child, I was, yeah— I was kind of noticed and really recognised in lots of ways, especially when I was younger, my relationship with my uncle was very strong, you know. And he— he was just fantastic, he was so gentle and kind to me and very— kind of

just recognised— that recognition in the psychological sense. I remember the way he looked at me in that—

*Ruth: Yes, he saw you, really saw you.*

Helen: He really saw me. Yeah, yeah.

*Ruth: Was he your dad's brother?*

[01:15:50]

Helen: No, no, he was my— He— It was—

*Ruth: Marriage—*

Helen: Joan was dad's sister.

*Ruth: Gotcha.*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: So it was through marriage he was your uncle. So he was a different sort of man to your dad by the sounds of things and brought something different?*

Helen: He was, yeah. Yeah, I mean he wasn't a saint you know? He— you wouldn't want to be married to him, that's for sure.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: Oh Jesus, no, but— no, I think— I think I kind of dropped into his life and he dropped— him and Joan dropped into my life and we were utterly delighted with each other.

*Ruth: Lovely, yeah.*

Helen: We were all really delighted by this kind of gift that had come and I think I was the perfect child, you know, I was very biddable, I loved working, I never complained, I'd love any job that they gave me, I absolutely loved it. I was delighted by everything and interested in everything about the farm. You know, so it was like I looked at them with love I think and they couldn't believe it.

*Ruth: Yeah and it was— it was reciprocal, wasn't it? It was a lovely relationship.*

Helen: Yeah, very reciprocal, you know, but then I think we all kind of grew up and I wasn't so reciprocal because I didn't want to live there.

*Ruth: Yeah. What happened to the farm?*

Helen: What happened?

*Ruth: Um.*

Helen: Yeah, my— Well, my cousins— So my dad's home place was— is just the other side of— do you know the Pass of Keimaneigh?

*Ruth: No.*

Helen: Have you heard of it, no? Oh, okay. So they— basically my dad's home farm is only about four miles away and my cousin Pat, he took the farm on when my dad's brother Mick died. So he stayed there and took the farm on, got married and had his kids there and everything. He's another really lovely man and he— as Joan and Michael got older and older and needed a bit of help around, he got more and more involved with them. First of all through kind of taking care of jobs on the farm, then he put some of his cattle on the farm and used the land a bit more and then he got involved in doing improvements on the farm and then gradually kind of getting involved in their much more personal care.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: And just ab— with no expectation of anything actually.

*Ruth: That's lovely.*

Helen: Yeah, this started years ago, probably, fifteen or whatever years ago and yeah, so gradually it kind became understood really that he was— that Michael was going to sign the farm over to him.

*Ruth: Yes, yeah.*

Helen: So that's what— that's what happened yeah, and everyone was really happy about that.

*Ruth: So it worked out.*

Helen: Yeah, it really worked out, yeah, and he was very— he was just lovely to Joan. Michael died about eight years before Joan or maybe more, maybe ten or twelve years actually. She was 101 when she died.

*Ruth: Oh my goodness.*

Helen: Yeah, yeah.

*Ruth: And when was that?*

Helen: That was 2015 I think.

*Ruth: Ah so, only a few years ago.*

Helen: 2014, yeah, yeah. She lived in the— she lived on the farm until she was 100, yeah. [Laughs].

*Ruth: Amazing.*

Helen: She wouldn't leave.

[01:19:16]

*Ruth: And have you been back to Ireland?*

Helen: I haven't been back since and I don't know if I ever will.

*Ruth: Um.*

Helen: Yeah, really interesting. I sort of feel like my— you know, am I Irish? I don't know. I don't know if I am Irish. I've got an Irish passport. Sometimes I just feel like a big fraud really. I just think am I allowed to say I'm Irish? I don't know if I am.

*Ruth: Why would you say that?*

Helen: Ah, I don't know. I think because I wasn't born there. I don't know, all these kind of facts I suppose that have got nothing to do with the feeling and the— how I was brought up to absolutely think I was Irish and nothing else, you know. Yeah, really interesting and yet now, I don't know. Have I got any connection to Ireland?

*Ruth: As people have died off and you visit— and as you visit less frequently, it feels less legitimate in some way, does it?*

Helen: Partly, I suppose that's the kind of the material, physical side of it but I think much more emotionally when I started to kind of realise that my life in London did not fit at all with— not just my life but my kind of psychological— the way I was really was not going to fit in with this rural farming culture and community. I think then I started to sort of realise that the separation between us, the division, was just quite big and getting bigger as time went on, the more my life— the more I constantly chose a life in England. And so— because after all I was still going— until Joan died, I was still going often twice a year, most years I went twice so it wasn't— I was still visiting there but even when I was still visiting, I was thinking, am I really Irish? I don't know, am I? Could I ever fit in here? Would anyone recognise— that's another thing, would anyone recognise me as Irish? I remember actually when I was working at Bath, University of Bath, something came up— Chatting to someone, another academic and something came up about passports and I said, "oh, I'll be alright because I've got an Irish passport." And he said— and this bloke said to me, "you?" And I said, "yeah, yeah, always have." And he said, "since when are you Irish?"

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: And I thought, oh you know, it really— I thought well yeah, you wouldn't recognise anything, I have to tell you that I've got an Irish passport to— you wouldn't see me as Irish, you know.

*Ruth: But I mean that might be about that person's perspective of what an Irish person is, which might not bear any reality to all of the people who are Irish. [Laughs].*

Helen: Yeah. But I suppose also that I am both. I mean I do see myself as English as well.

*Ruth: Yeah, you've got—*

Helen: That's— It's coming from a sort of— from an internal place as well as an external place—

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: And maybe the internal view on it is the one that's got most ambivalence and contradiction and conflict I suppose— conflict, really. Am I English or am I Irish? Well actually I'm both.

*Ruth: Yes.*

Helen: But I'm easier to recognise as English.

*Ruth: Yeah, I mean from what you've described, the things you describe about your— who you are as a person and your— your spirit and your sexuality are kind of both, aren't they? Because you've got the freedom— the more cultural freedom that was in England as you were growing up but you've got such strong connections to the culture of Ireland and— I mean you didn't talk much today about the kind of humour and the kind of— the good laugh side of things as well but I know that's also really important to you, so it is an absolute mixture, isn't it?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, absolutely, yeah. And interestingly, yeah, that kind of freedom. I mean I think the people that came over to England like my aunts and uncles, Jesus, I mean they were trying to escape something too. There's no doubt about that and not just— you know, my mum was trying to escape her mother but also my mum was quite a character and she was like a— you know, quite a girl actually in her time and I'm under no kind of doubt that her relationship with my dad was sexual before they got married and that maybe she had had other sexual relationships before she met him and that she really liked sex and she didn't— she didn't really see anything wrong with it in her girls either. It was a part of life really and to be expected. So it was contradictory, all the sexual jokes. I mean I remember all these sort of— when I was a kid, the hilarity sometimes that would come with the adults sort of talking about sex basically. You know and you'd kind of wonder what they were laughing at and only later when you grow up, you think, oh my God, they were having a right old laugh talking about some bloke's— you know, willy or something.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: All the aunts sitting there laughing their heads off. Because they'd heard some story about the size of some bloke's plonker.

*Ruth: [Laughs].*

Helen: Hilarious, yeah. So very contradictory, yeah. But yes, and also just yeah the Irish— there is something very Irish about that kind of flipping between the joy and the laughter, the poetry of it all and then the— the really destructive kind of flipping back into this or flipping over into very destructive dark, desperate, despairing kind of frame of mind or state of mind.

*Ruth: Yeah, absolutely.*

Helen: That's how it was in my family anyway.

[01:26:08]

*Ruth: Um. Yes. So shall we finish when you were twenty-five and where you were then and what you were doing?*

Helen: So when I was twenty-five—

*Ruth: Or around that age?*

Helen: Twenty-five, yeah. So, oh God, yeah, no, my twenties were really kind of— not a great time really. So I— my first big, big relationship and big love was with a young— So I met him when I was twenty-one— with a young Sikh man who grew up in West London but I met him through a friend. And we— So we had a big relationship and that was fraught with racial tension, mostly from his family actually and a bit from my brothers but not— not at all from my mum and dad and not from all of my brothers. Anyway, anyway, it was kind of doomed so when the end of that relationship came when I was about twenty-five, twenty-six and that was devastating, it took me years to get over. But actually on the rebound, I took up a year later with somebody else who— and we were together, we lived together for about six years. And he was a musician so that was brilliant actually, we had a great time in lots of ways, really great, kind of part carrying on that— that tradition of lots of sessions. He was a violinist, but he was very eclectic, he could play Irish music but mainly he was a jazz violinist. But anyway—So that was great, but we were together only about six or seven months when two of my brothers died, very close to each other, so two months apart. So I think that was kind of such a— It was really devastating.

*Ruth: Oh my God, very shocking.*

Helen: Yeah, very, very shocking, very devastating for everybody and for me I think it just kind of knocked me off my axis for years actually. Yeah, so yes, yeah.

*Ruth: So you— it was very happy in one way and then you had this tragedy really?*

Helen: Yeah, it was a tragedy, yeah, yeah. No, it was terrible. Yes, so I— so I was really knocked off kilter for years actually. I wouldn't— I'd say everything's a bit of a blur in lots of ways after that.

*Ruth: Your mum and dad were still alive then?*

Helen: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, they were young, I mean this was '86.

*Ruth: Goodness.*

Helen: '86, yeah. They weren't young obviously but they were— they weren't really old or anything.



[01:29:05]

Helen: Yeah so my career really started to take off but it was, you know— It was such a strange time because— So 1989, I published my first book with somebody else, co-authored, and that was really, really successful.

*Ruth: So, hang on. Because the last we talked about your professional life, I think you were still at poly so—*

Helen: Oh yeah, yeah.

*Ruth: So how did you get from poly to publishing a book in— within very short order really, wasn't it?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah. So when I left poly, I— What did I do? Oh, I took various jobs and stuff and then I worked for Office for National Statistics because I'd majored in research methods and stuff and done quite a substantial piece of research myself as part of my degree. I did a year's placement in British Rail actually and did a study of women managers there which was great. Yeah, so I worked for them and then part-time— So I was still kind of in the research field and then to get a bit of extra money because I could type really fast, I used to sort of type up people's Masters dissertations and stuff like that and a friend who'd done her placement in this research unit at the Institute of Education said, "oh, they're looking for people to type up tran— audio recordings, to do some transcribing." I said, "yeah, I'll do that." So I did that and the woman— Oh the interviews were just so fascinating, so when the woman who was the research director came to pick up the transcripts and that, I'd say, "oh, they're so interesting," and blah-blah-blah. And she like a good researcher would say, "oh, what did you think about this, that and the other?" so I'd tell her. Anyway, so a few times that kind of happened and she said, "look, would you mind writing down all your thoughts about what people are saying because they're really, really interesting." So I said, "oh yeah, sure." Did that and then a few months after that, she said, "look, I'm going to put in for some grant money and I'd reall— I really like your thoughts about the data and blah-blah-blah and I'd really like you to— If I get the money, will you come and be my researcher?" So I was like, I jumped at the chance, you know.

*Ruth: Wonderful chance and you kind of made it happen yourself, didn't you, by—?*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: By being interested and having thoughts and— about the data, yeah. Brilliant.*

Helen: [indec]. So that was so amazing and that was the beginning of a long relationship with this woman and— A long academic relationship and we went on and got quite a few grants together and then one really big one. We wrote— So the first book that we wrote was really— kind of caused a bit of a stir in a teacup, you know, a storm in a teacup. You know what it's like in academia, but it was—

[01:32:18]

*Ruth: Why was that? Tell me about it.*

Helen: Because it was about a study, a longitudinal study of working-class and middle-class girls growing up who had been paired together when they— in nursery when they were four and then we followed them, yeah, until they were eleven. And then, quite a few years later, we got a really big grant together to follow them up when they were sixteen and twenty-one so it was quite a— you know, big thing. And we were very critical of ideas about mothering as they pertained to class in particular, very, very critical. So just as class was going off the agenda, you know, it was in the eighties and no one really wanted to talk about class anymore, we were really insisting. And because we were interested in psychoanalysis and sociology, that was quite a new thing bringing the two together so it caused— And because it was really feminist, I mean we were really critical of some very established feminist theoretical ideas at the time but we were the— feminists, you know. So it was really interesting. And naively because I didn't— I hadn't written before, I didn't understand that there were all these rules about academic writing so you could— We kind of wrote what we liked, you know. And later, I think the more you know, the more hidebound you become in a way by the academic style but— Yeah, no, so it was great. But— So that was all happening in my kind of public life but Ruth, my internal life was like the Somme, it really was. I can't sort of tell you how much of a state I was in and how hidden it was.

*Ruth: Because of your brothers' deaths?*

Helen: Yeah, yeah. Until I started to become ill, you know.

*Ruth: Oh gosh.*

Helen: Four— three or four years down the line. I just became iller and iller and iller and— until in the end, I had to give up full-time work and that interestingly is when I got in homeopathy because of course I went all round the houses, had every test, every kind of treatment, blah-blah-blah. Nothing touched it and somebody said, "oh, why don't you try homeopathy?" I was like, "what's that?" And they went, "oh, I don't know but it's basically quite good for chronic— this kind of chronic thing." So they said, "oh, there's one that lives up the road from you." I don't know how they knew this person. Anyway, so I went to see her and it was just amazing. So within like eight months, I was back working full-time.

*Ruth: Wow.*

Helen: And that kind of also made me— it kind of woke— it kind of also worked on an emotional level and I started to realise, I couldn't hide, I had to do something about this because I was going to— it was hopeless to just think that this was just the physical problem, I was—

*Ruth: You had to face up to what had happened?*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: You had to stop being so Irish about it all and pretending it hadn't happened.  
[Laughs].*

Helen: Absolutely and, you know, while— Of course, like you're in a family where everyone's being really stoic. Oh but by the way, drinking themselves to death.

*Ruth: Of course.*

Helen: Yeah, so really stoic except oh for fuck's sake. Anyway, yeah, so— So that was interesting— Quite a— All this success professionally was quite overwhelming as well, I didn't really know what I'd— A - I didn't— I was back into that I didn't really understand what I'd done or how I got here or [indec].

*Ruth: And it was all very quick really considering your kind of school and university career were— you know what I mean? It was such a struggle for you and now suddenly you're really having this very successful academic career, it was—*

Helen: Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely, yeah, that was weird. But ehm, yeah. And then, what happened then? So then into my thirties. Some other interesting thing— Yeah, I don't know what to say about my twenties except they were taken up— I think the big events of my twenties were the break up— my relationship— first relationship which was quite destructive and then devastating when it ended, then my brothers dying and going into this other relationship which was sort of quite healing but not really where I needed to be in the end. But it was very healing with a very different sort of man. And that kind of academic professional life taking off.

*Ruth: Huge, huge things you did in your twenties and experienced, weren't they?*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: You know?*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: Wonderful. Well, we've been talking for an hour and a half so—*

Helen: Have we?

*Ruth: Yeah. It was a fantastic conversation Helen. Is there anything else that you wanted to add about family, Ireland, those years?*

[01:37:28]

Helen: I don't think so. No, I think that's it, yeah. Of course, I suppose also being part of an Irish community in London as well. So I haven't really mentioned that. So that's all going on. Because I obviously had lots of aunts and uncles living in London and we used to go to Irish clubs and clubs that were attached to churches, you know, like the Quex Road in Kilburn. That— we used to go there when we were visiting aunts and— an aunt and uncle who lived in Kilburn who were great fun so— yeah and very—

*Ruth: And did you keep in touch with them all the way up into your twenties?*

Helen: To the Irish clubs?

*Ruth: To that whole Irish kind of scene if you like?*

Helen: Yeah, the music took me into that, yeah, definitely.

*Ruth: Do you still have Irish— any Irish connections to any of the cultural centres or anything?*

Helen: No, not at all and I gave up playing Irish music as well. I listen to it a lot, but I gave up playing the flute and tin whistle and stuff.

*Ruth: And when did you do that?*

Helen: I think when I left— a long time ago now really when I left the relationship with Joe.

*Ruth: Ah, the musician?*

Helen: Yeah.

*Ruth: Uhhuh.*

Helen: There was something there about, you know, leaving music in that relationship.

*Ruth: Um.*

Helen: Yeah, funny, isn't it? I just lost the— lost the desire.

*Ruth: You lost the desire for the music, but you kept visiting right up until 2018 or '16, was it '16?*

Helen: Yeah, 2000 and— Actually I think it must have been 2014 that Joan died, yeah.

*Ruth: So for years and years.*

Helen: Hm.

*Ruth: You're the only one in the family to sort of keep visiting.*

Helen: Yeah, my brother Peter occasionally goes, yeah. Now he occasionally goes. Like once every sort of five years, yeah.

*Ruth: Umhm. Okay, well thank you so much for the conversation.*

Helen: It's okay. At last, we did it, yeah.

*Ruth: It's been amazing. I'm going to turn the tape off now but don't go yet.*

END

[01:39:31]