ÚnaGanAGúna

Interview Summary Sheet **Title Page**

Ref No: 0UNA-U1X0010

Collection Title:
ÚnaGanAGúna Phase 1

Interviewee's Surname	**Interviewee's Title**
Duffy	-
Interviewee's First Name(s)	**Interviewee's Gender**
Eva	Female
Occupation	**Interviewee's Date of Birth**
Journalist/ Communications	25.07.1972
Mother's occupation	**Father's occupation**
Looked after children and home	Car park attendant

Date(s) of recording 12.06.2019

Location of interview: Birkbeck, University of London

Name of interviewer: Ruth Beecher

Type of recorder Marantz PMD660

Total number of tracks	**Recording format**
1	48 kHz, 32 bit

Mono

Total duration (HH:MM:SS)

Additional material (e.g. photos, documents)

Copyright/ clearance

Interviewer's comments
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Ruth: It is Wednesday 12th June 2019. My name is Ruth Beecher, I'm an historian at Birkbeck, University of London and I'm interviewing Eva for the Unaganaguna Irish Women's Digital History Project. Would you like to introduce yourself?

Eva: Hi, my name is Eva Duffy, I'm from Dublin originally and living in Northampton in England for the past twenty years or so.

Ruth: Great. And just to confirm Eva that you have read the information sheet all about the project?

Eva: I have, yeah.

Ruth: And you understand it, you're happy with everything in there?

Eva: I am.

Ruth: And that you've read the consent/ release form and you're happy to consent for us to record you and make your account of your young life available for other people as you've set out in the form.

Eva: Yeah, happy with all that.

Ruth: Okay, so shall we kick off? Ready?

[00:01:02]

Ruth: So, can we start by thinking a little bit about your background? Your family and the connections to Ireland.

Eva: Okay. So I was born in Finglas, which is a Dublin northside area, very working class. My parents both came from Claremorris in County Mayo. They, I think, had quite typical backgrounds themselves. My mam was from a huge family. I actually don't even know off the top of my head how many brothers and sisters she had, but there was a lot of them. She was the second youngest of the family. And my dad was somewhat unusually from a family of three. I think my mam used to tease him about being a bit more posh than she was because

he had shoes to go to school in [laughs]. So that was obviously for them a small, rural upbringing. Neither of them had much in the way of formal education in terms of secondary school and my dad was largely self-taught. Hugely well read and perhaps the most intelligent person I've ever met but very much all of his— everything he knew he had taught himself. So reading, because he left school very early. As the story goes, he lied about his age in order to join the Irish army.

Ruth: So what age— when was he born?

Eva: 1939, I think, and my mam was five years older than him— or younger, sorry, five years younger than him. So he, from all accounts, was something of a bit of a rebel himself in the sense of— he was a very, very strong believer in social justice from a very young age. And I remember a story he told me about his dad. The local— a local dignitary's son had gotten a young girl pregnant in the town they lived in and the young girl was to be sent away to England and my grandfather was overheard by my dad having a go at the girl's father for sending her away.

Ruth: Sending her away to have the baby?

Eva: Sending her away out of sight so— and the father of the child getting away scot free. So obviously my dad I think was quite influenced by that in the sense that things were not quite right for people— for women and also for people who were poorer. And then there was an anecdote he told from his childhood. There weren't very many— he didn't talk very much at all about childhood, but the few things gave us a little insight into how he viewed the world I think. Because when he was very young, he got a job at the post office and he had to deliver a parcel to, again, a local dignitary or a bigwig. So he went to the front door, knowing full well he wasn't supposed to go to the front door, and knocked on the door and said, "I've a parcel for you" and the guy said, "you need to go round to the servants' entrance." And he said, "well, you can have the parcel or not have it" [laughs]. So he refused to use the servants' entrance and he would have been a teenager at that point and I think it gives a good insight into how he was developing. He was quite left wing and he was— he brought all of us up, because he had four daughters and a son, and we were all brought up in a kind of a— not typically gendered way in that he felt very, very strongly that we should all get the best education we could. To a certain extent, he didn't think that third level education was

necessary, he thought that would be— not that it would be a waste but it wasn't for people like us. And very much thought that we'd have the kind of jobs that he would have had himself but he believed very, very strongly that education was absolutely crucial and he was very passionate about us getting the best education and reading a lot. So, yeah.

[00:05:10]

Eva: My mam was a hugely gregarious character, a real social butterfly I suppose she would have been, and very good looking. She married quite late and I think it was because she was holding on for my dad, from all accounts.

Ruth: How's that?

Eva: Well, he went off to England and then he came back to Dublin and she moved to Dublin.

Ruth: So he went off to England to be in the army?

Eva: No, no, he joined the Irish army. But also, I think his route out of Claremorris. Then later he went to England and did the usual: labouring and learnt a bit of carpentry and learnt enough to become a jack-of-all-trades guy. And then he moved back to Dublin and my mam went to Dublin— didn't really ever get much out of them about that period but— so I think she definitely had her sights set on him and nobody else would do so.

Ruth: What age were they when they married?

Eva: She was in her very late twenties so I think all of her family would have been married by then, and even her younger sister would have been so—

Ruth: What year did they marry?

I don't know, off the top of my head, because they both passed away so we don't have those conversations that would keep it fresh in my mind.

Ruth: Where— where do you come in the family?

Eva: I'm second youngest, fourth of five. There were two babies along the way that were lost so— but she— again, my mam wouldn't talk about that very much at all. It was— I think not something that she even herself would have acknowledged as something that she could have grieved for, talked about. It was just a matter of fact.

Ruth: And was that before you were born?

Eva: One of them was before me, yes, and I think actually when I look back on my relationship with my mam, I think she may have had postnatal depression because I think she didn't bond with me in perhaps the way she did with the others.

Ruth: So you're second, is it?

Eva: Second last.

Ruth: Oh, second last out of—

Eva: Five.

Ruth: Five.

Eva: Yeah, yeah.

Ruth: So do you want to tell me about who is in the family?

Eva: Yes, yes. So oldest is Miriam and as normally is with the oldest, high achiever, really very, very clever, very academically successful.

Ruth: What age is she or when she was born?

Eva: She was born in nineteen— oh well, let's see now [laughs], I'll have to work backwards. She's five years older than me so she'd be— I was born in 1972. So she'd be '67.

Ruth: '67.

Eva: She's 50 now, 51.

Ruth: 51, she is, yeah.

Eva: So that's Miriam. Then next up, exactly a year and a day later was Jennifer. And then two years after that, my brother Billy. Then me.

Ruth: Well, then the baby that was lost, is it?

Eva: Yes, yeah. And then another two year, about two and a half year gap then to the youngest, Stephanie. And my mam told Stephanie that the only reason she existed was she couldn't get the pill [laughs].

Ruth: This is the late '70s?

Eva: So she was '75, January '75, yeah.

Ruth: The pill hadn't hit Dublin. I'm sure it must have.

Eva: I'm sure there were ways and means but she was quite clear to her that she wasn't [indec]. She would have not been a planned pregnancy [laughs].

Ruth: When did she lose the other baby then?

Eva: So, again, there wasn't ever very much discussion about but all I know is my sister Jenny is the keeper of all the family stories.

Ruth: She's second daughter?

Eva: She is and she was closest to my mam so I think she used to get all the anecdotes and the stories and what-have-you that wouldn't have been shared with the rest of us and I think that's because Jenny was very like my mam, both very outgoing characters, very feisty. So the child was born but it would have been very early and was still-born. So that was after my brother and before me and I think because of how things happened then— Obviously, it wasn't considered to be a proper baby, you know, in that sense so there wouldn't have been any grieving process for her. There was a miscarriage before that so Billy is the middle child. The miscarriage came before him and the still-birth came after him. Yeah. But as I said, she never talked about it with us in any meaningful way at all. And only talked about the actual details of what happened when she spoke to my sister Jenny about it. She didn't talk about the emotional impact that it would have had on her.

[00:09:56]

Ruth: And was your mum— was she at home with the kids or did she—

Eva: She was, yeah, yeah. And I think there would have been no expectation otherwise from her or my dad. And where we grew up, that was absolutely the norm. So I remember when I was in primary school, there was one girl whose mother worked and that was considered to be quite odd. And I think her— her mum was much younger than our mothers so she—

Ruth: So, does that mean you became sort of middle class then?

Eva: No. [Laughs]. No, not at all, no. It was— it was a poor upbringing so my dad worked at the airport by the time we all came along. He had a job as a carpark attendant at Dublin airport. But there was a lot of overtime where he could– [indec]— he could and he did shift work, which was difficult for us when we were small because we'd have to be really quiet when he finished the nightshift or just— Mam would kick us all out of the house and say, don't come back until whenever. So it was not middle class at all, no. So the staying at home wasn't because we were financially comfortable enough to justify it, it was because women of that generation and social class didn't work.

Ruth: That's interesting, I didn't know that. You know, in terms of— Because often working class women do work, don't they? You know, regardless of the generation so that's really interesting, yeah.

Eva: Yeah, well certainly I didn't know anybody who had a working mother except as I said the one girl in primary school.

Ruth: Whose mother was much younger?

Eva: Yes, yeah.

[00:11:29]

Ruth: So, shall we talk a bit about you and where you were when you were fifteen then?

Eva: So, when I was fifteen. So I lived in the same house all my life in Finglas. So it was originally as they were called starter— they were like starter homes, they were. And my

parents got the house, there was some sort of a lottery for newly married couples. So you basically paid a certain amount to have a ticket and that guaranteed you a house but you had no say in where the house was. So you ended up there almost by—

Ruth: On what basis did you get the house? Did you buy the house, did you rent it?

Eva: They bought it because the people on the road were— I suppose housed by the— by Dublin Corporation. So it was a mixture. So I lived there all my life, we've actually only just sold the house because my dad died just over a year ago so that's another thing altogether.

Ruth: Sorry.

Eva: It's okay. So I went to the local primary school, then the local secondary school. The school that everybody who lived in our road and in our area went just to their local school. So you knew everybody who was there. So fifteen, I was in secondary school, I would have been studying very hard. Very studious.

Ruth: What was the school like?

Eva: It was a Catholic convent school so— St Michael's, all girls. So it was run by the Holy Faith Convent. Although it wasn't all nuns who did the teaching, we had civilians doing the actual— most of the teaching. But obviously the ethos ran through everything, it was very much a Catholic school. We'd have the Catholic prayers first thing in the morning and all of the teaching I suppose would have reinforced Catholicism. So yeah, that was—

Ruth: Did you like it?

Eva: I loved learning, I was very studious, very academic. I was more than happy to be just with books. Books were my friends as a child so I wasn't very sociable and I did have the family [laughs]— the family legend I suppose about me is that I spent my whole childhood in a cupboard with a torch and a book which is not far off the truth actually.

Ruth: What kind of things did you like to read when you were fifteen, do you remember?

Eva: I had very, very wide tastes. I remember when I younger being at home in Mayo as— we used to spend our summers with our grandmother and auntie— and running out of things

to read and then rummaging through their book collection and finding Jane Eyre. So that's I think when I was around eleven and being really blown away by, "oh this is a really big book and it's really good." So, I think I quite liked challenging books. So by the time I was fifteen— I still hadn't discovered things like American authors, so I wouldn't have been hugely into very modern fiction, probably was with all the classics at that point. And in school, we'd have been doing Charles Dickens and, who else— we'd have been doing Brian Friel with the plays and the usual sort of poetry stuff— it'd be the standards of Shakespeare right through to modern Irish writers so just the curriculum that was there then. So I think I'd have been exposed to very— at that— very traditional and conventional reading I think at that point. It wasn't until I went to university that I discovered that there was a whole other world of reading that was really—

Ruth: Where did you get your books? The library or—

Eva: Yes, and we used to get pocket money so I'd save up my pocket money and buy some.

Ruth: New books or secondhand?

EvaL I'd buy new ones if I'd saved up enough. And my dad insisted that we had to share books which used to annoy me. Because when you're in a family of five, nothing is your own. You have no privacy, you have nothing you can say is just yours. So even I'd get a book and I'd try to squirrel it away so I wouldn't have to share it but was always found.

[00:15:48]

Ruth: Did you share a bedroom?

Eva: Oh yes. It was [indec]. When we were all sort of small, it was a two bedroomed house. And then at some point, when I was probably about ten or eleven, my parents had the attic converted so then it was three bedroom. But certainly when I was very small, the four girls would share bunk beds, so it'd be two on the top bunk and two on the bottom bunk.

Ruth: And your brother had [?]

Eva: He had his own bed [laughs].

Ruth: And then you all shared with one or more sister then?

Eva: Yes, yeah.

Ruth: And what were your favourite subjects in school?

Eva: English was my absolute favourite, I loved that. And then history, geography. I was very good at school so there wasn't any subject that was— that I didn't enjoy learning but English and History were my favourites.

Ruth: And did you do extra-curricular things?

Eva: No, there wasn't really much opportunity to at that point. It wasn't a thing that you would have. I mean school extra-curricular stuff. There wasn't anything in the sense of like clubs or things like that. And then after school I had a small circle of friends and by the age of fifteen, I think I probably would have started to hang out [laughs]. We used to hang out at the library [laughs] which says a lot about [laughs], about— I think there was a [indec]— because I was the fourth of five children, my parents were much more relaxed with me than they were with my— especially the two oldest ones but because of that I had nothing to rebel against, I didn't need to. So I had a lot of freedom.

Ruth: And you used it to go to the library, yaaay [both laugh].

Eva: I did, yeah. And I also had a situation whereby— I had two best friends. One of them was an orphan at that point and she was in the guardianship of her older brother. So she wasn't monitored in the way that other children were. So again, a huge amount of freedom and we would always end up at her house usually if we were doing anything but we were very good with it. I think again because when you have the freedom to do things, [indec], I think especially when you see your older siblings because at that point, they would have [indec] so you'd kind of think, "oh, that doesn't look very appealing."

[Both laugh].

[00:18:07]

Ruth: So, what happened next for you?

Eva: I, after school I went to the Dublin Institute of Technology—

Ruth: So what age are you now, eighteen?

Eva: Eighteen, year.

Ruth: So up until eighteen, your world was really going to school and going to your friend's house and going to the library?

Eva: Yeah, it really was. So then when I was in my last year of secondary school, I got a placement at a magazine, a newsy kind of place in the city centre and that's— I had already thought that I'd quite like to do journalism and that really cemented it for me. So I had a situation whereby the editor of this book— editor of a magazine, it was a construction magazine for the construction industry, it was very boring— But he'd give me a book to read every week and he'd pay me to do a book review. And some of the books were actually really, really interesting so that's how I became aware of things like Bauhaus architecture or the Shaker movement in America, furniture and things like that. So although it was quite a dull publication, the books he was giving me to read were really, really interesting.

Ruth: Opening your mind to different worlds.

Eva: Very much so, yes. And that was the first time I thought, I can read something, write about it and get paid for it, which just seemed to be ludicrous [laughs]. So then I applied to study journalism at the Dublin Institute of Technology and I was accepted on to that course so I was the first person in my family to go to third level education. And the only reason I was able to do that was because I was funded by the European Social Fund. My younger sister after me was offered a place at Sligo Regional Technical College studying art but we couldn't get a grant for that so she wasn't able to take it because my parents couldn't afford it which was a huge shame.

Ruth: And what was your day to day like?

Eva: So, because it was an Institute of Technology as opposed to a university, it was a proper scheduled day [laughs], so you'd be in at half nine and usually studying until about four. And that was a very practical course. So it was— the qualification was Certificate in Practical Journalism and it was what most Irish journalists had as their route into journalism but most

people studied it as a postgraduate thing but that wouldn't have been an option for me so I was straight into the journalism side of things.

Ruth: So were you with people who'd already done a degree then?

Eva: Yes, probably half and half on the course. There was about thirty of us on the course; half of them had done degrees and half hadn't, they'd just gone straight into it.

Ruth: So it was quite different to school then?

Eva: Very, very much so although again, because it wasn't a university experience, it was still kind of regimented to some extent.

Ruth: Yes, you had the routine and structure.

Eva: Yeah. That was one shock, yeah, just being exposed to new learning and I think what I found most— what affected me most about that was not so much the academic side of things, that was the social aspect of it. And it was the— just learning about the world that was much, much bigger than anything I'd ever experienced before. So that was where— well the sort of very typical stuff— that's where I discovered drugs and men [laughs]. And because I lived in Dublin still, I had I think the best of both worlds. Because I had the financial stability of living at home and I lived close enough to be able to be— It wasn't a problem for me to go out and then come home, get a taxi home in the evening so I didn't have some of the financial worries that some of my classmates had who were from the country for example. So that was great. And as I said because I was the fourth of five, my parents weren't really very proscriptive at all with me about my behaviour. They were— they trusted me I think so they were very happy to just—

Ruth: What were you doing while they were trusting you then?

Eva: I wasn't doing anything terribly bad I think just sort of—

Ruth: What was the social life like around the course? Was it pubs and—

Eva: It was mostly pubs and then you had the student balls which is a very grand name for a disco but we'd have those, like there seemed to be any excuse for one. So I think what was

really nice about that, it was sort of like an entry level into the world of gigs and discos but with other students so it felt very safe and the age range was much narrower than it would be in the real world. So I think it—

Ruth: So you did most of your socialising around the college and the people who were on your course?

Eva: Yeah, yeah and it was really great to be meeting people who had similar interests in terms of books and films and— but also similar interests but had read different things so were able to sort of—

Ruth: Teach you, informally?

[00:23:10]

Eva: Very much so. The most— the book that made the biggest impression on me there was actually Angela Carter's *Night at the Circus*, which was on our curriculum but hadn't originally supposed to be. So we had an English lecturer who came in at the last minute because the original lecturer for whatever reason wasn't able to take the course. So we had this guy called Desmond Fennell who is a famous Irish journalist, and he basically looked at our reading list and said, "okay, we're not doing that." And so it was Angela Carter, *Night at the Circus*.

Ruth: I haven't read it but is she like a magic realist?

Eva: She is, yeah, and it absolutely blew me away—

Ruth: What, the magic realism did?

Eva: Yeah, the— so her— the main character in this book is feisty, feminist with feathers who can fly, well maybe she can't, you don't quite know, you have to read the story to find out whether it's a big con trick or whether she actually does have feathers. So, it was just literally mind blowing that this— people can write like this even just take words and make something like this. It was, it was just extraordinary.

Ruth: And what was his motivation, do you think, for putting that on the course for budding journalists?

Eva: I think he really wanted to mix things up a bit because the reading material, I think he thought was a bit dull. He was very, very provocative in the things that he said and I think everything he did was very calculated. So he would say things that you could tell were deliberately designed to bait the women in the group. He was quite good at saying really antifeminist things and you could see— well for me, he was saying them not because he necessarily believed them but because he was going to get a reaction from people and he always did. I think there was a real sense of this is somebody who says something for the reaction, not necessarily because he thinks it. And I had seen that in my dad before because my dad was a bit of a— he liked a debate and he always encouraged us to sort of debate things so he'd sometimes take a view on something, he wouldn't necessarily believe it, but it would be to stimulate conversation. Which is really interesting, my husband now comes from a very small English family and his— he thinks that when my family get together, we're arguing and I have to say to him, "that's not an argument, that's just a conversation" [laughs].

Ruth: And did you— were you already very capable in debate when you got to the course, having come from that sort of family or was it a new thing for you to learn how to construct an argument and—

Eva: No, it was very much part of our upbringing. It's not that my dad would have said to us, "here you go, talk about this," we wouldn't have been aware of the fact that he was doing it but when I look back on my childhood, we were constantly having very animated conversations about things. I think it's because he did bait us to have those sorts of things—

Ruth: You said he was quite left wing, did you?

Eva: Yes.

Ruth: Was he active, was he a union man or was he just— in his thinking and his attitudes he was quite left wing.

Eva: Yeah, no, I'm not aware of him being involved in any particular party at all, I don't think he was ever a member of a party.

Ruth: He just had views.

Eva: He had views and his views changed as well over the years. He wasn't— he wasn't rigid in his outlook. I know that there are things he did change his mind on. So he was very much somebody who— if he was presented with an evidence base would change his mind. And I think that again is something that really had an impact on me; I think it makes you less— you're less— what's the word? Intransigent as a person I think when you've grown up like that.

[00:27:16]

Ruth: So you're at journalism course, you're reading Angela Carter, your mind is blown, what else happened that year? You said you discovered drugs and sex and—

Eva: Yeah, I mean it was still very much—

Ruth: Was it a one-year course?

Eva: No, it was a two-year course. It was hard work because we were expected to produce— the outputs were such that you couldn't really let up; it wasn't like a cushy couple of years. So we had to produce things at the end of each year in order to get the grades obviously. And because it was funded by the European Social Fund, I think there had to be evidence of learning as well.

Ruth: You wouldn't have had any problem with that because that was you anyway in terms of your work ethic by the sounds of it?

Eva: Yeah, and it was a really nice bunch of people, very, very diverse and so you had people who were there because they wanted to be sports journalists, you'd have the people who wanted to be music journalists and then you had the straighforward news geeks so it was a really nice collection of people.

Ruth: Where were you in that group at that time?

Eva: I was the newsy type, that's what was really my motivator in that I wanted to be a news journalist. Actually, my ideal would have been a war correspondent so the likes of Kate Adie would have been very much what then—

Ruth: She was your 'shero'?

Eva: I really did find her— she was a role model for me and then Orla Guerin started around— probably just later than Kate Adie but there would have been an overlap between the two of them. So I was really fascinated by the idea that women could go and report in conflict situations that had my life taken the trajectory that you think when you're eighteen or nineteen or twenty and you think the world's your oyster, you can do anything, I'd have been a war correspondent. And obviously never been injured or killed or anything like that.

Ruth: What would you think is the thing that attracted you to want to do that?

Eva: I think primarily it was about the fact that it was writing and I loved writing but also it was about having, I suppose, observing the world around you and being able to document it. So I think I had read or I had watched a documentary when I was in my late teens about a war photographer. And her was asked the question about how can you stand there taking photographs when people are dying and the answer which he gave was around "you have to document it, if I don't take these photographs, then the world won't know this has happened." And that really affected me enormously because I thought that is what a journalist does, they record what becomes the history of a country or a situation so journalism is— very much for me, it was a very honourable and noble profession.

[00:30:21]

Ruth: So you've neatly sidestepped the sex and drugs there. Was that deliberate or—

Eva: [Laughs]. I don't know, it's just, it wasn't that exciting, just that that's what I discovered, there wasn't much going on. I took acid a few times, probably about three or four times and then—

Ruth: So are we in the eighties now?

Eva: We are in the very early nineties. And also took ecstasy once and I really enjoyed that and I would have taken that more had I stayed in Dublin but that coincided with the time that I moved over to England and I didn't know anybody.

Ruth: So that was when your course ended?

Eva: No, no, no, I was in Dublin for another few years after that. So I moved over to England when I was about 22.

Ruth: So let's stay in Dublin then for a minute. So you finished the course?

Eva: Yes. Then I worked for about six months at the *Connaught Tribune* newspaper in Galway and then came back to Dublin and worked for a publishing company.

Ruth: So what was the Conn Tribune like? And Galway?

Eva: Conn Tribune, ah, that was lovely.

Ruth: Had you ever been to Galway before?

Eva: I had, I loved Galway, which is why I was really happy to go there. It was— it was great, it was really putting everything I'd learned into practice.

Ruth: What type of an outfit was it? Was it big? Was it—

Eva: It was, I think—

Ruth: The "Conn" being "Connemara"—

Eva: "Connacht," yeah.

Ruth: So it was kind of a province-wide newspaper?

Eva: Yeah, so they had the regional newspaper which was the *Connaught Tribune* and then they had the city edition *The Tribune*, so you'd be working on both at the same time. And it was just exactly as you'd expect a newsroom to be. It was really—

Ruth: I only know newsroom from the television so—

Eva: Exactly [laughs], it was exactly that.

Ruth: How many people worked there?

Eva: So there was about eight of them, I think, altogether and the photographer and they were as— exactly as cynical as journalists are portrayed.

Ruth: And men? Women?

Eva: It was a mixture and then the editor was a guy and he had his own office.

Ruth: So he had his office and then you were out on the—

Eva: [Laughs], yeah.

Ruth: Oh right, yeah, sounds very like telly. And what was your "beat"?

Eva: I was doing the sort of, the entry level, mundane stuff so whatever came through—

Ruth: Did you have to go off to like road traffic accidents and things?

Eva: I did [laughs], I'd do phoning around the police stations and say "anything happening at all"? So I got my first front page byline because I'd heard that a body had been washed up on the beach so I rang the police station and asked them to confirm it and they did so I got my first byline there, which was— really that was just such proper— exactly the sort of journalism we'd been taught to do. It's not glamorous, it's just about your contacts, making phone calls every day to the usual suspects, seeing what happens.

Ruth: Right, and did you enjoy the reality of journalism?

Eva: I loved it, I absolutely loved it. I really loved the buzz of going to an event say, for example, there was one where the mayor was giving a speech about something. There was a dinner in honour of all the former mayors of Galway and it was just, he gave a little speech. And in it, he mentioned that he thought that what they do was so valuable, it should actually be a paid job. So I got a headline out of that. And I so loved the idea of just going something and keeping your ears open and finding a story and that then became a lead story for the

newspaper and I was really proud, because it was like— it was just me and I just went to this thing and I got them a story, so—

Ruth: Great.

Eva: Yeah, it was.

Ruth: So you stayed there for?

Eva: About six months it was, I was there.

Ruth: And did you make friends there?

Eva: Yes, I did. Well I'd say it was quite transient so a lot of—

So you were about 21 now?

Eva: Yeah.

Ruth: And where did you live?

Eva: I basically stayed on the floor of somebody else. A friend of a friend's had basically said I could bunk with them for— Because it was an indefinite position anyway and— Yeah, so, and that was very much in keeping with what was going on in that house that I was living in. It was very, very relaxed; it was like you'd never know who would be there from one day to the next, so people would come and go.

Ruth: So you were still sort of in a student-mode except you hadn't really done student before because you'd lived at home.

Eva: Yes, exactly.

Ruth: So this was your first time living away from home?

Eva: Yes. Well, no, actually it wasn't. I had lived in Brussels for about two months in between leaving secondary school and starting the journalism course. So that was my first taste of freedom without any parental supervision at all. But having said that, there was still— there was a friend's older brother who was keeping an eye on us. But that was my first

taste of adulthood I suppose, I was working as a chambermaid in a hotel so that was hard work but, you know, when you're eighteen you have boundless energy so we would go out at night and go straight to the job from having been out. So you'd be starting work at like six o' clock in the morning but you wouldn't have gone home beforehand, you just go on and then sleep all afternoon and go out again.

Ruth: So you had two months of that before you went to journalism school?

Eva: [Laughs], I did yeah.

Ruth: And then in Galway, you were sort of the first time really for a prolonged period living away from home?

Eva: Yes.

Ruth: And how was that? Did you— was it— did you miss home?

Eva: I don't think I did. I don't remember missing home at all, no, no. I think I was just excited.

Ruth: You were quite independent and adaptable then when you were— even though you were quite young?

Eva: Yeah, and I think again that's— that comes of coming from a very large family where you kind of— It's a thing that I suppose, benign neglect would sum it most, where you're kind of left to your own devices and [laughs] it's that thing of— Yeah, you're not so much [pause], you're just left to get on with it really.

Ruth: You're not cosseted like so you don't mind that sort of— being driven around or kind of mollycoddled, yeah?

Eva: Oh no, I would never have been driven around at all. No, we were very much— I suppose perhaps in a way that doesn't happen now, you're expected to grow up quicker. You know, my mam would have always looked after us, she was the feeder, you know, so her role was always that of the homemaker? But she wasn't desperate to keep us at home [laughs] having said that [laughs].

[00:37:04]

Ruth: And so did the job in Galway kind of just end by itself or?

Eva: Yeah, I got a job in Dublin then at a publishing company so I came back for that because that was a bit more secure I suppose than the newspaper job. So I kind of moved away from newspaper journalism into more corporate reporting. So I did miss the buzz of the newspaper stuff but it was, I suppose, a more regular salary for me and I was still living at home at that point and then moved into a flat with my sister Jennifer who was the second oldest. So we lived together for a few years.

Ruth: Did ye get on well?

Eva: We did, yeah. And then— we did that until—

Ruth: In city centre or—

Eva: Yeah, city centre, yeah.

Ruth: How was that?

Eva: It was great.

Ruth: In what way?

Eva: Well, you're walking distance into the town centre and so it was handy for work, it was handy for meeting everybody whoever I was then socialising with, handy for getting back home again, so it was just really handy. And then our parents were only up the road in Finglas, which was only a few miles away anyway.

Ruth: And what was your social group like at this stage? What would you do?

Eva: It was mostly pubs, I have to say, yeah.

[00:38:27]

Ruth: Were you dating?

Eva: I had— I wasn't much of a dater, I tended to be a bit of a monogamist so I had a boyfriend from my second year in college and then that lasted for about two years.

Ruth: And what was he like?

Eva: He was lovely [laughs]. He was a friend of one of the guys I was on the course with, so he was from Dublin as well.

Ruth: He wasn't a journalist?

Eva: He wasn't no, he was studying technical engineering or something like that. Which wasn't really where his heart was but he didn't know what else to do with himself so he was studying that.

Ruth: And what did you have in common?

Eva: Mostly music and books and—

What kind of music was it?

Eva: Slightly alternative. So we would have been— so pop music would have been absolutely horrific at that point and— It's funny actually, I was having a conversation with my family very recently— an email exchange where Jennifer asked me about what folk music made me homesick. And I was saying to her, actually when I was growing up, I hated Irish folk music because it just seemed so—oh, it was like everything about being Irish that I didn't like, it was so fuddy-duddy. So, now in hindsight, I quite regret that because I feel like there's a huge cultural element to that sort of music scene that I missed out on and I didn't appreciate. So most of my musical interest would have been alternative music and—

Ruth: Such as?

Eva: The Smiths, The Cure, sort of rock or—

Ruth: So a little bit before your time, slightly, wasn't it?

Eva: No, that would have been the heyday of that sort of music?

Ruth: Was it? From an early age then? Because you're '72, aren't you, so?

Eva: Yeah, but then again so I had the older sisters who would have influenced my music listening.

Ruth: Ah so, okay, yeah.

Eva: So Miriam would have been— Miriam was quite punky in her outlook.

Ruth: She's the eldest?

EvaL She's the eldest. She was the one who you sort of— who—[laughs].

Ruth: So she would have been actually at the— she would have been the person that was there for the heyday of the Smiths and the Cure etc. And how many years younger then are you?

Eva: Five.

Ruth: Okay, yes, so you were a little dot basically?

Eva: Well, I had to fight to find some sort of space that was my space in that respect so I couldn't—

Ruth: But I mean you must have been a very young Smiths fan?

Eva: I don't think so.

Ruth: Well, I think that if Miriam is 51, I mean the Smiths heyday was the mid-'80s so you were born in '72 so yeah, you were about fourteen or something, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Eva: And the Cure and—

Ruth: The Cure hung around for a bit after that, didn't they?

Eva: A bit longer than that. And it was just at the time as well when that whole college radio scene was sort of breaking bands like— well it wasn't actually then, well it was slightly later

but the likes of the Pixies and REM who were there then. So there was that sense of oh American music is really cool.

Ruth: And did you get to see people coming to Dublin or?

Eva: Yes, ah that was the lovely thing about living in Dublin was that you could go to gigs really, really easily and I didn't appreciate that until I moved over to Northampton where there's like a cultural black hole or to get to a gig I have to travel to London or to Birmingham, which is an hour's train journey either way. So my first gig, I actually can't remember which gig was my first gig because I went to two gigs, one after another on consecutive nights in the SFX in Dublin. So there was the Communards and there was the Housemartins. That was when the Housemartins were still cool so they were the first two gigs I went to. So we'd go to, you know, usually smaller gigs, I wasn't a fan of—

Ruth: Was the SFX one of the bigger venues that you would go to?

Eva: Yes, yeah. So normally it would be more pub-y kind of places. I was never really a big fan of like stadium gigs and I'm still not.

Ruth: What pubs did you see music in?

Eva: I don't even know what they'd be called now, do you know? I remember seeing the Cranberries when they were very, very early days. I think that was in the Hard Rock Café in Temple Bar. And then when I was in university, Kevin Street was the place to hang out there then. There was Up the Junction and I think Whelan's as well. Yeah, so it was a fantastic scene to be in.

Ruth: So you and boyfriend number one used to go to gigs together?

Eva: We did yeah. That was a really big thing, yeah, and the cinema. So again—

Ruth: So are you still living at home when you were with your first boyfriend or was that sort of at home and then elsewhere?

Eva: No, I was still living at home when I was with him and then we broke up and then I moved out with my sister and we got the place.

[00:43:30] \

Eva: And then I met a guy from Northampton and that's how I ended up here. So he was over in Dublin for a weekend with some friends and, so we met and then it just developed from there and became one of those situations where, well, it could have potential so one of us would need to move because we had a slightly long-distance—

Ruth: It must have developed quite quickly if he was only over for a few days.

Eva: No, I don't mean, it didn't develop that quickly [laughs].

Ruth: No, what I mean is, there must have like— there must have been quite a spark or—

Eva: Yes.

Ruth: So how did you keep in touch then after the first few days?

Eva: Oh so that was letters and telephone calls—

Ruth: Did you meet him in a bar?

Eva: Yes, met him in the— The Gaiety Theatre used to have club nights - Club Velour it was called. It was acid jazz kind of music so that's where I met him. And then, yeah, we arranged to meet up for a couple of dates while he was still here and then it was sort of a long distance relationship.

Ruth: What, by what, phone?

Eva: Phone and letters, which was very sweet and we'd alternate visits and then eventually I decided to move over there and see what happened.

Ruth: How did you get to Northampton from Dublin?

Eva: You fly to Birmingham Airport and get the train. It's not too bad.

Ruth: And what was he like? What was the attraction?

Eva: He was very, very different, I think, to anyone I'd known before because he was this— he was English for a start and—

Ruth: What was— was that a good thing or not in your family? How was that?

Eva: No, no, it was just different. For me, it was the attraction of something different and my family were very open minded— open about things like that, so I have a brother-in-law who's Nigerian and my sister had a partner who's from India so my family— my parents were always very, very welcoming to whoever.

Ruth: So what was the attraction apart from that he was different to the Irish fellas? [laughs]

Eva: I think there was a kind of very nice calm thoughtfulness about him. He was very, very intelligent and very quiet. But I'm not with him anymore so [laughs] don't dwell on that too much.

Ruth: I was just wondering what the kind of attraction was and was he a reader, was he into music?

Eva: Yeah, he was a reader and he was into music but not the same sort of music as me necessarily so that was perhaps the first time I'd been attracted to somebody who wasn't— Well, he didn't —

Ruth: Like you.

Eva: — have to like exactly the same things so people could be quite different and you could still like them. So yeah, that was—

Ruth: So how long were you together?

Eva: [pause]. Twenty years, so we had three children together.

Ruth: Oh wowser.

Eva: Yeah.

Ruth: From— So you moved over and got together basically?

Eva: Yes. Moved to England and lived with him.

[00:46:33]

Ruth: Can I just take you back a little bit? Because you skirted around your sort of early sexual experiences and that sort of thing and—

Eva: Okay.

Ruth: I'm just interested in how you negotiated that in your— in your whatever it was— 1990s' Dublin? And what that was like? If you want to talk about it, you can.

Eva: Oh yeah, that's not a problem at all. So that was [pause]— so, would have lost my virginity probably— Well I would have assumed to have been very late because you assume everybody else is having sex and certainly the way they talk about it, they are but then like years later you find out that actually nobody was. So I would have been about twenty at that point.

Ruth: So still in uni— in journalism school.

Eva: Yes, so that was— again as I mentioned earlier, I was a serial monogamist so very much— for me, it was very important that I loved the person that I was going to lose my virginity to. The practicalities were difficult because we both lived at home.

Ruth: So was this boyfriend number one?

Eva: It was proper boyfriend number one. It wasn't the first boyfriend I'd had but I wouldn't— first serious boyfriend. First person that I was absolutely madly in love with. Yeah, so we did what everybody does and we went to Galway for the weekend [laughs].

Ruth: Was that what everybody did in the '90s?

Eva: In a B and B.

Ruth: If you were living with your mum and dad, you went to stay in Galway?

Eva: You went somewhere else. [Both laugh].

Ruth: So it was quite carefully planned then?

Eva: It was yeah so that was not— the first time was not a great experience. I think for him it was very mechanical, I think that was because—

Ruth: Was he a virgin, do you think?

Eva: No, he wasn't, he wasn't no. So I think my expectations were raised somewhat because I thought at least he knew what he was doing but I think the nerves got the better of him so it wasn't a fantastic experience at all for me. But it got better as time went on.

Ruth: And where did you get your family planning, if you don't mind me asking?

Eva: That was condoms and that was his responsibility.

Ruth: Okay, yeah, yeah.

Eva: In the course of our relationship, there was once where I thought I might be pregnant and just even the sheer act of finding out whether or not you were pregnant was at that point not the easiest.

Ruth: Do you mean to try and get a pregnancy test somewhere?

Eva: Yeah, as I say, because although I would have thought of myself as being a really cosmopolitan student in this cool city in—

Ruth: In the capital city?

Eva: Exactly. Actually it wasn't easy to be able to—

Ruth: What, you'd have to front it up and walk into a chemist or—

Eva: That was a possibility but I actually went to a Well Woman Centre because I knew nobody would know me there. So even just the thought— the fact that I was having sex was in itself something that I thought I shouldn't really be making people aware of that.

Ruth: Did your mum know?

Eva: No, no, I never talked to my mum about sex.

Ruth: And your sisters?

Eva: No.

Ruth: Oh, so no conversation about sex in the family then?

Eva: No. I mean there would— Not about— personal conversations about sex. There would have been generic conversations where my mother would announce that she was too young to be a grandmother—

Ruth: Yes.

Eva: So we all had better make sure we weren't pregnant

[00:49:36]

Ruth: But no actual conversations about sex?

Eva: No real ones, no.

Ruth: And big sisters didn't take you aside and have any conversations?

Eva: No, they wouldn't have been interested in doing that, no. [laughs]. So everybody just forged their own path and learned things themselves and, again maybe if things had been different, it would have been nice to have shared things like that but—

Ruth: Were you a close family in, like— the sisters I mean in a sort of a— in a general way.

Eva: I think there's a closeness that comes with being a family of five in a two-bedroomed house where you haven't got much money. That's about trying to just carve out your own space. So actually, you're not emotionally close until you all move out and then you realise how much you care for each other. When you're all under that one roof, you just cannot stand the sight of each other. And it's constant—

Ruth: Yes, too intimate and— yeah.

Eva: It's just fighting all the time so no, I wouldn't have had— I wouldn't have spoken to my sisters about that because that would have been too personal for me and I would not ordinarily have made myself feel vulnerable by talking to someone because there was always the risk that they'd do something bitchy later.

Ruth: What, tell you mam or—

Eva: Yeah, yeah or just—

Ruth: So you don't know if— what their experiences were like with contraception and sex and all of those things—

Eva: No, I could have a conversation with them now and be very, very comfortable talking to them. We all would because we talk about all sorts of things now that we wouldn't have done when we were younger.

Ruth: Well, that's lovely, that that's happened, isn't it?

Eva: It is and I think it's very much— it's a benefit of having that closeness in years is a long term benefit so we benefit from it now. As I said, at the time it just felt very claustrophobic to be growing up like that.

Ruth: So I'll take you back to serious boyfriend number one.

Eva: Yes.

Ruth: So the sex got better?

Eva: Yes.

Ruth: Your pregnancy scare was just a scare?

Eva: Yes, yeah.

Ruth: Did you breathe a sigh of relief? Would that have been a catastrophe in your mind?

Eva: It would have been. I was terrified about the possibility of being pregnant because even though I was in my twenties, I was still very dependent on my parents because I was at that

point, still living at home and I wouldn't necessarily have been at a point in that relationship where we would have wanted to have a child.

Ruth: And were you ambitious then at that stage? Would your career have come in to the thinking about having a child or not?

Eva: I think I didn't have a clear career trajectory at that point. I was very, very—

Ruth: You didn't want to be a war correspondent anymore?

Eva: At that point, the realities of what life was really like when you're trying to get a job in a field that you like meant that I was just grateful I think for getting the work that I had got. So I wasn't driven professionally, I wasn't sort of doing one job and looking at what's my next opportunity in the way that I am now. So I'm much more I would say professionally minded now than I was in my twenties.

Ruth: And how did that compare to your older sisters, were they ambitious?

Eva: No. Again there was a kind of a— I suppose a quite inbuilt cultural thing— My older sister got a job in the civil service when she was straight out of school and I think she was slowly dying of boredom because it just wasn't what she wanted to do but my parents were of that mindset that this is a job for life, you'll be secure, you'll have a pension, which for her was not what she wanted anyway. So she ended up ditching that, she works in theatre now, she— that's her— she's always done that. So my parents were distraught because they just saw for her a life of never having any sort of financial security at all. But she's very happy, and she's very good at it. So, she's never short of work. My brother similarly got a job in the post office and he actually left school to take that job and that was a bit difficult for my parents because he was really clever, really, really good at school but he didn't do his leaving cert because he was offered the job and they encouraged him to take the job rather than stay in school. And again—

Ruth: Your parents did?

Eva: Yeah. And again, that's because of I suppose for them— they hadn't had the secondary school— they hadn't had the secondary school education so they felt the job was more important.

Ruth: Yes, yeah. Yeah, yeah, that was the ultimate aim like so why stay in school if you've got the job offer anyway.

Eva: Absolutely, yeah.

Ruth: And did he feel [indec - cough] or was he happy enough?

Eva: He's not somebody who expresses regret really very much. I think he'd have liked to have stayed on in school. I don't think he felt like he had a choice. Because once your dad says to you, you're taking this job, then you're you know, sixteen or seventeen—

Ruth: And it was quite late in the century for that sort of decision, I think it might have been a little bit unusual, you know?

Eva: Perhaps, but I think again—

Ruth: Was that the '80s maybe?

Eva: Yeah he would have been— he would have been late '80s—

Ruth: Although there weren't many jobs in the '80s, were there?

Eva: No and I think that was a huge factor [indec]

Ruth: They probably would rather he had a job than go to university and then leave the country.

Eva: Absolutely and where we were from in Finglas was an area that at that time had a really bad reputation, so it did affect your career options.

Ruth: Bad reputation as in 'good-for-nothing, don't work kind of people,' is it?

Eva: Yeah and it had a really big drugs problem. There was a heroin epidemic so I think there was a fear of my parents that that as well would be taken into account when my brother went looking for jobs. Because it was, you're right, it was difficult to get jobs at that point.

[00:55:21]

Eva: So my sister Jenny came to England for a few years because she couldn't get a job at home [cough]. So she worked in London in the betting shops and then that was her thing so when she came back to Ireland, she'd always find work in that line and again I think I mentioned earlier, she was very much like my mother, very, very gregarious, very sociable so it was an absolute given that she'd end up in a job that involved—

Ruth: Customer service and people.

Eva: — working with other people, yeah. So she absolutely thrived on it.

Ruth: So you met serious boyfriend number two?

Eva: Yes.

Ruth: And you jumped straight into the being together for twenty years but just to take you back a little bit— So you were corresponding, it was romantic, there were letters and you decided to make the big move to Northampton?

Eva: Yes.

Ruth: And how did that go?

Eva: It was— it was a very successful relationship.

Ruth: Did you move in with him or did you get your own—

Eva: I did.

Ruth: You did move straight in with him?

Eva: Moved straight in with him, yes. And again, because I wasn't living at home, it was a lot easier for me to come to Northampton and move in with my boyfriend, living in sin as it would have been seen as.

Ruth: How long were you together before you moved to Northampton and set up home?

Eva: Probably about a year.

Ruth: A year, kind of long distance?

Eva: Yeah and I remember thinking at the time I was just going to see how it worked out. I wasn't going with a view that this was a longterm thing, it was that I'll see what its like and if I don't like it, I'll come back.

Ruth: So you were sort of setting those safety valves around it, I guess?

Eva: Yeah.

Ruth: And tell me more. What was he like, what did he do for a living, how did your life go in Northampton?

Eva: Yeah, Northampton was— that was grand. It was a bit of a culture shock because I was used to a capital city with so much culture and Northampton was not like that at all.

Ruth: What was it like?

Eva: It was— It's a town that's kind of slowly dying as a result of various economic policies of local authorities and out of town retail things so it's— it's a place that I think can be best described as having a massive inferiority complex. So the people who live there I don't think value it very much but it's— it does have a lot of culture historically.

Ruth: What does it look like as a town?

Eva: It looks like a very typical English midlands town.

Ruth: Old or—

Eva: Yeah, it's a very old town so you've got your mixture of really very, very old architecture and then like your town hall kind of thing— the guild hall which is very grand, lots of really old churches, that sort of thing mixed in with your very ugly nineteen sixties, seventies' growth, sort of stuff.

Ruth: And what year did you move to Northampton?

Eva: I'm not great on years so [laughs] it was probably roughly say '94 perhaps.

Ruth: Pre-Labour then.

Eva: Yes but—

Ruth: John Major years or something like that?

Eva: It might have been, I don't know, I can't make that connection at all. But yes, the two— funny you say that yeah, I would have been here when there was that euphoria around a Labour government.

Ruth: Yeah. So what did you do for work?

Eva: I started off initially just getting the first job I could which was in a photography factory I suppose would be the best thing— It was one of these studios that does franchises all over the country so it was a national headquarters where these photographs would be processed. My job was in the post room, basically sending them out. So I wasn't there for very long because then I got a job at what was then the local health authority as a communications assistant. So that was moving away from journalism into corporate communications, that was the first job there. And since then, I've subsequently worked in corporate communications in local authority and NHS in Northampton until recently when I got offered this job in London.

[00:59:35]

Ruth: So what age are you now when you moved to Northampton?

Eva: About 23, I think I was— 23, 24.

Ruth: And you knew nobody there apart from your—

Eva: No, nobody at all.

Ruth: How was that?

Eva: It was a bit liberating on the one hand. I could do whatever I wanted, the world was my oyster effectively. There was— I had a real sense of not wanting to be the stereotypical Irish immigrant so—

Ruth: What was that in your mind?

Eva: [noise] I didn't want to go to the Irish pub—

Ruth: Ah yes.

Eva: I didn't want to hook up with all of the usual sort of suspects.

Ruth: Is there an Irish community in Northampton?

Eva: Yes, yes there is, and I remember my dad saying to me 'you should go to mass because you'll meet people there,' and I hadn't been to mass at any point as an adult in Dublin.

Ruth: [indec] Once you left the family home or— Were your family religious?

Eva: No, not at all, no.

Ruth: So did your mum and dad go to mass?

Eva: No, they didn't. They made— they kicked us out the door on Sunday mornings but we didn't actually go.

Ruth: That's funny, why did they kick you out to go then?

Eva: Because I suppose they felt they should—

Ruth: Because the school and everything, was it?

Eva: Yeah.

Ruth: Ok, that's— So they sent you guys while you were still at home and then once you were old enough— Well you didn't go anyway—

Eva: We didn't go, we'd pretend. And then we stopped the pretence of it after a while but my dad said to me that if I went—

Ruth: He genuinely said go to mass because you'll meet some people—

Eva: ‘Go to mass because you will actually— you'll meet people from the Irish community,' and he thought that would be a good thing for me to do. But because that was the opposite of what I wanted— I didn't want to go down that road of being stereotypically Irish in England so I actually avoided all of that sort of community. There was a— there is an Irish pub in Northampton called The Swan and the Helmet which is quite famously—

Ruth: Does every Irish pub have to have a swan in its name? The Swan in Stockwell and The Swan and Helmet in Northampton, that's so interesting. [Laughter].

Eva: And—

Ruth: Have you been to the Swan in Stockwell?

Eva: No.

Ruth: So I can't ask you if the Swan and Helmet is similar then.

Eva: The Swan and Helmet is a very, very nice pub.

Ruth: Yes.

Eva: But I actively avoided it and I—

Ruth: Because it was full of Irish people?

Eva: Yes, yeah. Absolutely full of Irish people. So in my mind, there was— I think one of the biggest problems that I had with it was that there were no other Dublin people. So all the Irish people were from Mayo and they were—

Ruth: Like your family?

Eva: Yes, and they were builders, or they were from the Midlands and they were nurses, and this tended to be the case; and I thought, 'there's nobody here like me, there's nobody from Dublin in Northampton.'

Ruth: So in other words, you felt that it was very non-cosmopolitan?

Eva: Oh, very much so.

Ruth: Like parochial?

Eva: Yeah.

Ruth: That you wouldn't have things in common with the people you would meet apart from the fact that you were both roots in the west of Ireland.

Eva: Exactly, yes and it very much ties in with what I sort of felt earlier— mentioned earlier about the folk music. That there was a type of Irishness that I didn't want to subscribe to because it didn't represent me as a young Dubliner and I didn't want to—

Ruth: What was it about it that sort of turned you off? The music and the sort of folk culture?

Eva: I think it was just because it wasn't cool, I wanted to be cool and I didn't think that was. And I suppose I didn't have enough appreciation of culture to recognise that it could be so [indec] comes with age and maturity— that there's more— there's room enough for everything, kind of thing.

Ruth: I guess it's all personal taste isn't it?

Eva: Yeah, yeah, but I just felt that it wasn't— the Irish community in Northampton didn't represent me.

Ruth: And do you feel like you were— I mean I know you fell in love and that's why you moved to Northampton but had it been a thing for you wanting to leave Ireland?

Eva: No, not at all, I was very, very happy in Dublin, I really—

Ruth: So had you thought you would stay in Ireland your whole life?

Eva: Yes, yes. I was never looking abroad wistfully thinking 'ah yeah, this place isn't for me.' Dublin was a fantastic city to grow up in and to be a teenager and a young adult in. It was really—

Ruth: Lot's happening.

Eva: — just a wonderful experience. So when I left Dublin it was very much with the view that I can come back here whenever I want—

Ruth: That didn't happen.

[01:04:01]

Eva: It didn't happen because then I had children and—

Ruth: So did you get married or did you just live together?

Eva: No.

Ruth: You lived together?

Eva: And again, that's—

Ruth: Was that a choice or?

Eva: It was, it was part of me not wanting to be— conform and to be a stereotype I think. So we had three children and I think because of my family and the fact that by then I appreciated that having a family close together has its advantages, I had three of them in the space of four years.

Ruth: Are you still under 30 now?

Eva: No, just about, let me think now. Again, I'm awful with ages. So the youngest is eleven, the oldest is fifteen. So she's fifteen, I'm 47 this year, so I'd have been 31 when I was pregnant, 32 possibly.

Ruth: So you weren't that young. You were together quite a while then before you had children.

Eva: We were, yeah. And again because it wasn't something that was a big driver for me to settle down and have children, I was just happy doing stuff so the first one was— not an accident as such, I wasn't actively preventing pregnancy, it was kind of a 'ah we'll see what happens, if I get pregnant.'

Ruth: So you were sort of thinking about it though?

Eva: Yeah, if it happens, it'll be grand and if I don't get pregnant, that'll be grand as well.

Ruth: And was it something you talked about together?

Eva: Yes, yeah. It became-

Ruth: That way, let's just see if—

Eva: When I came to England, I started taking the pill and I couldn't believe how accessible birth control was here.

Ruth: Was it very different then?

Eva: Very, very much so and there was no sense [laughs] of needing to be embarrassed.

Ruth: So this is the mid-nineties, yeah?

Eva: Yeah. And that was quite remarkable to me. I found that— that you could get it for free other than paying your prescription charge— That was, that was [laughs] obviously hugely welcome because it was saving a lot of money but I was just really surprised by it, the fact that this was accessible and nobody made a judgement.

Ruth: So do you think that people still were making a judgement in the Dublin of the mid-nineties if you— Where would you go in Dublin? Did you— You'd go to a family planning clinic or a—

Eva: So I didn't even get to the point of having that option because I was using condoms when I was—

Ruth: So you didn't even think about going to because you felt like it would be awkward?

Eva: Yes, yeah.

Ruth: Was that something like in Dublin you would have talked to your girlfriends about or—

Eva: No.

Ruth: You didn't talk, you didn't ask?

Eva: No, no. I didn't.

Ruth: You just kind worried along on your own.

Eva: [Laughs]. Yes.

Ruth: I'm just interested, would you have been able to read about that in magazines in Ireland?

Eva: Yes, I certainly knew about what was— how—

Ruth: You'd have been able to go and get the pill if you needed to.

Eva: Yes, yeah. And when I was here actually at one point, I did need to get the morning after pill. Before I moved over but when we were seeing each other. And that again was something that — it surprised me. The lack of needing— I didn't need to give an explanation; as to why I needed it.

Ruth: Because you— it was here— in Northampton—

Eva: It was in England, yes, so I thought I'd have to go along and be all contrite: 'I'm sorry, it won't happen again,' and it wasn't at all, because the doctor wasn't interested in my personal circumstances, he was just addressing a need. So there was no lecture which I was what I was expecting.

Ruth: Gosh, so Dublin really wasn't— was still in your perception anyway quite judgemental about contraception?

Eva: Yes, I think so, yeah. So even though it was cosmopolitan in some ways, as far as sex goes and certainly even I think how women were perceived, it was still quite some way to go, I think, yeah. And certainly in terms of contraception I think coming to England made me feel much more grown up, much more in control of my choices. That I had choices that I wouldn't necessarily have felt I had in Ireland.

[01:08:15]

Ruth: So there was still quite a difference then being a woman in Ireland in the '90s and being a woman here in the UK?

Eva: Yeah, I think Ireland at that point, it was on— it was a really almost like place shifting. So there was very much people of my generation who were— had— were exposed to things that were happening in the world and had expectations around what was acceptable. And you had my parents' generation who— Although my parents were quite liberal in an awful lot of things, in other ways they weren't. In areas around how women should compose themselves and carry themselves.

Ruth: They were a little bit old fashioned in that way, were they?

Eva: Yes, yeah. And society at large was. And still very much a sort of victim-blaming for any sort of crimes that involved a woman as a victim. That would have been the default: 'Well, what was she doing there?' 'Well, what was she wearing that for?' I know that's probably not dissimilar to how a lot of places would have been at the time and some— in some cases, it's still the case but it would have been absolutely a default reaction to finding out that somebody had been a victim of a crime.

Ruth: And like was that very different then when you went to college and met people more your own age or met the kind of lecturers and the faculty there if you like?

Eva: I think for me what was different was seeing women in academic roles. So obviously we'd had female teachers before but—

Ruth: They were operating in a church school I suppose?

Eva: Yes, yes, and so to be in an environment where women had very, very— I suppose very serious jobs, that was really— really quite cool. It felt very cool at the time.

Ruth: I suppose I'm also thinking like was there a class difference, you know, in terms of the attitudes to women and sexuality? That's I suppose partly what I'm asking about the difference maybe between your family's attitudes and people from Finglas and then going to I suppose higher education and—

Eva: Yeah, I think there would have been. I do remember, there was one woman in my course who had previously studied something like gender politics as a degree. And I remember thinking that that was something that was— I wouldn't have had the vocabulary for this at the time but it was a mark of her privilege I suppose that she could study that because I remember thinking, 'how are you going to get a job out of that?' So for me study—

Ruth: You were doing practical journalism.

Eva: Exactly yeah, so when you were studying, it was because it was going to be what got you your job.

Ruth: So you actually had a lot of your parents' like stuff drilled in to you?

Eva: Yes, yes, very much so. [Laughs].

[01:11:15]

Ruth: I mean we're nearly at your kind of— we're nearly around 30 now but it'd be great just to— if you want to go on a little bit. As a project, we're interested in those sort of formative years from fifteen to about 30 but I don't want to leave it up, up in the air.

Eva: No, well I think the interesting thing about my thirties was that I was a mother then and I was a mother in a country where I had no family and all the isolation that goes along with that. My mam had died by the time I had children so—

Ruth: So what age were you when your mum died?

Eva: Ah [laughs]. I really am awful with ages. I was in my twenties, I'm not sure exactly how old I would have been.

Ruth: So you were living in Northampton when your mother died. And was it expected?

Eva: No, it was very sudden, she hadn't been ill. So it was unexpected and sudden and it absolutely—

Ruth: And was she— what was she? in her late fifties?

Eva: She was 62. It was her heart, but we hadn't been aware of the fact that there was an issue with her heart and it very much fractured our family, quite immensely. And it's not until my dad died last year that actually the process of grieving my dad has helped to heal some of the wounds that were left from my mam's death and I think it wasn't until my dad died in a very expected way that we realised how badly we coped with when my mam died.

Ruth: And when you said 'fractured the family,' can you talk about what that was like? Or is too hard?

Eva: I can't— [background noise]— there's stuff that I don't want to talk about because it's not fair on the rest of the family, other than to say there was a lot of unresolved issues for us. And I suppose the thing about it being so sudden was that we were all sort of left adrift emotionally. But because there were other issues, I think my dad perhaps felt like he wasn't able to comfort us in the way that a parent should comfort their children when a parent dies. I think we all just did our best to deal with it but there was an awful lot of unresolved emotional stuff.

Ruth: And who was at home with your dad then? Was he— was he on his own in the house or—

Eva: No, my youngest sister was still living at home at that point.

Ruth: What age would she have been about, was she a teenager like?

Eva: She was early twenties.

Ruth: Okay.

Eva: Yeah. But I don't particularly really want to talk about my mam's death too much or the stuff around that.

Ruth: That's fine.

Eva: Other than to say, as I said, when my dad died it kind of really helped us to come to terms with what grief actually is and I think we all individually had the same realisation that 'okay, this has helped in some ways.' That my dad dying was something that brought us all

very much together for a period of time when we had to rally round because he was very sick for a while. He was ill but still self-sufficient for a long time but then there was a very rapid period where he wasn't able to look after himself so much so—

[phone rings and recording paused]

[01:15:00]

Ruth: So we just had a pause in the recording and we're back now, talking to Eva about being a mother in Northampton and what that was like.

Eva: So with my first daughter, I felt for the first time since I moved to England, very isolated. My own mother had died some years beforehand so I felt like there was a wealth of expertise that I didn't have access to and my partner's family didn't live close to us so I felt very alone and I think my previous decision not to interact with the Irish community here was perhaps at that point very detrimental to me. I think I would have benefited enormously from having had some I suppose friendly faces to talk to at that point.

Ruth: And why do you think maybe friends from the Irish community, rather than just friends in general?

Eva: I think maybe because there's certain experiences that mean more if you're Irish. And I can— I don't know if I can articulate it actually but I think growing up in an Irish family, I think is different to growing up in an English and I suppose there's a whole thing about the Irish mammy and this Irish matriarch who's just the— the absolute centre of the family, who holds the family together.

Ruth: And that was your mam?

Eva: Yes, yes and to the extent where the whole concept of the `irish mammy' is something that people will laugh about and that, you know, because the idea of this woman who is such a feeder and a looker-after of everybody and I felt I suppose that I didn't have my mother there to help me be the sort of mother—

Ruth: Did you want to be that person yourself?

Eva: I did I wanted to be the soul-nurturing mother, yes.

Ruth: And did that come easy?

Eva: I was surprised I suppose by how fiercely protective I was of this child. I wasn't surprised at how much I loved her but by how protective I felt of her and how suddenly the world seemed much more dangerous, all these risks and threats and I had to protect her from them. But alongside it— I made every— I made lots of efforts to socialise so I went to things like baby swimming groups and baby massage and these things but I— there was a touch of postnatal depression and I'm quite sure that the isolation was a big part of that. When I subsequently had my third pregnancy, I developed antenatal depression. I knew it was antenatal depression because I knew what postnatal depression felt like and this was exactly the same except this was—

Ruth: Earlier—

Eva: — while I was still pregnant. And I was genuinely shocked, I didn't even know there was such a thing as antenatal depression.

Ruth: Had you sought help for the postnatal depression beforehand?

Eva: I had been scored and —

Ruth: Oh on the scale that the health visitor does?

Eva: Yes, exactly, yes. And then recognised—

Ruth: Did they give you support or—

Eva: I wasn't in a category that would have required any sort of medical intervention. She basically just kept an eye on me and I think—

Ruth: She came and visited you?

Eva: She did and she felt I was coping, which I was on a day-to-day basis, I was just more sad than anything I think. It wasn't helped by the fact that I really, really struggled to breastfeed but I was absolutely determined to do it.

Ruth: Did your mother breastfeed?

Eva: No, she didn't, no, we were all bottle fed.

Ruth: But you wanted to do it because you felt it was the thing to do or—

Eva: I kind of felt that I was embarrassed by the fact that I couldn't do it because I felt there's nothing I haven't been able to do in my life. I wanted to study this thing, I studied it and I studied it really well. I wanted to do these jobs and I did them really well. I got offered every job interview I ever went to, I was offered the job. So to be in a position whereby there was something that I couldn't do, I couldn't master this thing that was supposed to be natural.

Ruth: Sense of self was—

Eva: It just felt like the first failure, as a parent with not even being able to feed my own child which should be the most fundamental thing you should be able to do.

Ruth: Did you— were you able to talk to anybody about those feelings or—

Eva: When I talked to people, it was more about the practicalities of the breastfeeding rather than how it was making me feel because I don't think I really teased it all out for myself at the time, I was just more focused on trying to feed her. In hindsight, I should have [laughs], I should have just given up because it wasn't as though I was failing her.

Ruth: How long did you keep persevering?

Eva: I didn't stop, I kept going until she was weaned and—

Ruth: Tenacious lady!

Eva: It was tenacious. It was the whole bleeding nipples thing, it was like having a cheese grater rubbed on them every time she latched on but I kept doing it.

Ruth: Is this your third child now or your first?

Eva: This was the first one, the first one. The subsequent ones were grand because I knew what I was doing then, with the first one. And again I think it comes back to not having

somebody that I could ask these things. I didn't know to feed a baby and obviously I assumed the baby would know how to feed. So that was a bit of a shock, they're not born knowing that, they have to be taught how to do it. It was noticeable about— as well, in between having the children— by the time I was pregnant with the third child there had been cuts in public sector budgets to the extent that, even though I was diagnosed with postnatal depression, I had very little support throughout that pregnancy and subsequently.

Ruth: When you were antenatally depressed on the third child you mean?

Eva: Yeah. What I would have thought would have been a flag for the health visitor to follow up after I was— had the child, there was actually very little surveillance of me at all or support there. And I could see there was a direct correlation between budgets and—

Ruth: And it was your third child I suppose so assumptions may have been made, yeah.

Eva: Absolutely, yeah. I was very fortunate in that I had my GP who I just by coincidence registered with when I moved over, also happened to be the county lead for mental health in the GP sort of world. So I was really very lucky that I had his support and the whole issue around the antenatal pregnancy was managed very well.

Ruth: The antenatal depression?

Eva: Sorry yes [laughs], the antenatal depression. So he was very good and my midwife was very good as well so I felt very well supported by them. But yeah. So that's the pregnancies, the middle one was quite uneventful really and he was my best feeder and he's now to this day, my best eater [laughs].

Ruth: He was relaxed.

Eva: He was and I suppose because I was as well to some extent, there's— that's an element of it as well. So yeah, that's— they're grand so they're lovely.

Ruth: So fifteen, eleven, and one in the middle?

Eva: Thirteen, yeah.

Ruth: Ah lovely. And you stayed in the corporate communication field?

Eva: Yes.

Ruth: And so you— your career was important to you throughout?

Eva: Not when the children were small, it was very much about— I stayed in the job for a very long time because it suited me to be there so I was thirteen years in one particular role while the children were very small. And it's only now that I had two of them in secondary school and the third one about to start that I started to look at what else could I be doing. So this is my first job in London, I wouldn't have been able to do this job when they were smaller. But `I kind of feel like, this is a bit of a renaissance for me. They don't need me in the same way, I don't have to do everything for them. Their needs are much more emotional now than physical. So it feels like I have a lot more freedom to think about what's right for me now.

[01:23:10]

Ruth: And what sort of part has Ireland played in your life, do you think, you know? And I suppose— that's a question. And also has it changed over the years?

Eva: I feel very, very Irish so I'm nearing the point where I'll have lived in England longer than I lived in Ireland but I still call Ireland home, I still call Dublin home. My dad dying last year has been a major issue for me because I now— for the first time, I don't have a family home to go back to. So when I go home, it will be staying with my sisters which is a goodwill thing rather than just an assumption that you're going to go home and stay in your parents' house. But I still very much feel Irish and Dublin feels like home. When my children were born, they all— I got Irish passports for them because that was really important for me. I've told them that although they were born in England, they were incubated in my body, which makes them more Irish than English [laughs]. It was Irish blood flowing through them.

Ruth: And how Irish do they feel?

Eva: I think it depends on the circumstances [laughs].

Ruth: Have they been back a lot or—

Eva: They have. So they very much feel that that's—

Ruth: Do they do that every summer going back kind of thing like you did to Mayo?

Eva: They did while I had a home, my Dad's home, to take them back to. But they wouldn't have been there for entire summers.

Ruth: Yes. They'd go every year at least once?

Eva: Yes, yeah. So they're— it's very much part of who they are. They will chop and change a little bit depending on what's most advantageous to them as to how Irish they feel. I've tried to secure a promise from my children that if they ever get to an international level at anything that they'll choose to represent Ireland but they said they won't make that promise [laughs].

Ruth: So they're 'feet in both camps.'

Eva: Absolutely, yeah.

Ruth: And has Ireland become more important to you then over the years or has it always been at that level in your thinking?

Eva: I think it's always been. It hasn't got more important but it hasn't diminished either in its importance so I very much identify as an Irish person and it's really important for me that my children have that heritage as well.

Ruth: Would you go back?

Eva: [Sighs]. I'd go back— The practicalities of it, having children in school and also my— one of my children has a medical condition that I know they wouldn't get the same quality of care in Ireland as they get here on the NHS so that's a really big factor for me. I think if it was just me and I didn't have any dependants, I would have gone back before now.

Ruth: And why? What would have— I think that would be a nice place to end— what would have pulled you back to Ireland?

Eva: Well, Ireland is home.

Thank you very much for talking to me today. I really enjoyed it, I hope you've enjoyed it as well.

Eva: I have.

Ruth: I'm now going to stop the tape.

[ENDS 01:26:14]