



Magdalene Institutions: Recording an Archival and Oral History A project funded by the



Reference Code:	MAGOHP/15
Oral History of:	Mary Currington
Pseudonym?	No
Status:	Survivor
Keywords:	Good Shepherd Magdalene Laundry, Sundays Well; St Aidan's Industrial School, New Ross; industrial school regime; County Homes; sexual abuse; physical abuse; sewing and needlework; Viyella; sales of Magdalene Laundry needlework; separation of siblings; institutionalisation; rebelliousness; escape attempts; Gardaí returning women and girls to laundries; transfer of religious sisters for questioning laundry/industrial school regime; public interaction with Magdalene women and girls; illegitimacy; post-natal experiences of unmarried women and girls; adoption; surveillance after leaving Magdalene Laundry; emigration; Residential Institutions Redress Board; long-term impact of sexual abuse; family reunion experiences; rejection; loss of identity; religious order as family; survivor reunions; shame; Magdalene Laundry finances; survivor groups; difficulties with solicitors.
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Transcript:	116 pages
Number/Format of Audio Files:	Two .wma files
Interviewer:	Dr Sinéad Pembroke
Records/Papers included:	Yes (not yet available)
Access Conditions:	Interviews are freely available to the public. Immediate release of transcript; audio file destroyed on request.
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Note Regarding Interviewee

This woman's testimony was also gathered in 2011 by Maeve O'Rourke of Justice for Magdalenes (now JFM Research). It was one of the testimonies presented to the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UNCAT), leading to UNCAT's recommendation in June 2011 for a prompt, thorough inquiry into the Magdalene Laundries. The Inter-Departmental Committee to investigate State involvement in the laundries was established that same month, and the official State apology followed two weeks after the publication of the IDC Report.

Notes on Redaction and Transcription Process

Interviewee Initials: MC
Interviewer Initials: SP

Key

... = Short pause (or where words are repeated or the speaker changes direction mid-sentence)

(*pause*) = Long pause

blabla = spoken with great emphasis

(*blabla*) = Additional audible expressions, body language

[*blabla*] = background information that might be helpful

Notes on Redaction Process

- Individuals who are named by informants have been assigned pseudonyms
- Pseudonym assigned to interviewee's maiden name to protect identity of third party
- Some minor details have been removed to protect the identity of third parties
- Some locations have been removed to protect the identity of third parties

List of Pseudonyms

Pseudonym	Status/Relationship to Interviewee
Mary/Molly McDermott	Interviewee's maiden name/name in industrial school
Mother Benedict	Third Party Religious (New Ross)
Esther Doherty	Interviewee's friend/fellow survivor
Breda	Interviewee's aunt
Mother Joseph	Third Party Religious (New Ross)
Fidelma Broderick	Interviewee's schoolmate/friend
Vera Delaney	Interviewee's schoolmate
Mother Christina	Third Party Religious (New Ross)
Emily Mahon	Interviewee's schoolmate/friend
Deirdre Collins	Interviewee's schoolmate/friend
Mother Kevin	Third Party Religious (New Ross)
Brian Conway	Worker at house where interviewee was sent to after laundry
Elizabeth/Betty McDermott	Interviewee's sister
Agnes Murray	Former schoolmate who abused interviewee, now deceased
Mother Dolores	Third Party Religious (New Ross)
Mother Loretto	Third Party Religious (Sundays Well)
Mother Vincent	Third Party Religious (Sundays Well)
Imelda	Interviewee's house name in Sundays Well

Pauline	Auxiliary in Sundays Well
Hazel	Third Party Magdalene
Alice	Auxiliary in Sundays Well
Liam	Painter who came to Sundays Well
Mother Gertrude	Third Party Religious (Sundays Well)
Julia	Third Party Magdalene
Fr Stephen Ahern	Third Party Cleric
Rita	Interviewee's friend
Mother Oliver	Third Party Religious (Sundays Well)
Noreen	Third Party Magdalene
Valerie	Third Party Magdalene, possibly auxiliary
Mother Ursula	Third Party Religious (Sundays Well)
Marguerite	Auxiliary in Sundays Well
Luke	Interviewee's son
Monica	Auxiliary in Sundays Well
Anita	Interviewee's former workmate (Irish hospital)
Joanne	Interviewee's former workmate (Irish hospital)
Mr O'Meara	Patient at hospital
Mr Maguire	Interviewee's former workmate (Irish hospital)
Mother Peter	Third Party Religious (New Ross)
Brendan Doherty	Interviewee's friend's son
Sharon	Interviewee's landlord
George	Interviewee's landlord
Terence	Interviewee's step-son
Stuart	Interviewee's husband
Shirley	Interviewee's sister-in-law
Henry	Interviewee's former boyfriend
Sheila McDermott	Interviewee's grandmother
Keith	Interviewee's half-brother
Sheila	Interviewee's half-sister
Pamela	Interviewee's friend/workmate (UK)
ABC Printers	Pamela's place of work
Jack Clancy	Interviewee's mother's ex-husband
Ben	Interviewee's brother-in-law
Sadie	Pseudonym interviewee used for her sister
Austin	Interviewee's nephew (Betty's son)
Grace McDermott/Clancy	Interviewee's mother
Seamus	Interviewee's cousin
Anthony	Interviewee's half-brother
Ellen Mahony	Barnardos employee
Michael McDermott	Interviewee's father
Mr Smith	Psychiatrist for Residential Institutions Redress Board
Winifred	Third Party Magdalene (Sundays Well)

Thelma	Third Party Survivor (New Ross)
Fr Grehan	Third Party Cleric
Ian	Interviewee's friend's boyfriend
Maria	Choir mistress at interviewee's choir
Mother Anastasia	Third Party Religious
Mr Fletcher	Interviewee's former employer
Charlotte	Interviewee's former workmate (UK shop)
Gillian	Interviewee's former workmate (UK shop)
Muriel	Interviewee's friend (UK)
Stephanie	Interviewee's former workmate (UK day care centre)
Amanda	Interviewee's former workmate (UK day care centre)
Bertha	Interviewee's friend's sister
Mother Agatha	Third Party Religious (New Ross)
Fr Scott	Third Party Cleric
Melanie	Interviewee's friend (UK choir)
Maxine	Interviewee's friend
Penelope Norton	Interviewee's solicitor
Tanya Hughes	Interviewee's solicitor
Sebastian Baker	Interviewee's solicitor

Basic Data from Interview

Name/Pseudonym	Mary Currington
When Born	1945
Where Born	County Home, Enniscorthy
Born outside marriage?	Yes
Raised by	County Home until three, family until five, then St Aidan's Industrial School, New Ross
Education	Industrial school
Order	Good Shepherd Sisters
Laundry	New Ross, Co. Wexford
From	1963
To	1969
Duration of stay	6 years
Age on entry	18
Entered Via	Industrial school (after returning to industrial school post-release)
House Name/No	Yes
Haircutting/punishment?	Physical punishment in industrial school; hair cut on entry to Magdalene Laundry; witnessed psychological punishment and humiliation in Magdalene Laundry; food and recreation deprivation as punishment in Magdalene Laundry; haircutting as punishment for escape attempt.
Circumstances of Departure	Left with assistance from priest
Emigrated?	Yes
Physical ailments?	Diabetes; long-term psychological effects; cancer.
Of Note	Attempted to escape; detailed accounts of needlework industry in laundry.

[Intermittent background noise throughout interview]

[Audio File 1 Begins]

[Interview begins]

MC My name is Mary Currington, I was called Mary McDermott [pseudonym] at school in New Ross, County Wexford, [St Aidan's Industrial School] reared up by the Good Shepherd nuns and I got there because the courts made me a ward of court; they took me off my mother. My mother obviously took me down on a train because I remember a tunnel. I was five years old, and I remember the tunnel very well. Anyway we got to the hall door and the...that was as far as the parent ever got...to the hall door in the lobby there. And the head of the school side, which is Mother Benedict... [pseudonym]

[Identifying information removed]

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and she was in charge of this...the kids' side at the time and sh...I remember her as a very, very tall woman and all I could see was her face and her hands; their habits were covering...

[Identifying information removed]

MC ...the rest of their bodies...

[Identifying information removed]

MC ...and...I was quite frightened. And...I remember...Mother Benedict trying to take me off my mother because my mother wasn't allowed up to the school bit, so therefore I was so frightened I grabbed my mother around the neck very, very tightly and I wouldn't let go. My mother in the end had to take me up to the school. I remember I had this beautiful little purple velvet dress on me and a little bodice inside and...I was a bit wild because when I was...left the...County Home where I was born...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...because in those days you were not allowed to be institutionalised until you were five years old, and...I was in the County Home until I was three and then I was placed with my aunty, Aunty Breda [pseudonym] – and she was my mother’s sister – out in the country and she had boys of her own. Of course I...I became quite a tomboy, climbing trees and so forth. Anyway, when I did get up to the school side – I don’t know how they got me away from my mum – I was suddenly on the...the big bank of grass with loads of...flowers and I heard children shouting...oh my name was...changed, by the way, to Molly...

SP *Yeah.*

MC Because there was another Molly McDermott there, and I heard the children say, ‘oh Molly is up on the flowers, Molly’s up on the bank’. They got me off of there and... [identifying information removed] ...in the end I went into the little room and there was a great big fire place there with a big huge fender around it, and I hid myself in there with my fingers through the...gr...the...the grid and they couldn’t get me out. I w...I must have been very frightened.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Anyway, my mother had disappeared; I didn’t know where she went to and that was the beginning of my life...in...with the Good Shepherd nuns.

SP *Hmm.*

MC When I...I the...when I re...when I was about five or six, we were...all i...we were all in these dormitories and I...remember being taken out of my bed in the very early hours in the morning and put in...in one of the big girls’ beds and I was made to do dreadful things. I didn’t put a name on it ‘till I came over here to this country. I was actually sexually abused by this big girl, and this happened every night and the little girl beside me also, she...she...that was happening to her as well. And we had a nun sleeping adjacent to our dormitory – I was in the...the ch...the children’s dormitory part.

SP *Right.*

MC And her little place was called a cell and she had a little hatchway to look out to make sure we were all alright. Of course, these bigger girls that used to look after us when the nuns were in church or praying or on retreat or anything like that, and they threatened me, if I told what was happening, I'd be put out in the playground. We had a huge big tree in the middle of our playground and the bats used to fly in and out of there. And they said if I told what was happening to me I'd be put standing outside on the window sill and I was too small to be able to get off of it, you see. So, I was terrified but I did tell one nun, she was our music teacher...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...and she told the head nun and I was beaten because the head nun said I was telling lies and *(pause)* this went on until I was about eleven or twelve and I was big enough to maybe fight back for myself. I never...never spoke of it after that beating from the nun and...they... *(Pause)* Our food was very poor in the school, I was very lucky I was able to learn because I have a good brain on me and I remember any time we were naughty in the school, we were put outside the...the classroom door and the head...if the head saw us out there we'd get whipped. I remember one day I was outside this classroom door and I was hiding behind this little door so the head nun wouldn't see me. I heard these footsteps coming along – I thought it was one of my friends...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...I stuck my foot out to trip my friend up and it was one of the nuns! I never forget that day, *never!* She fell over; both her hands flat on the ground and her veil went up over her head. Well, I *flew* like lightning up the stairs, ran all the way through the other dormitories to come back down the other way, and when I got back down there she was brushing herself off. She s...I said, 'oh what happened to you then?' you know, being concerned. And she said, 'some little devil,' she said, 'tripped me up'. Well I never did tell her who it was – it was me! And...I hid in the toilet until the school was finished that day, so I never got a beating for being naughty. What I had done wrong in the classroom was, Mother Joseph [pseudonym] said to me one day, 'right then Molly, I'd like you to read this essay out', it was in Gaelic as well. It was one of the other girls' and I was a right little jester at school, I used to like to make the children laugh, you see. And I stood up behind this nun, slightly back from her, and I'm reading this essay and

there was not even one full stop in this, So I c...I started at the beginning and ended up without stopping at all, all the way along.

SP *Hmm.*

MC And she...she looked up at me and she said, 'what are you doing, Molly?' I said, 'I'm reading this out, you asked me to read it out'. She said, 'give me that,' she said. She grabbed it out of my hand and she said, 'who owns this essay?' 'I don't know,' I said – I knew who it was, you know – and...and that poor girl got three essays to write that night in all...the order. And another day I was reading again – I was very good at reading out loud...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...this was English I was reading this day – and every sentence...and I...every full stop I came to, I...I went like this, I'd stick my tongue out at the nun (*sticks tongue out*) every sentence, just to make the children laugh, you see. And I forgot there was a classroom going on at the end of the...at the end of our...our big classroom and this nun shouted up from the end of her bit, she says, 'now, Molly, tell the nun what you've just been doing!' Well I...my heart nearly leapt out of my skin and I thought, 'oh my God!' I was sticking my tongue out after every sentence I read and I'm g...once again I'm outside the door waiting for the head nun, you know, to come along. And as much as I could I'd avoid it, I'd nip upstairs to the toilet, hide up there for a long while, you know, and get away with the whipping. But the whipping[s], they were dreadful because we were actually sent upstairs to this punishment room and they'd leave you there for a few hours because you knew exactly what was going to happen to you. And you were dreading to hear the footsteps coming up the stairs, you knew – here it is. And they used to take our underwear down, and hit us with a...a sewing machine belt, the roundy ones – they were made of leather. And the welts...half the times I used to wet myself and I'd...wasn't allowed to change my underwear, I'd have to go back down to school, carry on with my wet underwear on, and then I'd start smelling of urine and the o...the other girls would say, 'oh Molly, you stink!' you know, I said, 'oh I can't help it,' you know, I'd cry.

SP *Hmm.*

MC And...that happened so very, very often. As I said the food was very poor; I hated cabbage, I hated the meat, it was full of fatty lumps and gristle. I used to try and give mine to the cat. Old Captain, our cat was called. He was lovely, I loved animals. And...education wise I...I liked the schooling. I...I was okay on that. I liked Maths, English, Geography. I was quite good at my maths. Spelling, yes. I used to do my friend's maths and she did my essays for me. I was dreadfully bad at putting things down in order when I was asked...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...to do so. I'm able to explain myself more in a verbal way rather than writing it down, you see. So Fidelma Broderick [pseudonym], she used to always do my essays for me in Gaelic and in the English and I did all her maths for her. So, we...we got on like that and we had this one girl called Vera Delaney [pseudonym] and poor Vera couldn't read or write at all, and we used to try and teach her with the baby books, with the symbols and all the pictures, you know, and she still couldn't grasp it, poor girl. She used to wet the bed a lot and she was...she was always heavily punished. Her...her wet sheet was stuck over her head and she'd have to stand in the middle of a classroom, you know, and we're looking on at this, you see. I don't know how the girl survived – truly, I really don't. And if you were a bit slow at all in the school, you just were left behind you...you weren't given extra tuition or anything, you know. And...I was one of the lucky ones I was able to pick up quite easily. And this day there was...we had this little room where all the sewing machines were kept, there was about ten of them there. And I was too young to join the sewing classes, I was only about seven or eight and there was no one around this day. And I thought I'm going in there to try these machines now. They were all treadle machines, they were not electric. And the covers were all on them because they were all in cabinets. And I went in and I was doing...using the treadle with my...my right foot and then I'd hear it click (*makes clicking noise*) and I thought, oh that's not going anymore. I went onto the next one and so on and so on. What I was actually doing – I didn't realise it at the time – the needles snapped in all of the machines. So the next time the sewing was...about...I think it was Friday they had sewing, and...Mother Christina [pseudonym] that was looking after the sewing girls said all the machines' needles were broken. And we were all called into the big classroom. If anything happened we were all gathered together, you see...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...and put in a big circle. And the head nun said, 'now, somebody's broken all the machine needles. We want someone to own up'. And of course anything like that, I used to go bright red. My guilt was obvious, straight away. And I always...I always told the truth; it was quicker to tell the truth than try and deny it. So, I put my hand up and all the other girls were left go and I was to stay behind and she said, 'now, why did you break all the needles?' 'It wasn't my intention to break the needles; I wanted to learn how to use the sewing machine'. And she said, 'but you're too young to join the class'. I said, 'yes,' I said, 'and I just wanted to feel how it was'. So, anyway she...she approached Mother Christina and she said...Mother Christina said, 'you're still...still too young with the pins and the needles' – it was a safety measure I suppose – 'and the scissors'. And the nun-in-charge said, 'what if she learns all the different stitches?' So I made my own little book, it was cardboard the out...on the outside, then loads of different materials sewn in. And I did all the different stitches on each little piece of material and I said to the head nun, I said, 'can I show this to Mother Christina on Friday and see what she...she thinks?' And I just left the little book...my folder there and the next Friday I was asked to go into the sewing class, and I thought, 'oh lovely I'm joining the sewing class,' and...and I said, 'I'm here now,' I said, 'you wanted to see me'. She said, 'yes Molly', she said, 'your hand sewing is very, very good,' she said, 'and I'll try to coax the head nun to...' – I'm not mentioning any names as you might...except Mother Christina – And she said...Mother Christina said, 'it's okay for you to join the sewing class,' and I was about eight by then, you know. And I was the youngest in the sewing group.

SP *Wow...*

MC I was...

SP *...eight, yeah...*

MC ...very, very privileged, you know, and it kept me out of mischief – instead of playing out in the playground I was in sewing, you know. And I felt very, very, very good about that and...that followed me through my whole life. Anyway, what else can I say about the school bit? It was very, very harsh. The...the sexual abuse was the worst part of it. And...I had my own little friends, my own group. There was Emily Mahon [pseudonym] [identifying details removed] Emily Mahon, Fidelma Broderick, Deirdre Collins [pseudonyms] and myself, we were all in the one little group and I remember the head nun saying to us, 'you're like butterflies, where one is

the other three are,' you know. And I remember once, because the...the g...the girls used to come up to our playground because the dairy was there and we had our own cows and all this. And they used t...the...one of the girls used to bring up the two bottles of milk and take all the cream off and put it in a churn. And we used to see this from our classroom. you see, and Mother Kevin [pseudonym] was in charge of the dairy bit and I used to see where she'd hide the key over the door and I thought, just to be very naughty, I'll hide the key on them one day, you know. And Deirdre...my group knew about this and we were sitting waiting for her to come up from the farmyard you see, with the aux...the...the lady from the other side [Magdalene Laundry] you know. And there she was, looking for the key and I was very naughty this day, you know, really naughty!

SP *(Laughs)*

MC And...she came waddling up – she was a big nun – she came waddling up to the...the school bit, you know, and she told the nun-in-charge that the key of the dairy was missing, and where was it, you know. And the head nun said, 'right,' she said, 'who's took the key of the dairy?' you know. And I had hidden it, for a laugh really, and we were all told to go out in the cold, look for this key, you see. And this is where I regret what I did. I s...I had Vera Delaney with me because she was very slow, you know, and I said, 'let's look along here Vera,' you know, and suddenly she found this key. And of course she got the blame for hiding the key you know, poor Vera. And it was just a laugh that we were up to. And...she didn't get whipped, I'm very glad about that. She was deprived of one hour of recreation, that was all she got done to her you know, I was glad about that. But, we achieved what we wanted to achieve. We had a great laugh watching her struggling, this nun, you know. And the girl from the other side, from the Magdalene Laundry, you see, where D...my friend Deirdre was at the time. Anyway...when I was sixteen as the law says you're...you're allowed to get out of the school and they got me a job with one of their own sisters and this was right out in the country in Mallow, County Cork. [location removed] was the name of the place.

SP *Hmm.*

MC And...they had two young children and I was supposed to do everything in the house. I was hardly able to cook. There was no lighting, no water, no electricity at all. So, I'd come from the convent with all these amenities and there was nothing at all for me in this place. My toilet at

night was a bucket and during the day it was the woods across the road. And I was surrounded by men all day long...

SP *(Coughs)*

MC ...apart from the woman of the house.

SP *Hmm.*

MC I didn't know how to behave in front of the men. There was one young fella called Brian Conway [pseudonym] and if I had nothing to do I'd go up and watch him trying to milk the cows and all that, you know. And...and I said to him one day, 'why do you have the music on?' you know. And he said, 'it helps the cows to give the milk more quickly,' you know, and I said, 'oh'. And I used to sometimes hide in the hay barn and fall asleep up there, you know. I stayed there for nine months, I couldn't cope with it anymore. Then I w...I asked the nun to find me another job. I found another job in Ennis, County Clare – I can't remember how I got from one job to the other.

SP *Hmm.*

MC That was a...there's a lot of blanks in my younger life...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...an awful lot of blanks, you know.

SP *And even the day you were leaving, you know to the first job...*

MC Yes.

SP *Did you even know?*

MC I don't even remember getting...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...to that job either. Don't remember getting to Mallow at all.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I think perhaps th...that nun's sister's husband came to collect me...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...I'm not sure, I really can't remember. Because obviously that was traumatic for me, leaving all my school friends behind...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you see.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I...I...I got another job in Ennis, County Clare. Eventually they moved from Clare to [location removed] in Limerick. I was a domestic; we were only ever good enough to be domestics. Our...all...of our schools and...and the institutions were recruitment...recruitment places for people that wanted cheap labour. So, I w...I lan...I actually lasted eight months in that job, then I went back to the school. I could no longer cope out there. Oh I remember the first time I got my periods, I go...I got my periods when I was fifteen and a half, very late...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...in life and I remember going...waiting to go into the chemist one day to get what I needed and I stood outside this chemist for a couple of hours because there was a man behind the counter and I thought he sh...wouldn't know anything about such things, you know. And suddenly this lady took over and I went in I...and I said to her, I said, I...I explained it in detail th...what did I need because I was bleeding. And she said, 'oh you poor child,' she said. I said, 'I've been waiting out there a long time, you know. Why do you have a man behind the

counter,' I said, 'like that, when us women need...us girls,' I said, 'need such things,' you know, 'and I don't even know what I need?' So, she showed me what I need, she got me a packet of Dr White's [sanitary towels] I remember the name. And I said, 'how do I keep these things on?' – there was loops or something on them – and she showed me what to do and after that I didn't mind going in when the lady was there. I never did ask the man for anything like that you know, behind the counter. And I remember – sorry I'm going back to the school now – I remember, the middle dormitory had this wooden box in the toilet with a slit on the top of it and I said to my sister one day, I said to her, 'what's in that wooden box in the toilet?' And she said, 'you're not allowed...no'. I said what do you mean?' She said, 'you're not a big girl yet'. But she was. She got her period very young, she was eleven years old.

SP *So your sister was there as well?*

MC She was there, yes...

SP *Wow.*

MC ...she came in at...at three years old.

SP *Okay.*

MC I didn't even know I had a sister before I went into the school.

SP *Oh.*

MC She was already born, you know! She was with me at my aunty's house...

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I never *knew*! And the day the nuns told me, 'come on, Molly, your sister is here,' well that was wonderful! I had somebody that belonged to *me*!

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I remember they were resurfacing the corridor leading from the school down to the...down to the convent bit where the...the...we all came in the hall door, [identifying information removed] and I ran all the way down through the cemetery...the grounds to get my sister, and she was screaming her eyes out, and I'm dragging her all the way up to the school to show her off to all my friends, you know.

SP *Aww.*

MC Yes, and...and she belonged to *me*...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...she was *mine*, you know. And I said, 'this is my sister'. Her name had to be changed as well. Her name was Elizabeth McDermott. [Pseudonym] And she was changed to Betty McDermott [pseudonym] and she still has that name to this day, I...I changed mine as soon as I left the school. And I...I rem...I remember...what was I about to say now, about that day? I can't remember...

SP *The periods?*

MC Oh yes, yes...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...she...she was, as I said, she was eleven years old, maybe twelve by now...and yes, exactly because...I wasn't even...hadn't my period until I was fifteen and a half and we're three years' difference between us, and she said to me, 'you're not allowed in...to n...to go near that box,' you know. I said, 'why, what's in it?' you know. And she said...'don't ever get caught going near it'. So one day, as usual, being curious, when there was nobody around the dormitory, I went up the back stairs, through the bathroom, went into that toilet and I lifted up the lid of that box. I nearly died!

SP *Hmm.*

MC And I...put the lid down very quickly and the smell was horrible!

SP *Oh!*

MC And...I said to my sister afterwards, I said, 'I know what that box is for now'. And she said, 'do you? Have you been up there?' I said, 'yeah, all these nose-bleeds people have. All these rags are in there, you know, with loops *and* numbers on them,' I remembered the numbers.

SP *Oh, there were numbers on them?*

MC Oh they were all numbered, yes, and they went to the...the laundry over the road, over to the Magdalene side...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you see. We called it the big girls' side, we didn't know how to say the penitents' side.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And when we were children we were always threatened to be put in the Magdalene side if we were naughty, you see. That threat went with us 'till we were..'till we were...ending up there ourselves. Anyway, my sister laughed when I said about the...the nose-bleeds of people, you know. She said 'yeah,' she said like that, you know, she just said, 'that's it'. And...I still didn't know anything about periods until I did get them myself. And my periods were very sparse. I h...I had dreadful, dreadful, dreadful periods you know, the pain was enormous and there was never any painkillers, no pain relief whatsoever. You just had to get on. Anyway, I...went back to the school after two years of being out in the big world, I was eighteen in the June. I went back to the nuns at the end of June...to see if they could find me a new position. I was there for a whole week with my friend Deirdre Collins, she was a visitor there, we had our own room at the top of the stairs, you know. And I can't even remember seeing my sister there then. She was there, she was only fifteen and yet I can't remember seeing her at all in the school when I went back. I just cannot remember seeing her. And I went down the Irishtown with Deirdre this day and...I heard somebody calling me from across the Irishtown, 'Molly, Molly, come over and see my baby'. It was Vera Delaney. She was wheeling this pram with this little boy in it. It must

have been about six months because it was sitting upright, lovely little lad it was. And...and I said, 'oh,' I said, 'when did you get married Vera?' She said, 'I'm not married'. And I said, 'oh you can't...that's not your baby then Vera'. I said 'you're looking after that for someone aren't you?' I thought she was in domestic work, you know. And she said, 'no, no,' she said, 'Molly, this is *my* baby'. And I turned to my friend Deirdre and I said, 'she's telling lies isn't she Deirdre,' you know. And Deirdre just fobbed me off by saying, 'yeah,' you know, I said, 'there you are,' I said, 'your...it's not your baby, Vera,' and she said, 'it really is, Molly'. Anyway, I just dismissed it. We went up for our tea that evening around five, half past five, and before I went to bed that night, the nun called me back after all the children had gone to bed and...she said, 'I believe you met Vera Delaney today'. And I said, 'oh yes,' says I, 'and,' I said, 'the baby in the pram said...she said it was *hers*. She's not even married, that can't be right,' I said to the nun, you know. And she said...her words to me were that night...were, 'we were so very wrong to leave you out of the school without telling you the facts of life'. And I said, 'what are the facts of life?' I said to her, you know, and she said, 'you'll find out one day,' you know, and that was her answer to me. We didn't know anything about life. We didn't know where babies came from and one of the...the older girls in the school, she'd come in rather late...other...not like me – I went in at five, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And she knew a little bit about life and she said, 'babies are born under the head of a cabbage,' and...and I said, 'but how are they born?' And she said, 'the man goes to the chemist and buys a pill and the woman swallows it'. And I always thought the babies came out of your mouth because the pill went in your mouth, you know what I mean?

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MC And that was my interpretation of how a baby was born, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And we were told by the bigger ones that they were left under the head of the cabbage so somebody can find them. I suppose maybe because I...I...I had no Dad, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...I never...knew a father. My mother used to come and see me every now and again. I remember my grandmother coming to see me once in school. My Aunty Breda and my mother, and they only ever sat on the porch way of the...the convent, they were never even allowed into the parlour, *never!* We were out there and the nun was always standing by in case we said anything wrong. And I remember one day my mother had me on her knee and she was checking my clothes were clean, my...I had a pair of brown knickers on me with a little pocket on it, you know and she says, 'do you...do you get bathed?' you know, and I said, 'oh, oh yes,' I said, like that. And I said, 'I remember one day...' – the water in the bath was up as far as our ankles. It was topped up by a turn of the tap after every child, it was the same water, filthy dirty and you never sat down in the bath, you stood up for that wash down. And I remember one day, the actual girl that sexually abused me, *she* was doing the bathing; Agnes Murray [pseudonym] was her name – she's dead now, I can mention her name – and what they used to do was they used to take one leg, dry it off and then your leg was...stood outside the bath and then you dry the other one. This day I must have been totally confused, I gave her the leg and I thought what am I going to do with this leg? I put it straight back in the bath. She clouted me around the ear hole and I'm telling this to my mum, you know. And the nun was standing there, her face changed. That was Mother Dolores. [Pseudonym]

SP *Yeah.*

MC And...she said, my mother, she said, 'why did that woman hit Mary?' – she called me Mary – I said, 'they call me Molly here now,' you know. 'Why is that?' she said, 'because there's another one the same name as me', Mother Dolores said, you know. And, 'what [sic] was she hit? The child didn't know what she was doing with her dry leg!' I put the dry leg back in the bath because how could I...stood w...stand...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...while my other leg was being dried?

SP *Yeah.*

MC I...I sometimes laugh at that...this...to this day, you know. How stupid I was, you know. But I was only a youngster.

SP *Of course.*

MC And...and I'll never forget telling my mother that. I was always so innocent, it wasn't a complaint from me. It was just she had asked me about the bathing...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you see. And I think that was the last time I saw my mother. Apparently she moved over to England.

SP *Okay.*

MC She had met her husband, married in Ireland and moved over to England. I used to have a photograph of my mother for a very long time, and that was my only possession, you see. And the photograph sud...finally got...worn and I only had the head of my mother...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...eventually after that, you know. And I remember that very, very, very well...

SP *Did you ever have any visitors from State inspectors or...or anyone?*

MC Yes, whenever there was an inspector coming along, we were told to go upstairs to the dormitories, put our best bed spreads on, and put our best dresses on. And as soon as that inspector was gone...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...we were told to go back upstairs, take off the bedspread, put them in the huge big press in the dormitory and take our clothes off and put our old clothes back on.

SP *Jesus.*

MC And that was the system. And I remember that I loved the colour red as a child. Red or lemon and shiny, shiny shoes with the buckles on them. And I used to squeeze my feet into those shiny shoes...and I'm surprised I can walk today because my feet are the healthiest part of my body right now...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and I'm diabetic, I've got a lot of medical problems. But my feet are the healthiest part of my body, believe it or not, and...the shiny shoes were a...always hand-me-down shoes. We never had really new shoes at all. Even for our Holy Communion and our Confirmation, it was still hand-me-down shoes all the way along, you know, hand-me-down dresses, you know. I always wanted to have a red dress on me and little patent shoes, but that wasn't always the case, you know. And I always wanted curly hair. I remember one morning in the dormitory, I got this comb and I was twisting around the front of my hair to try and curl it and the comb got all tangled up in my hair, you know. And I remember the bell went for breakfast and I couldn't go down because the comb was stuck in my hair and the nun...the nun...somebody went down and said, 'oh, Molly's still upstairs, she's got the comb stuck in her hair'. Well the nun came up and just cut the comb off me hair. It was all...all jaggedy up and down, there was a big tuft of the hair sticking out. I'll never forget that, all because I wanted a few curls in my hair, you know. We used to do lots of operettas and...and plays at school, you know. We had an orchestra as well. I started off in the orchestra but I preferred to be climbing trees out in the playground, you know. Of course I was chucked out of the orchestra but I remained in the...in the choir and the plays, you know. I had a good voice when I was a youngster. I remember seeing photographs of me as a youngster. I was very, very shy and I used to stand with my head down. Sometimes I used to go around the back of the big ones so I wouldn't be seen, you see. And the nuns would always pull me out to the front, you know. And...I remember the photograph of me, I was so very...I stood like that with my head down, that's the only photograph I remember of me as a child. And...I loved the plays, all the singing and everything. I couldn't dance, I couldn't act to save me life, just the singing. I was able...I was very good at singing, I loved the singing, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC My sister, I remember she was very...really a show-off, oh my word! And...whenever there was big concerts, you know, we used to give the concerts to the nuns and the...sometimes the public came in, you know. And...I remember out in the...the little hallway before we go on the stage...because we had beautiful scenery and everything, the...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...the whole lot was really make-believe, you know, and...there she was dancing away, showing off and poor Vera Delaney, once again, Vera will come up in the story a hell of a lot...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...she was never in any plays, no musical or anything God love her; and Vera was sitting there watching my sister and I said, 'stop showing off!' I said to her, you know. She says, '*no!*' she says, you know. So I pushed her and I remember she...falling against the bench and there was an iron edge on the bench and she cut her head, she still has the scar to this day. And it was only because she was showing off, you know. And...don't get me wrong I always stood up for my sister...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...if anybody hurt her, but at the other...on the other hand, I kept her in place, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I hated show-offs! I *really* did! And...when we used to be singing, Vera Delaney was always sitting behind the nuns and the visitors and the ones...the other ones that weren't in the concert, you know. And I remember one of the songs so well, it was about sailing and we used to c...we used to say Vera Delaney was sailing every night in her bed, because she used to wet the bed you see! (*Laughs*) And Vera Delaney used to st...stand up behind the nuns and the visitors and if we laughed during our singing, we got whipped later, you know, because we were supposed to be very courteous and stand there with our hands like this singing, you know. And Vera used to stand up and she'd go like this you know, with her hands, the sailing

motion you know. And I used to try and look up, up at the ceiling so I wouldn't see her, but I could still see her...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know. And somebody behind me would dig me as if to say, 'look at Vera Delaney,' you know. And I don't know how I kept a straight face and afterwards I used to sort Vera Delaney I'd say, 'why do you do that all the time Vera?' I said, 'you're getting me into trouble!' you know. But we used to have great fun with Vera Delaney, God love her! She took it always from us, you know. But yeah, we did loads and loads and one day I remember...we were all dressed in these beautiful robes...we were...doing a play about Old King Cole and we all had to go in backwards passing the king, you know. And we were one of the Chinese, myself and three others and we had to come in backwards like the Chinese do, yeah?

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I was the last one in and the first one that was in fell, and we all fell back on top of her! What a laugh! We daren't laugh! We daren't laugh, and we'd just pick ourselves up and carried on, you know. But I love situations...comic situations, this day, and that situation made me roar with laughter. I couldn't wait to get off that scene that day you know and...

SP *I don't know how you could control it. I'd be...*

MC No, no indeed not but I...I was also very good at keeping a straight face while making people laugh, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...in front of the nuns if I was behind their backs, you know. And I'd be making all these faces and gestures, you know. And some of them couldn't help it but laugh their heads off, you know. And if the nun turned around I'd be *(makes a face)* she'd say, 'what are you doing Molly?' 'Nothing, nothing,' so innocent I was, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC So yeah I was...

SP *Considering the traumatic experience of being sexually abused...*

MC Yes.

SP *...and yet you still managed to keep a humour. Like, was that sort of a coping mechanism?*

MC That didn't come into play until I was married actually.

SP *Okay.*

MC That...that...the...effect of that didn't come into play until I was actually married.

SP *Okay.*

MC Yes...now about entering the laundry, I went back to that nun and...hoping for a new beginning to my life...

[Identifying details removed]

[Interview paused]

[End of Audio File 1]

[Audio File 2 Begins]

SP *Okay, so we're continuing on.*

MC Right, as I say I went back down to the...the convent, the nuns that brought me up, as there was nowhere else for me to go. I re...looked on them as my parents that I never had, and

stayed there for the week.¹ At the end of that week I didn't know what was happening to me, I thought they had found me another job by then. And...I was put in a car and taken – where, I did not know at the time, it was quite a journey. And the next minute I know I'm standing in this parlour and there was about four nuns surrounding me and all I could hear them saying was, 'now what shall we call her?' And I said...'I'm...my name is Mary'. And another nun is saying, 'no, and what's your second name?' 'It's Mary Josephine'. 'Oh we can't, we can't...' They were talking between themselves, 'we can't call her Mary Josephine, or Mary Jo, we've got one of them already'. And they were nattering away between each other and the penny dropped! I saw the habits they were wearing and I thought, 'gosh they're the same [Good Shepherd] nuns as I've just come from in New Ross,' you know. I didn't...I still didn't know where I was, what county I was in...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...and the...the Reverend Mother of the...the convent in Cork was Mother Loretto [pseudonym]. The nun that was in charge of the Magdalenes, her name was Mother Vincent. I can't remember the other two nuns' names, they were obviously convent ones but not to do with the children or the Magdalenes. So after they decided on my name, and they decided to call me Imelda [pseudonym] – 'oh we'll call her Imelda' – after the nun that actually put me in there. And then I was taken over by Mother Vincent, passed over to an auxiliary. I remember she had this bluey grey dress on her and the little short veils. And she took me up to this room, she took my case off me, all my clothes were taken off of me and my shoes. She put this horrible dress on me. My...my...my hair was very dark and down to my waist, beautiful hair I had, and that was cut up to my ears in no...style, just straight across like, a pudding bowl haircut I got. And I said, 'why are you cutting my hair?' You know, I started crying that I was losing my hair.

SP *Hmm.*

MC And she said, 'you have to have your hair short here'. I said, 'where is here? Where am I?' 'Do you not know where you are?' I said, 'no I don't'. I was crying and I wasn't getting any sense out of this woman. She'd be probably about twenty years older than me, you know, and I was just barely eighteen that June and this is July the seventh. And then she says, 'you're in the

¹ See also MAGOHP46/Pippa Flanagan/ANON. Pippa also returned to the industrial school as she was unable to cope and was subsequently sent to a Magdalene Laundry.

laundry'. 'The *laundry?*' I thought, 'I'm in the convent and I must be going to the children's side,' you know, because the worst nightmare would have been to be put in the laundry.

SP *Hmm.*

MC Anyway, she said, 'come on then,' sh...oh I asked her for something to eat because I was very, very hungry. I said, 'can I have something to eat, where can I get something to eat?' She said, 'no, you'll be going to supper very shortly now,' you know. Supper was bread and dripping and a mug of horrible cocoa. Anyway I ate that, I went to this dormitory, I cried my eyes out. The bed wasn't too cold, it was summer time there, you know, and there were loads of other people there and some of them were quite weird. They...they were just *staring* me, you know, staring at me, and...and I was r...I wished I had had the courage to say, 'what are you gawking at?' you know, but I didn't, because I didn't know the people so I wasn't going to be rude to them. And there was this very old lady sleeping at the other end of my bed and I could see her trying to get in and out of bed and I think to myself, 'where am I? What am I doing here? Am I going to be looking after all these old people?' That's what I thought my job was going to be!

SP *So, was everyone there older...much older than you?*

MC Yes...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...yes.

SP *Yeah.*

MC There was...the...I remember the next day seeing one girl almost the same age as me but I realised she was two years older than I was. She was a city girl, Cork city.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Anyway, went to bed that night, got up the next morning and the woman that was supposed to be looking after our group Pauline [pseudonym] she said, 'right then, Imelda,' she says, 'you're

going to work in the laundry tomorrow'. I'd never worked in a laundry in my life, I didn't know what the heck I was going to do. So I was just stood there watching and then she filled this huge big wheelie trolley with the slats at the bottom where all the water can come out, with shirts, businessmen's shirts. And she...and she wheeled it over to this *great big* wringer, huge big wringer and she showed me how it was supposed to be packed. She said, 'you pack it like this, evenly all the way around because if you don't pack it evenly, instead of it spinning around it'll bump from side to side'.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I said, 'okay'. So when she had gone back over to the big washing machine, she was...she was putting in some sheets. I just got the shirts, and I was in a bit of a temper, and I went – *bang, bang* – just flung 'em in any old way, all around the drum you know, and hoping that it was going to go once I pressed the button otherwise I would have had to repack it again. So (*pause*) oh yes, and it spun lovely and then when I heard the...the big noise stop, I lifted up the lid and when I saw what was inside that spinner I nearly died! Because of the way I packed it, all the shirt sleeves were crisscrossed over the drum and they were all hanging off the shirts, right! And I went to myself, '*oh my God!*' So I put the lid down really fast and I pretended I was stupid, how am I supposed to open this? So I went to the...'Pauline! How am I open...how do I open this now? It's stuck, it's stopped making noise!' 'Imelda are you that stupid?' she said. I said, 'no I've never used one of these before'. I wanted *her* to find the terrible mistake I'd made. So she lifted it, she said, 'oh my God! Imelda! Look at what you've just done! It's going to cost the nuns a lot of money!' I said, 'I just pressed the button, that's all I did'. 'But you didn't *pack it right*', she said. And...I said, 'oh, am I in trouble then?' 'Oh yes you are, the nuns are going to have to fork out a lot of money, you know, all of these lovely businessmen's shirts'. I didn't give a care, I would say something else if I wasn't on tape here (*laughs*). Anyway, she took me off the wringer and she put me on one of the...the big washing machines, pulling all the heavy laundry out. Your feet were constantly wet, you know, because the...the water had to go somewhere. Otherwise you wouldn't be able to wheel the barrel from one machine to the next and into the...the dry room then you know, for all the sheets to be mangled, you know. They had big six-roller mangles. Some of the machinery was fantastic...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...I will say that, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC If you want to go to the loo or have a drink, you had to put your hand up like a child. And the nun that was in charge of the laundry bit, 'yes Imelda what do you want?' 'I need to go to the loo,' or the toilet I would have said in them days, you know. 'Go on then, don't be...don't be long, be quick'. And...and I'd go down there, be as quick as I could, and run back up. We never had any toilet paper, we had old...old bits of newspaper or orange wrappings and st...stuff like that, you know. Our underwear was always black from the print of the paper, you know. And...and then I went back to my work, we had a half an hour's break, I should imagine, for lunch. We'd have something to eat very quickly, not a lot; and then we'd be allowed to walk around the grounds out there like zombies. We had no conversation because there was nothing happening except work, work, work, work! Work, prayer, sleeping, and a little bit of food. And I was three weeks in the laundry and myself and Hazel, [pseudonym] she was another girl there, she...she was my friend there. We looked alike, very alike. We both had jet black hair and we both had red dresses on us, we were both like twins the two of us. And one Friday when the work was all finished, we were pushing each other in this great big trolley up and down the laundry. The laundry was all mopped up and everything, all clean and dry, and we'd take turns, I'd hold onto the sides with my legs over each side putting my dress down to make sure I was modest. She pushed me down to the other end of the laundry, I put me feet on the wall to stop me, otherwise I...I don't know where...how I would have stopped and then I pushed her the other way around. This Friday anyway we were having wonderful fun the two of us – must have been about four o'clock in the afternoon – and I was trundling all the way down the laundry, when I saw Mother Vincent in the doorway and the Mother Provincial of the whole of the Good Shepherd Order was standing there with her and I remembered her from the...my childhood in the...in the orphanage...

SP *Oh!*

MC ...with the Good Shepherd nuns and I knew exactly who was I...I was looking at and I went, '*oh my God!*' And of course as soon as I got to the end, I stopped and walked back sheepishly to one of the machines, you know. And I could see Mother Vincent's face, she was standing a little bit behind the Mother Provincial you know, and *her face*, '*oh my God!*' I thought, '*I'm in*

trouble now! So she whispered to the auxiliary that was there, 'you tell Imelda and Hazel to come to my office in twenty minutes,' in other words, when the Provincial was gone...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...she would deal with us. Anyway we went to the...the office and she said, Mother Vincent said, 'you have let the whole of the laundry down'. I said, 'oh have I? What...what have I done wrong then?' you know. 'Your behaviour today, your modesty was in question'. I said, 'I had my dress well down,' you know. She said, 'you were still immodest and then to show up my laundry like this and Mother Provincial expecting the best from you girls,' you know. I said, 'the laundry was all finished, it was done'. 'Don't answer me back!' You never questioned anything, but I wasn't going to stand there and have her tell me what was what. And she said, 'right,' she says, 'I'm getting nowhere with you. Monday morning you report to the sewing room. I believe you're very good at sewing'. Of course the nun that put me in there told her I was very good at sewing, that I would be very useful to them.

SP *Of course, yes from your school...*

MC School, yes. So I reported to Alice [pseudonym] – was the auxiliary's name in there. She's...she used to do all the cutting out of the dresses, and the banners and the altar boy clothes, the vestments – all the altar linen I did, you know. I will say I was lucky because I loved doing what I was doing in the laundry. But I still had to see my friend Hazel, so the only excuse I could [use to] get out to the laundry would be to wash my apron. I wore an apron every day to keep my few rags clean, that they called clothes, you know. So I said, 'Alice, I've got to go and wash my apron. I've pricked my finger, blood or something like...' 'Well, don't be long Imelda,' you know. And I'd go out, I'd be in the big deep white sinks you know, I had near...nearly fallen into it washing my apron. And I'd say to Hazel, (*whispered*) 'come over, we'll have a chat,' you know, and if the nun or the auxiliary saw her there, 'Hazel get back to your work now, never mind chatting up to Imelda!' And then, now and again she'd have to come through the classroom to go to the toilet, you see, yeah? And if I'd see her I'd go in, we'd have a long, long chat in there. We were not allowed to have friends really.

SP *Yeah. I was going to ask, how did you and Hazel become friends?*

MC Be...because of the laundry. I was...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...in that laundry for only the three weeks...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...in the actual laundry bit, and that's how we...

SP *I mean how did you get talking?*

MC Well we were the two youngest in that...

SP *I see, yeah.*

MC ...particular section...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...of the laundry, you see. She wasn't in my group at all, but she was the...the only young one really...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...in that laundry bit and we clicked really, you know.

SP *Yeah, of course.*

MC And at recreation times as well we'd be...we'd sort of meet up out in the recreations until some auxiliary or one...the one belonging to my group would say, 'Imelda get back here to your own group'.² You know, and...oh and I remember once the painters were in the laundry, we were

² See also MAGOHP/53/ANON and MAGOHP/46/ANON for recollections of similar practices

never allowed to see men at all you know. The painters were in the laundry and Hazel told me about this and I said, 'did you get to talk to them at all?' you know, I never had any involvement with...with men, I was very shy around them, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...even when I was out in the world for two years. And she said, 'oh yeah', she said, 'Liam, Liam [pseudonym] is one of them'. And I said to her – 'cause I've always wanted to learn how to smoke you see, I wanted to be th...one of the big ones – I said, (*whispered*) 'ask him does he smoke?' So, Hazel said, (*whispered*) 'my friend Imelda wants to know, do you smoke?' 'Oh yes...meet her outside the back of...' because there was a galvanised partition between our...outside...our doors to the outside world, you see...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...although it's still part of the...the grounds of the convent, but some people cut through it for shortcuts...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...like a breen maybe you know, or an alleyway as we call them over here. And, and I said to Hazel, 'tell him to go around by the...by the galvanised gate'. We couldn't get out that gate but there was holes in the galvanise you know, small little holes. And I said, 'I'll meet him out there,' you know, him at one side of the gate and me on the other side. So, I went, 'oh hey Liam, is that you out there?' 'Yes,' I said, 'have you got one for me then?' He said, 'yes'. And I said, 'there's a hole there, stick it through that there now'. He said – these are his very words and I didn't know what they meant at the time – 'how the fuck can I get it through there, it's only a small hole?' I said to him, 'well the cigarettes are only small,' oh no...yeah, I said to him, 'but they're only small Liam,' I said to him, you know. And I said, 'by the way I'll need a match as well'. 'Was that...is that all you want – a fucking fag?' I said, 'here, what did you think I was after?' And he said, 'oh I thought you were after a fuck!'

SP *Oh!*

MC I said, 'what's a fuck?' *I didn't know! Oh my word!*

SP *Oh my God, that's why he...*

MC *Yeah.*

SP *...that makes sense. Jesus!*

MC Yeah, yeah, he...he said, 'That hole's too small!' I said, 'but sure they're only small aren't they Liam?' says I to him, you know! Anyway...

SP *Jesus!*

MC ...I said...

SP *The cheek of him!*

MC ...yes exactly, he stuck...he stuck one through and I said, 'can I have another one because my friend is in the loo out here waiting to learn how to smoke?' Mother Vincent was in the hospital at the time, and she was...she wa...actually she went out for a hysterectomy [of] course, I didn't know what a hyster...hysterectomy was then...

SP *Yeah.*

MC And there was another nun in charge, Mother Gertrude, [pseudonym] she was second-in-charge, you know. And I was teaching Julia [pseudonym] how to smoke in the loo outside, you know, in our recreational part. And she was coughing like mad I said, 'Julia, you don't swallow the smoke, you...you inhale it and then you puff it out,' you know. And she gave up and I ended up smoking one and a half cigarettes that day, you know. And I...and I felt great, I thought I was one of the big girls, you know.

SP *Had you learnt to smoke when you were...*

MC I did yes, I tried them...

SP ...two years...

MC ...yes...

SP ...when you were outside...

MC ...I tried Consulate only, only the menthol cigarettes...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...yeah, because I ended up smoking them for a while over here in this country, you know. And I could never smoke another cigarette after smoking the menthol, they were nice, as they said, cool and minty and they weren't strong at all, so that was my adventure out there and with Liam and I did not know what he wanted that day. All I wanted was a fag...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...to help my friend to learn how to smoke. Julia never did smoke after that, I don't blame her either. Anyway, Mother Vincent came back from the hospital, recovered after a long while, came back on duty to the Magdalene side, and I was called into the office because I was...I broke the rules, I was smoking, you see. And luckily we never had any physical punishment. It was all psychological and mental humiliation and all that and the...the...the most, I think they were afraid we'd hit them back if they hit us...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...that's my...stance on it and...and we were never allowed to question anything, not once were we. But I wasn't going to sit by and not ask things – if you don't ask you never know. And we had this...these priests that used to come up and say the Mass for us. They were the Vincentian priests, St Vincent de Paul...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...priests, right? And anytime the priest wants to come over to see the girls, they're always escorted by one of the nuns from the convent bit except one, Father Stephen Ahern [pseudonym] he's passed away now. He was a wonderful friend to me. Because when my friend left...she used to write to Father Stephen, put a letter in for me and Father Stephen used to pass the letters to me...

SP *That's nice.*

MC ...and I'd write to...my friend Rita [pseudonym] and Father Stephen would post it for me. That was the only contact I had from the outside world...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...and Father Stephen used to come up on his own, *never* with the nuns. He did not like the nuns – for locking us up I suppose, I don't know. And he'd always come to my machine and he'd say, 'oh Imelda, are you still working hard?' I'd say, 'yes I am Father Stephen'. We were not allowed to call him Father Stephen, it was Father Ahern like, you know, 'I am, Father Stephen'. Alice would shout at me – the auxiliary – 'Imelda, give the priest his full title'. '*Right. Father. Ahern.*' And I said, 'when are you getting out?' he would say. I said, 'I don't know, I'm leaving that up to you'. Each week I asked to get out and each week I'd be refused. Then when Father Ahern would come over, I'd say, 'are you going to speak up on my behalf now please Father Ahern? And he'd barge into her office, leave the door wide open so I could hear and he'd say, 'right, Imelda is out there, when is she getting out of here?' And I'd hear her constantly saying, 'Imelda is not mature enough yet, she'll never be able to hold down a job yet'. And I must have been about twenty-two, twenty-three.

SP *Jesus!*

MC All of this, you know, I was a *woman!* Anyway, myself and Hazel...although she was still out in the laundry working and I was in the sewing room, and she said...I said to her one day I said, 'Hazel,' – she was a city girl – and I said, 'how about us trying to run away?' And she said, 'Imelda, are you serious?' I said, 'I am, I can't get out of this place any other way'. And she said, 'But how are we going to get out, Imelda? What about our clothes?' I said, 'you work in the laundry, you can nick a couple of dresses for us, hide them behind a machine and nobody

will know they're there'. It took us two months to arrange this between the two of us – when we managed to get together that was. I suffered migraines all my life until the change of life came and they stopped, and I thank God for that to this day. And as I said before we never had any pain relief either by...with my periods or my migraines and I said to her one evening I said...we decided when we were going to go. That night we were going to forego our supper after being in the church and, 'you can ask to go to bed early Hazel, say you have a stomach ache and I will ask to go to bed early because I have a migraine,' they knew I suffered from them. So we were allowed permission to go to bed early and we forg...went [without] our supper, you know. So, when everybody was eating and we assumed the nuns were also eating at the same time, we got dressed – could do nothing about the shoes mind you – and the door from the workroom, the sewing room was actually left unlocked that night and we...it was the summer time also, I was very glad about that because the dresses she got were short sleeved. We walked down this little avenue, it was very sheltered by loads of trees, but every step I took I was looking behind me to see if there was anybody watching us, nuns or the girls, you know. We got to the city alright, we walked so fast that evening, oh my God I'll never forget it! We got down to the city and I don't think we were missing 'till everybody went up to bed that night because we were supposed to be in bed, you see. And...

SP *This was in Cork?*

MC Cork ci...Cork...

SP *Yes, yeah.*

MC ...Sundays Well in Cork...

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MC ...which is on my forms there for you.

SP *Yes, yes, yeah, yeah.*

MC Sunday's Well, Cork. And...the city wasn't too far because it was all downhill, it was nice and easy to go and H...Hazel and I, we en...I ended up outside this arcade, the one-armed-

by...bandits, she knew a lot of people in there, you know and she g...she said, 'Imelda, you stand there, you watch...watch out'. 'What am I watching for?' She said, 'just stay there!' And she went in and I said, 'what are you going to do in there?' She said, 'oh,' she said, 'I'm going to play the one-armed-ban...' 'But you got no money!' 'Oh some of the fellas will give me some money or...or there's sometimes, pennies dropped into the...the machines unclaimed,' you know. 'Oh,' I said, like that, 'I'll stay out here then,' you know. And I'm standing outside this arcade [identifying details removed]. Anyway, this guard [Irish police] suddenly this guard appeared and he...he seemed ever so tall and he said, 'oh good evening'. And, 'oh *hello*,' like that and I put my head back down. And he said, 'now who are you?' I gave him a different name to what I was and I thought, 'here we go, he's looking for a couple of people now'. As soon as anybody disappears, the nuns alert the cops you know, the police, the guards what you call them...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...over here.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Anyway, and he said, 'are you on your own?' I said, 'yes I am' – lies, white lies – 'I am'. 'Are you sure you're on your own?' I said, 'yes I am'. And he said, 'and why are you standing out here?' Of course I slipped up, I said, 'I'm waiting for someone'. 'Well let's go and see if we can find that person in there,' you know. And I saw Hazel out [of] the...the left eye and I thought, please, please don't let her see me now. And I was walking around with the guard, you know, this big fella and suddenly I heard my name – '*Imelda!*' She should have known better, she saw the guard with me, she shouldn't have said my name, you know! He said, 'oh, so you're Imelda are you?

SP *Oh!*

MC Is that your friend over there?' I said, 'I don't know who's calling me,' I said, you know. And he said, 'would that be Hazel then?' The game was up. So, he went over and he said, 'come on, you're coming with me,' you know, to...to Hazel and we were shoved in this car and I went, '*oh!* We're going for a drive?' I said, to the cop, you know. And he said...I said, 'where are we

going?' He said, 'we're going...you're going back to where you escaped from'. That was two hours of freedom, two hours only. And...

SP *But why...sorry to interrupt but it just seems so...because they weren't su...laundries were not supposed to be prisons...*

MC But they were.

SP *Cou...of course...*

MC They were...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...prisons really you know. They were...we were a source of cheap labour for them, you know. And we never questioned that we should be paid, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC It never entered our heads...

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MC ...you know. We were in there and...and in a roundabout way I thought, because I'm having board and...and a bit of food that that was payment for what I was doing...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know.

SP *I think people...a lot of people from outside would be even shocked to hear that police would get involved...*

MC Oh they were...

SP *...with something...*

MC ...all the time, all the time...

SP *...yeah.*

MC ...all the time. And I...and I witnessed that first hand...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...myself and Hazel you know, and I mean she was two years older than me. Very city-wise you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...very, very...she'd come in from the city, you know.

SP *Do you know why she was in?*

MC No you see...

SP *No.*

MC ...and people often asked me afterwards why was our names changed, you see and I've got two ideas on that. One, I was told by one of the nuns that...to protect the identity of a lot of the local girls, because if they got into trouble outside in the city it would be in their papers you see. And if we got hold of the papers and we saw say, Hazel McDermott or whatever, had stolen...something or...like that, that would be in the papers and everybody in the...S...in the Magdalene side would know why she was in there. They said they were protecting the identity of the people in there. My other idea is that...so that whenever we left there or were put out of there we'd never be able to trace our friends...

SP *Yeah. Yeah.*

MC ...you know. That was our...my...the...the second one was my idea. Th...that's the only way I can think of why we had another name...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know.

SP *Hmm.*

MC And we didn't have a second name in there it was just Imelda dead on, you know.

SP *Okay.*

MC And...not...mean all the nuns weren't bad you know. There was some okay, you know, but they didn't dare stand up and complain about what was happening to us. They'd be moved to another convent if they did.

SP *Right.*

MC That happened in the industrial school as well as the Magdalenes you see.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And some of them yes they were nice you know, we had a...a nun that used to teach us music; we do...we did lots of operettas and I was always in the choir and...and I did all the...the boy parts of the operettas because of my voice, very strong voice, you know, but I couldn't act to save my life. And I said to Mother Oliver [pseudonym] one day, I said, 'do you know what I could do Mother Oliver?' I said, 'I could sing in the side of the wings you know and somebody else can mime my s...my singing and they can act because I cannot act'. I'd sing 'till the cows come home, which I loved, singing, and I had to learn all those parts because we had public coming into see the operettas, you know.

SP *I see, so you performed to the public?*

MC Oh yes, we did, yes, yes, always yeah. And I liked that bit of it...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...you know and...and a...all the visitors that came in and the priest that used to come up and say Masses and all, and I said to Father Ahern one day – on the quiet – I said, 'I feel a right idiot entertaining you and all your friends and so on'. He said, 'but Imelda, you always look very, very well,' he says. I never used to look at the audience, I always looked above the audience, you know. And that's the way I coped with the singing because I was still very shy, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC But...oh and another evening I remember I was suffering very, very badly. I knew my periods were coming on, and I said to Noreen [pseudonym] one of the other girls in the sewing room – that was her house name, Noreen – I said to her, 'will you walk around the grounds with me?' And I said to Alice, I said, 'I'm in a lot of pain I need to walk,' you know because I was sitting down all day.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And she said, 'oh I'll go out with you Imelda'. So, we were walking around the grounds and we passed this graveyard, which was for the nuns really, a small little graveyard attached to our recreational grounds, you see. And I remember that evening stopping, saying a prayer for all the dead that was in there, you know. And then we were walking around and walking around, the two of us, nattering away like anything. This was October and it was getting dark and I said to her, I said, 'God we better get back in, it's getting a bit dark, you know'. So it was either October or November, I don't know what month we said the rosary every night, I can't remember and anyway, and I said, '*oh my God* all the lights are off in the workroom,' you know. Well, she became hysterical Noreen did and this was near the laundry as well. And I'm standing outside in the...in the cold on this drain cover and the steam from the laundry was coming up this...through this drain cover and I'm standing there keeping myself lovely and warm and she's nearly breaking the window trying to get in. In fact she said to me, 'Imelda,

Valerie [pseudonym] is over there!' – Valerie used to lock up, you know – and I said, 'Noreen she's not there, she *is not* there!' And then there was a flat roof over our toilets and she was going to knock on the infirmary window – there was a few sick ladies in there, old people – I said, 'don't, you'll frighten the life out of them,' you know. I'm still down on this drain keeping myself warm, you know. And...then Noreen said, 'oh I've got an idea'. She lifted up the window that went straight into the classroom, you know, our workroom...

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MC ...she skid[ded] down the...the pulleys, the ropes that opened the windows up and down, you know, and that was it, she was in. And I sat on the window and I...I didn't realise that the pipes going around the top of the building, the...the workroom were hot, that was our heating...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...up in the air not down...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...on the end, you know and heat rises – that's how stupid they were. And I sat there and both my legs got burnt at the back, you know. I took my apron off because I used to wear glasses just for sewing only...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and I chucked that down and I said to Noreen, 'what will I do if I can't get down?' She said, 'go on Imelda, you'll do it!' And I didn't realise the rope was hot after she skid down it, you know and my fingers were all burnt skidding down. And just as we got...I got to the end – I was still in the workroom, we had to look for our berets to go to the church, you know because we were both in the choir. And as we were walking down Mother Gertrude, second-in-charge and Valerie, the one that look...locked up...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...were coming up this corridor from the church to look for us and Mother Gertrude said, 'Noreen, Imelda, where have you been?' And Noreen had polio as a child and she had a...a pin in her right leg and it was like...from the ankle into the foot, you know so it was like an L-shape.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And Mother Gertrude, all she was concerned about was Noreen's foot. 'What about Noreen's foot?' I said, 'Noreen's walking alright'. We're going down to the church now, goodbye!' And we went down to the church and of course I disrupted the whole of the choir. Went in, genuflected and carried on saying the rosary and singing the hymn between each decade of the rosary. And they were all saying, (*whispered*) 'where were you Imelda?' I said, 'we were locked out!' 'How did you get in?' 'Through the window!' 'Oh my God!' Anyway, I was on the serving of the food that night and Mother Ursula was sitting up at her throne – we always had a...a nun...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...at every meal, you know – she was sitting up on her throne and she said, 'right,' she said, 'I don't want to hear a *word* from any of you tonight! Imelda and Noreen have disgraced the whole place!' And I served the food, but I got none that night. I didn't care anyway because it was *horrible* food.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And recreation for me was out of the question. I was at the bottom of the...at the end of that big room and I was made to sew. It didn't bother me, I loved my sewing anyway.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Noreen was made to do embroidery you know, and...and I had that for two whole months, that was my punishment, you know.

SP *Wow.*

MC Yes, yes!

SP *Two months, Jesus!*

MC Yes exactly! And everybody I was giving the food to that evening, because I had...there was like four sections in the refectory – I had one and the other three girls had the other and they were all saying, (*whispered*) ‘*what happened Imelda?*’ And I’m telling them all as I’m serving them and Mother Ursula she said, ‘*Imelda, stop talking!*’ And I was...had...I was on a high, you know, it was a fantastic thing we did, we jumped in from the big high window and of course we...that...that was our punishment, I’ll never forget that. And I remember Mother Gertrude shouting after us, ‘*Imelda! Noreen! Imelda!*’ And she said, ‘*Imelda, you tell me the truth!*’ And I turned around and I said, ‘*we were locked out.*’ ‘*And how did you get in?*’ I was still walking down away from her, ‘*we got in through the window over the toilets.*’ ‘*My God! What about Noreen’s ankle?*’ I said ‘*Noreen is able to walk, nothing wrong with her,*’ you know. And I’ll never forget that evening anyway we were the talk of the place for a very, very long time. And...what else did I do wrong in there?

SP *I meant to ask you actually when you came back...not when you came back, sorry, when you were brought back by the Guards, you know when you escaped...*

MC Yes.

SP *...what happened?*

MC Well, I think my hair was chopped up even more...

SP *Right...*

MC And once again the recreation side of it...

[Identifying details removed]

MC Yes, our hair was cut in a...a...I don’t know, I think they used one of those pinking shears, you know the ziggy zaggy shears...

SP *Yeah...*

[Identifying details removed]

MC Yes, and once again, no recreation in the middle of the day, no recreation in the evening, which wonder...pleased me wonderful because I didn't have to sit with a group of morons trying to talk rubbish.

SP *Yeah.*

MC That was...you know...

SP *Was the re...recreation the only time you could talk or...?*

MC Now and again we were allowed to talk in...in...in...in the food hall...

SP *Yeah?*

MC ...in the refectory you know, only now and again, not always because we had a...our...our midday meal, in the...we had our main meal in the middle of the day and there was always somebody to read a book.

SP *Okay.*

MC Yeah, and I wa...I was pretty good at reading out loud as a child you know, and I was approached and I was asked to do some reading. I said, 'I can't understand words at all,' I didn't want to sit out there and read in front of everybody, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...because you had your back to her, the nun, sitting up there observing every morsel we put in our mouth and the...and the girls, you know. I hated reading but I...I was assigned to it. Every...everybody had a different week of reading. Mind you, although I read a lot I still can't

remember any of the stories I read because I wasn't reading it for pleasure, I was reading it because I *had* to read it, you know.

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MC And we did read a lot of books in that six years I was there, you know. And bath time? The bathroom was down at the end of the laundry, hence the plumbing was very bad in them days.

SP *Hmm.*

MC So, the...the...the...there was three baths and one, one of the auxiliaries was in charge of the...the assign...assigning us to a bath or whatever. And I remember one day I got up to get out of the bath, and I...I...everything went black around me and I was stupid enough to pull the water out, I should have left the water in the bath. It would have been a buoyancy aid for me had I fallen, which I did fall.

SP *Oh.*

MC I fell – I...I actually fainted – I fell and hit my head off the tap. That's...I've still got a little lump here today because they didn't give you any medical care really. That was obviously...had to get better on its own as it obviously knitted on its own but I know there was a lot of blood there. And after that incident, I remember – Marguerite [pseudonym] was her name, she was the auxiliary in charge of the bathing – she said to me now, 'from now on, Imelda when you're having a bath you can't lock the door'. And I said, 'but what about other people coming in when they come to the toilet, you know'. She said, 'I'll be watching there, you know, nobody will walk in on you'. But of course that never happened. I...I was always interrupted, always sat back, with my back to the door, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and...that went on for quite a time, you know. And to this day I will not close the bathroom door because of my fainting in the bath.

SP *Wow.*

MC And I can't have a very hot bath at all, it's...it's warm and if I want it any warmer I just put a little more water in it, I just can't cope with the very hot water...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...at all because we never had hot baths as a child.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And when I have a hot bath now I...I lie in the bath for a very, very long time and my son Luke [pseudonym] will say, 'Mum, why are you in the bath so long?' 'Luke, I never had baths when I was little'. So every time I have a bath I think of my youth. My...my...my childhood...marked...mapped out my life for me more so in my marriage. I stayed in...I was living over here at first. I remember...oh no, I'll...I'll tell you about leaving the...the laundry first. 1969, January 1969, it...actually it was the first day of the troubles of Northern Ireland and I got up that morning at half past six to get ready for church and so on. I had my towel and my flannel and my toothpaste with me and my little round tin of toothpaste. It was a cake, a very hard cake of toothpaste. And I was just about to go and have my wash in cold water as usual, and Monica, [pseudonym] she looked, sort of looked after the sick and I think she was a...n...studied nursing before she came in there but she ended up staying for the life, she was an auxiliary. I remember she was quite a tall lady and she s...she came out into the dormitory and said, 'Imelda, my zip's broken, can you fix it for me?' You know, being a sewing lady. I said, 'Okay M...Monica,' I put my washing things on my bed, and once I was behind that door she said, 'come on Imelda, you're leaving'. Those were her very words! Well, the butterflies that went in my tummy that very moment, I said, 'well hold on a minute,' I said to her, 'I'll just go and say goodbye to my friends'. 'Imelda, you're leaving, did you hear what I said?' And I started crying, I wanted to go all those years I was in there, suddenly I was being plucked from the security I had in there for those six years and I was going out – where I don't know, they didn't tell me. They put me in clothes [identifying details removed] very poor quality clothes, ill-fitting clothes. I think the coat I had on me wasn't fitting me at all.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And that was it. The clothes I stood up with, the...the one in charge of my group Mother...Pauline took me down to the station in Cork. I'd never been on a train in my life except when I was little with my mother, but as an adult I was never on a train and I was worried, where do I get off, you know. Anyway she said, 'you have to stay on the train until you get to Drogheda. And there will be nuns waiting there to meet you'. And I said to her, 'where am I going?' She said, 'just do as you're told, sit down on the train'. She put me sitting down on the train and I had my ticket in me hand and I got to the other end and I heard the...the announcement, 'the train stops here,' and I thought, 'that must be my stop, I've got to get off now,' you know. And I got off and there was two nuns waiting for me, and...and I looked, I didn't s...say anything, they came down, she said, 'are you Imelda?' I said, 'I'm Mary'. 'But were you Imelda?' 'I was. I'm Mary now. Where am I going?' 'Come on,' she said, 'you're going to work in St John of God's Hospital in Newry, County Down'. And I thought, 'well, I'm free now,' you know, and all the...any of the domestics or the kitchen staff, we all lived in this great big, long dormitory...a ward actually that was not being used. So, there was about...there was two kitchen staff there, three...four, so there was six of us altogether in this great big long thing-a-me. And...and a lot of them were from Wexford, from where I was born. I was born in the County Home in Enniscorthy and they started asking me where I was from. I once again had to think on my feet because they were saying, 'oh do you know so-and-so, do you know so-and-so'. I was saying...would say, 'no, no I was...I was in...boarding school for a long time in New Ross, County Wexford,' you know.

SP *Hmm.*

MC 'Oh why was that?' 'Oh my father died at sea,' I said, 'and my mother couldn't care for me anymore'. I said, like that. So I was in a...in a school being educated. I wasn't telling them anything else, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I changed the subject very quickly.

SP *And you didn't explain the school...*

MC I didn't.

SP ...or...

MC No, no, no.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I changed the subject very quickly.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I was...I was very bright, I was v...I was...I was able to survive and I wasn't going to be humiliated anymore by all these questions, you know. And I started getting on very well with them. I was put up in the maternity ward and I'd never seen babies come in the world or anything like that before. And I remember Anita [pseudonym] that was working up in the wards with me and she...and she said, 'oh Mary,' she said, 'we'll see lots of blood,' and all that. And I went, 'no'. And I remember one day I was serving the tea out, because in them days the...all little babies were put in their little cots and they were kept in a nursery like, you know. And you'd give the babies out to their mums and we used to...I remember we used to always put the...the little girls on top in the pink gowns and the blue boys underneath the trolley with their bottles beside them and give them out to their mummies. And I remember one day I was giving out this baby because we had GP [public] patients at one side of the wards...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and the private patients at the other side of the ward you see, because they had their own rooms and everything, the others had wards like, you know. And I remember handing this baby to this mum this day and it was a little girl and...I passed onto the next ward to give the other babies out and I heard this almighty scream, you know. And I ran back to see what was the matter and I said, '*what's the matter?*' She'd undone the little wrapper to check her baby, yeah?

SP *Yeah.*

MC And she found the baby had no fingers on this hand at all. And she screamed. She was hysterical! It hadn't been picked up when the baby was born you know, because mums look after their own baby, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And she didn't notice it and she decided to check the little baby's hands and feet and found no fingers on this hand, it was like a club hand.

SP *Wow.*

MC W..what could...I didn't know what to do for her you know, and I said, 'oh my goodness!' So, I...I pressed the buzzer for...the John of God nuns used to look...run...after that...run that place, you know, and I called a sister-in-charge and I said, 'this lady needs your help,' you know. I didn't know what to do. And then another morning I went into this private ward and I'd seen a blue baby in the nursery in a little cot you know, and I wondered who owned it you see. And I went around to all of the patients, especially the private ones, to ask them what would they like for breakfast, you know. And I said, 'oh good morning,' I said, like that and I s...and I could see the bump was gone. And I said to her, I said, 'I see you've had your baby then. Wh...what did you have?' You know, being polite, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC She said, 'I don't know and I don't care'. 'Oh, I am so sorry,' I said to her, like that, you know. She said...I said, 'oh I am so sorry,' I said, 'What can I put you down for breakfast?' I said, like that, you know. I didn't know what else to say to her. Anyway, I brought her breakfast, the kitchen staff brought it up and gave it to her, and after she'd eaten breakfast I went to collect her tray and I said, 'is there anyone you'd like to talk to?' you know. She was a...from a well-off background, you know, private ward and everything. And I said to her, I said, 'what went wrong?' you know. And she said, 'oh I'm sorry I was rude to you this morning,' she said, 'it's not your fault,' she said. I said, 'I should have checked the book before I asked you,' you know. And it was her baby I saw, the blue baby. And I sat on the side of her bed chatting to her. And she said, 'as soon as the boyfriend heard I was pregnant, that was it, he moved on'. And that evening that little baby died, you know.

SP *Oh.*

MC And the nun...one of the nuns c...told her, you know. And I saw her that evening and I said to her, 'how are you?' She said, 'it's Mary, isn't it?' I said, 'yes,' I said, you know, I was I...I was upset for her, you know. And she said...'I'm glad it didn't live Mary,' she said. 'I don't think you are,' I said, 'perhaps the guilt is going from you now,' you know, 'but you won't be glad in a few years' time'. And she said, 'what was it anyway, Mary?' I said, 'it was in a blue wrapper so it was a b...little boy,' you know. I said, 'it never got a chance to be baptised or anything'. She was a non-Catholic anyway, she was Protestant as they called them in them days. But I felt very, very sorry for her. She...she spent a whole week in there getting...trying to get over something she'll never get over. And then another day this young girl came in, she brought in this basket with tonnes of baby's clothes in it. She was a seventeen-year-old girl and she was in the GP side, you know. And she had her baby and she wasn't allowed to know what she had. And she was speaking to me one day in the little kitchenette – we used to serve the teas from there, we used to make the teas ourselves – and s...she came up to me one day, she said, 'Mary, what did I have?' I said, 'oh my goodness me,' because we used to have to feed the babies that were...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...not going out to their parents and she said, 'what did I have?' I said, 'I'll let you know before you go'. Anyway, this afternoon I was on the afternoon duty and there was no one on the...on the corridor and she came into the kitchenette with me and she said...'I'd just given out all the teas, and she says, 'Mary, could I see my baby?' And I said, 'oh I'd be in trouble, y...I don't want you upset or anything'. 'Mary, if I promise not to cry can you show me my baby?' And I said, 'I won't be able to let you touch it or anything, I will bring the...its cot to the window and then you'll be able to see it'. And I said, 'you did have a little boy'. So I brought her up, I said, 'you *mustn't* cry!' An awful thing to ask, wasn't it – a seventeen year old? I brought the baby and I lifted the cot up, (*whispered*) said, 'there you are,' and put the baby back very quickly, and I said, 'come on now, you can collect the cups with me now from all the patients'. I made her busy, you know. And she said...

SP *A smart move on your part...*

MC Yes, yes...

SP *...to help her.*

MC ...yes. I said to her, 'you can collect the cups and help me wash up, keep you busy'. And she said, 'oh Mary thank you very much for that I'll never forget you for it!' she said. And I said, 'what do you think then?' She said it looked like the boyfriend that left her also. And you know I had to...the nuns...these nuns used to come in to collect these babies. They used to take the babies down in the lift and I'd always carry the cots, you know. And that was heartbreaking for me. I...it was dreadful. And...and I said to this girl, this day I said, 'do not cry, the baby is going to a very good family'. A lot of them were sold to Americans, you know. They were *sold*, them babies were and I pitied...and those girls had to bring in everything for that baby, a whole big basket of stuff you know, for them. And the nuns, there wasn't an ounce of compassion in them nuns! Collecting them babies from those lovely girls you know. And then half of them didn't know what they were having. Some of them didn't want to, but she did and I'm glad today, this day that I let her know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and she saw her baby after being in labour of course, she had to see it.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I...I did her a big favour but she never cried, she kept her word. She might have cried at night, I don't know, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC We did s...I did see some sadness on the...on the labour ward. And then one night we were all sleeping and I...I remember hearing the rain pattering on the windows and...and I woke up. There was...we had venetian blinds in our room. And I heard this pathetic cry and I heard this, '*nurse, help!*' And I called, '*Joanne!*' [Pseudonym] '*Yes?*' '*Anita?*' '*Yes?*' And the two kitchen staff, '*can you hear that?*' '*Yes!*' '*Are you not trying to see what's going on?*'

SP *Yeah.*

MC *'We're afraid!' So I got up, I shoved me dressing gown on, peeped out through the venetian blind, there was this man sitting right on my eye level. His nose...there was blood on his nose and I said to Joanne, she was down on that particular ward because I was down on the...I was put down on the medical ward after I done my stint on maternity. There was maternity, surgical and the medical and this man was in...he was very well off, he had a mansion in [location removed]. He was a...he was an alcoholic and they were trying to dry him out.*

SP *Okay.*

MC *So, I said to Joanne, I said, 'There's a man out here in a pyjama, in pyjamas,' I said like that, 'he might have come in off the road'. I thought he was drunk and come in off the road and was sitting outside our window. He gave me the fright of my life. When I looked out and I went, 'oh my God! There's a fella out there in his pyjamas'. And Joanne looked out and said, 'oh my God it's Mr O'Meara'. [Pseudonym] And I said 'who the hell is Mr O'Meara?' And she said, 'he's from the ward above, from the medical ward'. I said, 'oh come on, let's go and get some blankets and a wheelchair, we can't leave him there'. So we ran out, lifted him up – we didn't know whether there was anything broken or not but we wanted to get him in out of the cold, you know.*

SP *Yeah.*

MC *We wheeled him in and the only room I could find on the...on the medical ward was a VIP room. So I stuck him in there and then I went upstairs because I knew the two nurses on duty were in the labour ward, there was one woman giving birth, another two waiting to give birth. So they were up to our [sic] eyes in it and I said to the...one of the nurses, I said, 'there's a man downstairs, I put him in the VIP room,' I said like that, 'he needs a doctor and a priest. I don't know he's...' What had happened was he'd gone to the...thinking he was going to the bathroom, his relatives brought him in half a bottle of brandy that evening...*

SP *Oh.*

MC ...visiting time. He had it under his pillow and he drank it. And then he thought he was going to the bathroom and he went through one of the wards, opened the window and fell out the window.

SP *Jesus.*

MC Yes, and...and I said to Joanne, 'what ward would he have fallen out [of]?' And she said, 'such-and-such a ward,' I think it was number twelve. So I ran along to number twelve to see if the patient in there was alright. She was actually a nun from another order, she was in there as a patient. And I said to her...I said, 'are you alright Sister?' 'No, no, no!' she said, she was screaming, and she had her...her hand covering her face. She said, 'his leg's still in the window'. It was his slipper! I went over to see if it was the leg and I said, 'Sister it's alright it's just the slipper'. 'Oh I don't want to see it!' she said. She was shaking.

SP *Poor thing.*

MC So I had to get a doctor in to sedate her to calm her down, you know. Anyway, the priest did come and gave him the last rites and he was taken straight away to Belfast Hospital. This hospital wasn't equipped for the operation he needed, he had to have his hip reset. And I went up to the nurses and I said to them, I said, 'you're busy, do you want me to give the babies out?' So, there was I happily running around in my dressing gown giving all the babies out to the mums, you see. They were not allowed in the nursery in case there was any germs, you know. So I fed the ones that didn't have a mum to feed them, you know. And I said...I said to the nurse, 'I might as well stay up now'. I picked all the babies up, changed all their nappies. They never done that them...in them days the mothers – we did it, you know. And it came then to morning then and the...the head nun was away at the time and the one that was in charge, I did not like at all. She was on the surgical ward and I didn't get on with her at all. Anyway, the...the Sister on the medical ward said, 'Imel...Mar...Mary will have to have a day off now to recover, she was up all night,' you know. 'We can't spare her; she has to stay on duty'. Well I did stay on duty, I didn't care, I did my work, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...hard worker I was. Anyway, when the head nun came back, she called the other nun c...into the office and she called me in and she said, 'I believe you stepped in when there was a disaster with the man falling out the window' and all that. And I said, 'yes I did,' I said, 'he was a patient of here, I thought he was a drunk from the road, you know'. She said, 'no,' she said, 'you did very, very well, the girls said how quickly you acted,' you know, we wrapped him up. And...and she said, 'I believe you stayed up all the next day'. I said, 'yes, the work had to be done,' you know. And I said, 'I was geared, I was trained to work hard and that's...that is me'. And she...and then she started telling the other nun off that wouldn't let me go to bed that day because the nurses were all against this nun for doing what she did, you know. And the...the Sister said, 'right then Mary,' she said – this was like on a Tuesday – she said, 'you can have the rest of the week off,' she says.

SP *Excellent.*

MC Oh yes I did so I w...I was well repaid for it and I was paid for it as well.

SP *Yeah, you were paid for all your work?*

MC I was *paid* for my work...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...there and then and that's... I never spent any of it really. All the girls...I had a book on all the girls who were always borrowing off me! We got paid every weekend like, you know. And I didn't go very far, I went about five or six times maybe in those seven months.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I was saving up to get over here...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...to England, you know.

SP *And you lived...when you were in this hospital was it live-in as well?*

MC Live-in, yes, yes, yes...

SP Live-in, yeah.

MC ...it was live-in yes. We didn't have any h...I didn't have a home.

SP *Yeah, no exactly that's why I was wondering.*

MC No, no...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...I lived in you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I did go out on the odd...odd occasion you know, out to Warrenpoint, Rostrevor. Actually, Mountbatten [Lord Louis Mountbatten] was blown up on one of th...I can't remember what one it was, either Rostrevor or...or Warren...I think it was Warrenpoint...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...he was blown up.

SP *Yes, it wa...yeah.*

MC Well I used to go over there to the seaside you know. And I remember seeing a bloke from the hospital there one day. I was with Anita from the labour ward and...I was with Anita, we were both off that afternoon. And I said – we were walking along the beach – and I said to her...I said, 'isn't that so-and-so?' I can't remember his name now. His wife was in the hospital and his wife had a spina bifida baby you see...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...and that poor baby had to be flown to Belfast to get his...you know...back sorted. And *oh*, he was...he was in tears in the hospital with his wife by his side, the baby was baptised and all that before it went to the hospital you see. And this day we were there at Warrenpoint or Rostrevor, I don't know which one it was, and I said to Anita, 'isn't that so-and-so's husband there?' He was on the beach with another woman! Yes. And...as I do, I approached him, and I went to him, 'hello'. I...I don't know his name now, I'll say Mr Maguire, [pseudonym] 'oh hello Mr Maguire, imagine seeing you here!' 'Oh! Hello,' he said. I said, 'how's the wife?' She didn't know anything about the wife you see, this girl. And, '*you've got a wife!*'

SP *(Laughs)*

MC 'Yes, and a very sick baby in Belfast Hospital, spina bifida,' I said, like that. So I said to him, I said, 'I'm on duty tomorrow afternoon, I hope to see you there. Otherwise your wife will know about this'. 'I promise, I promise Mary, I *will* promise I'll be there!' And of course before he went down to see his wife in the ward he came into the little kitchenette, I was doing the teas.

SP *Yeah.*

MC 'Mary, I'm here, you haven't said anything have you?' I said, 'no,' I said, 'but,' I said, 'you must come clean with your wife if that's what you're going to be doing behind her back,' you know. And he did come in and visit her every evening after that, you know. I couldn't believe what I was seeing though on the beach, floozing around with this other girl, you know. And she up and left him that day on the beach, yeah.

SP *Very good.*

MC Yeah, well I couldn't be deceiving, you know. And when...when I'd...I...after the seven months was up now, Sinéad, I...I went down, I...I'd already booked my ticket from the travel agent down in Newry and then I went back a week or so later for my ticket and she said to me, she s...I was...this was...I was twenty-four years old, that's right, and she says, 'you are under twenty-one aren't you, Mary?' I said, 'no I'm not, I'm twenty-four'. 'Oh my God!' she says, 'I've given

you a ticket for under twenty-ones!' 'Well I'm not going to tell anybody!' 'Please don't,' she said, 'you'll get me into trouble'. So I got over to London half-fare really, you know.

SP *That's brilliant!*

MC Yes, and I remember that day I was going I'd already told the head nun I was going to England, you know. Of course Mother Peter [pseudonym] in New Ross knew I was going, you see. And the only way I could get away from being supervised by the nuns over there in the Magdalenes and so on and the [industrial] school was to leave my own country and I flew out from Belfast that afternoon. It was my first time in an aeroplane. And I didn't see any aeroplane, I was just seeing myself away from Ireland, you know. And my sister who was also living here in Dunstable...

SP *Hmm.*

[Identifying details removed]

MC ...she said she'll meet me in Luton. Well I...I flew into Heathrow airport and I was told to get the 727 Express Green Line from Heathrow Airport down to Luton, you see. So I'm get...I got on the bus and I said, 'oh I need a...Luton, one way to Luton,' that's what my sister told me. Well I handed over my Irish money and he said, '*I can't take that!*' I said, 'I'm so sorry this is all the money I have!' And I said – once again I'm thinking on my feet – I said, 'can you trust me until I get to Luton? My sister is meeting me there and she'll pay for my fare and I'll give her back the money when I get to the bank tomorrow to change it over'. He said, 'okay'. I said, 'can you tell me when I'm a...at Luton please because I don't know where I am, I've just come over from Ireland, as you can see by the currency I'm using'. And he said, 'of course I will'. So I sat behind him nearly, you know, in case he forgot I was there, you know!

SP *Yeah.*

MC And Betty did meet me and I went into digs, the same digs as she was in, you know.

SP *And of course this is the same Betty who was in the school...*

MC In the school with...

SP ...with you...

[Identifying details removed]

MC And I went around looking for a job, jobs were easy to come by, but you know what Sinéad? I had sleeping sickness for the first two weeks I was over here in this country, you know. I could not stay awake! Esther [pseudonym of interviewee's friend who had also emigrated] took me to the doctor and...and he said, 'what's the prob...?' I said, 'I keep on sleeping all the time, what's the matter with me?' She said, 'it's the different air coming from Ireland, heavier air'. So he gave me a couple of tablets to unwind me and then I got a job and that was it. And I got a job in the co-op up in...in the main street in Dunstable. Brendan [pseudonym] Esther's boy – this was now July by the time I went over to England – Esther's little son, her first born, was only five months old and of course she used to come up every Monday. I was half-day on Monday, half-day on a Thursday because I never had any weekend off, because they...they needed me there in the shop, and Esther was always there with Brendan in the pram every Monday afternoon, every Thursday afternoon. And I'd go down, we'd put Brendan on the swings, I'd take him to the toy shop, whatever wages I had left over after my digs I'd spend it on Brendan, you know, buying him little cowboy outfits and guns and all that, you know. And I bought myself a little camera, I'd tonnes of photographs of Brendan so I idolised that little boy, you know, *idolised* him. And...yeah, then I moved away...over to Watford – '72. And I...I...I started living with this family and I remember they went away to Greece once and I was all on my own in the house and I was reading the paper, and there was a little column in it and it says, 'pen friends wanted'. And of course I never went out anywhere, I didn't know how to behave socially or anything, you know. I was an indoor person, I was too shy actually to go out. I didn't know anybody and...sitting in there one day and I was reading the paper and I thought I'm going to answer this advert now, 'pen friends'. And I wrote this letter, very innocent letter and all, and...I got about...oh this was September and one morning Sharon [pseudonym] came up and woke me up – I had a day off, Monday – and she said, 'you've got about eighteen letters downstairs'. 'Eighteen letters? Who the heck from?' says I, you know, and she had my breakfast by the fire and everything and I went down, the first one I opened – that was before I even touched my breakfast – I opened it up and I thought, 'this is a very well written letter'. This was like somebody was sitting in front of me telling me their story, how it was written, very well written.

So, I put a tick on that. Some of them were quite kinky, you know, they wanted to see me with suspenders and all that, you know. And I thought, 'rip it up,' you know. I kept two of them; I thought, I'll answer two of them, and I got a reply from the very first letter I wrote that day. And six months...I met him in the December; he stayed with us over the Christmas at Sharon and George's [pseudonym] house – they were like my Mum and Dad, you know – and he proposed to me and he went...because he had a son, you see, he lost his wife.

SP *Okay.*

MC She was only twenty-six years old, and his son was staying with his twin sister down in London, Middlesex area. And he took me down there to meet his mother and his wicked step...no his wicked step-mother and his real father and then I saw his son Terence. [Pseudonym] He was only five and a half when I met him. He was two and a half when his mother died of cancer, right.

SP *Wow.*

MC And he was losing track of his Dad, anytime his Dad got po...posting from abroad, Terence...all Terence wanted was, as any child would ask, 'what have you got for me, Dad?' And then disappear. He was losing his...his son, his affection, you know. And I met him and then I met the mother and father and the mother s...and Stuart [pseudonym] said, 'oh it was Mary's idea that w...I g...that we get married'. Because Stuart had asked me to marry him, and I said, 'you need to know one or two things about me first Stuart,' I said like that, 'I was brought up by nuns in the orphanage,' I said, 'and then I was locked up in a workhouse called the Magdalene Laundry for another six years. I was seventeen years on the...in the nun's care,' I said, like that. 'Now do you want to marry me still?' He said, 'I'm going to marry you, not for your past, for the future'. And I thought that was lovely.

SP *It is.*

MC And I said yes. And that was six months after I met him, and we married. We're married thirty-six years this year.

SP *Wow.*

MC I never, *never* thought anybody would want to marry me you know. I always felt myself as undesirable to anybody because of my past. But my past came back to me in a big, big way because (*pause*) I married for one reason, one reason alone, was to have a child. I always vowed I would never have a child out of wedlock because of my mother. So, my reason to...for getting married was to have a baby...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...to experience that. But after the baby was born – and I know my husband had his needs – but to me the bedroom side of my marriage was not what I wanted. I couldn't love...totally love him that way intimately because I never knew what love was myself as a child. I couldn't give love back. I loved him for who he was, not that other way. And every time it happened I felt I was being raped. I used to sob my heart out and it was very hard for Stuart...to understand why I was crying. Every time, I sobbed my heart out. But, a man's needs come before...that woman's feelings, my feelings, there. I knew he didn't fully understand exactly what I was going through and although aft...after I went through the Redress Board, [Residential Institutions Redress Board] all of this came out and I remember making my statement to the Irish government and that was the first time I spoke about the sexual abuse of my life. I told him about my life but not that part of it, you see.

SP *Oh I see.*

MC So fifty-nine years later it came out through the solicitor. And I said to Stuart, I said – because they sent me a copy of my statement – and I said to Stuart, I said, 'my statement is here – to the Irish government,' I said, 'I'll leave it on the table, you're welcome to read it. It might upset you a little bit 'cause there's things you never knew'. So, he read it, I said, 'would you like a cup of tea?' And he did cry after he read that bit.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Even then I don't think he understood what I was going through. I ...I don't think a man ever will on that side of it, you know. They have their needs after all, you know. And I felt I failed him really badly on that side of my life, you know. And after 206 [2006] I sat him down one evening

and I said, 'Stuart,' I said, 'I can't cope anymore with being in the same bed'. I said, 'I won't stop loving you in many other ways,' I said, like that, 'I'll always be there for you,' you know, and...and...and he did cry. I cried myself as well and I...I got up the s...I got the spare room ready for myself and I've been in there seven years this August, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC So, he's very patient with me, you know, and he...and he stuck by me, I'll give him that. And all those years I'm married to him, he's never once thrown it back in my face where I came from and I'll give him full credit for that and I have said that to him as well, so many times. I said, 'Stuart,' I said...because he had...didn't have a very good upbringing, his step-mother was an evil woman, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and...and I said, 'I know you had it tough yourself Stuart, and if ever, ever you want to talk about your first wife, the passing of her, you...please do so,' because sometimes I...I...I hear him being emotional, you know. 'You can always talk about her, please do, it won't upset me,' you know. And he gets very, very emotional, you know, especially when his big son comes down, his oldest son comes down. Because then I had a son of my own, our...our son together...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know. But Terence did grow up with his half-brother, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC They get on very, very, very well you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC So...

SP *And how...how did you cope being a mother?*

MC I was already a mother before I even had my own child if you know what I mean.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I had a...a ready-made son, you see.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I remember first when Stuart was still in Northern Ireland and Easter holidays came and, although I'd seen Terence just a couple of times with his aunty, I said to Stuart, 'I'd like him to come up for the Easter when you're not around, I want to see how he gets on with me,' you see.

SP *Hmm.*

MC Anyway, I went down and collected him and sat him in the front room of where I was living and...because we decided that we won't have him until he finished his school that...for that year like, you know; and I said to him, I said, 'right now,' I said, 'Terence, I'm Mary,' yeah. 'I'm not your real Mum. One day I hope to be your Mum but I'm not your real Mum, I'm Mary, do you understand?' 'Okay Mary!' he said, quite bubbly, you know, cheeky little chappy he was, and he was living in the bedroom next to me you know, because I made a double bedroom for when Stuart and I actually got married like, you know. And...and he lived with us all through the Easter holidays and Stuart phoned me up and he said, 'how's he getting on?' I said, 'oh he's loving it here, totally spoiled,' and I said, 'I have to take him back now on the Friday,' you know, 'because he's back to school on the Monday,' you know. And George came with me down to Middlesex 'cause I was only learning to drive then and he c...sat beside me as...I was the learner and...because I bought my own little car you see. I took him back to his aunty Shirley, [pseudonym] Stuart's twin sister. Well that child was sobbing and sobbing and sobbing. He didn't want to go back to his aunty Shirley at all. He did not want to go back. I said, 'I'll be picking you up very soon again,' you know, 'and then you'll be living with Mummy...Dad and me again,' you know. And we were in touch all the time with Shirley you know, see if he was alright now, settled down again. She said, 'yes, but I think the sooner he is back with his Dad

and yourself the better,' you know. We d...we did take him at the end of the holidays, when his schooling was finished down there. I had already secured a school for him up where we were living in Fenbech [pseudonym] in Hertfordshire, you see. And I remember we went to the seaside before the...the holidays were up...up...down to Margate in Kent and I bought him a spade and bucket and we were sitting...just sitting on the beach you know, and...he come running over to me and he said to me, 'Mum,' – that was the first time he called me Mum – 'Mum, come and see the castle I've made,' you know. And I just said to his Dad, (*whispered*) 'I'll be back soon'. And I went over and played with him, put water in the moat and everything around the castle, you know. I integrated with him quite well, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

[Identifying details removed]

MC I integrated with him quite well you know, and from that day on he called me Mum, you know. Then shortly before I had my son, we were sitting around the...the...the fire one evening in Fenbech and...and he always had his hot chocolate before *Crossroads* [television programme] came on – half past seven was his bedtime and as soon as he heard that music he'd get up off his chair, you know. He'd have already had his hot drink, hot chocolate he loved, and he'd just get up and he'd say, 'night Mum...ni...nig...night Dad'. But before he went to bed that night, he turned to me, he was between the two of us, and he turned to me and he said, 'you know, Mum,' he said – *the innocence of a child, my God, the truth that came out that night* – he turned to me and he said, 'you know, Mum', he said – he was about seven – 'I love Dad more than you because I know Dad longer'. *Well*, it was like somebody stuck a knife in me! (*Crying*) I just got up, I gave him a kiss good night and I went out to the kitchen. I didn't want him to see me crying, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And soon as he went up to bed, Stuart tucked him in, and he came down and he said, 'are you alright?' I said, 'not really,' I said, 'listening to what he said,' you know. I said, 'I know he's only a child,' I said, like that, but what he said was true, he did know his Dad a lot longer than me, you know, even though he was some years away from h...him, you know but God it's like somebody *stuck me with a knife that night*, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I didn't hold it against the lad, you know. And I went up then, he was still awake, I said, 'are you alright now? Do you want me to...to read you a story?' I got over my little tears, you know. And he said, 'yes thanks Mum,' you know, I read him a story, I fell asleep myself I was so tired. I w...worked as well, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And that was Terence. And then we got our own house, we saved up hard the two of us. Stuart left the army then on compassionate leave. He sh...would have loved to have spent the whole twenty-two years, he was fifty t...fifteen years in the army but he'd also asked for com...for compassionate leave to be with his son more because he was being posted abroad all the time, you know.

SP *Okay.*

MC He was losing touch with his son and when he left the army he got a...a...a big lump sum and then a pension for the rest of his life. So with that lump sum we put it down on a house of our own, you know and we didn't look back, you know. And somebody said to me, 'y...you...you'll never stay married, you've only known him six months before you married him'. And it has lasted...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...because we...we worked hard at it and there was one time when Luke was about ten and I said to him one day...things were not going so well...it was the bedroom side of my life as well, that was what went wrong...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...in my marriage and I said to him one day, 'Luke,' I said, 'how would you like to just live with Mummy and not Daddy?' That was my way of saying you know, 'I want Mummy and Daddy,' he

said – he was only ten. And I said, 'okay'. So I...I worked very hard at it. And I actually phoned Mother Peter – I think I said this in one of my statements – I phoned Mother Peter, the one that put me into Cork and by this time now all the convents were closed and they were living in their own units, you see. And I rang her up one evening, I said, 'what happens to the units when they become empty?' That was my way of wanting to go back for security, you know.

SP *Right.*

MC But then Luke answered my question for me – carry on, you know. And I remember Mother Peter saying, they go to the public...the elderly because they're the government buildings after all. I said, 'okay, that's all'. And she...she said, 'are you alright?' I said, 'not really'. 'I will pray for you,' you know. And she has always prayed for me, I must give her that, you know.

SP *So you stayed in touch with her?*

MC *Always, always.*

SP *Yeah.*

MC I...I...I even took my...and she arranged one year...it...I think it was...the year after...what year did I move back? I moved then...I eventually moved back to Dunstable where I first was...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...you know, before I married because I had a hysterectomy and I could no longer do my job. And rather than lose my mortgage, I put my house on the market. I told the...the...the mortgage people, I said, 'look I can no longer do my job'. I worked with the elderly for fifteen whole years...

SP *Wow.*

MC ...I loved my work, and I rang up the mortgage people, I said, 'could you freeze my mortgage for six months?' And I told them what I intended doing, that I was going to put my house on the

mortgage...the...the...the mortgage...my house on the market and look for...not s...such a...a dear area and I came back to Dunstable.

SP *Okay.*

MC That's what I'm doing here today.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And my husband would quite gladly sit and let the house go from under him. I wasn't going to let that happen, we worked hard for what we had.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And our house was paid for now a few years back and I'm very glad. It's like Esther my friend, they bought their own house as well. And I said to her only a few months ago, I said, 'Esther,' you know, 'we came from nothing and we've done very well'. And...

SP *Definitely.*

MC ...and I...I...we both feel very proud of what we've achieved.

SP *Hmm.*

MC That's...that's how I look at it...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know.

SP *So having your own place is very important...*

MC Oh God...

SP ...to you?

MC ...yes, because I never had anything...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...never had anything, you know, in life. And I remember going over to Ireland in 1972, I always wanted to trace my mother you see. The nuns in the school bit knew my mother had...we had a brother we were told. And I always wanted to trace her. So I used to write to my aunt all the time, Aunty Breda, she always wrote back to me. And I used to send her money because her husband...they...they...they were very poor. I always sent her a postal order when I went out working, you know. Always...and when I came over here when I was working hard as well I sent her postal orders *always* so she would you know, be able to feed her four boys. And... I remember going over there with a boyfriend of mine, I wasn't married then, I didn't get married until '77 and this was '72.

SP *Hmm.*

MC And...and we went over to Ireland. We booked into Whyte's Hotel. This fella, I was...I idolised him. Anyway we went to see my aunty, and we didn't get there until about a quarter to ten in the evening. My aunt didn't even have electricity by then nor running water. And she had the lamps and I rattled the gate because I knew the dog would be out, and I rattled the gate and she stuck her head around the...the door, and she said, 'who is it?' I said – she knew me as Molly – I said, 'it's Molly'. '*Hold on darling,*' she says, '*I'll open the gate for you!*' A great big field gate was across her property, you know. She put the dog away and then I got into her...her kitchen, her living room was all the one, if you know what I mean. And then there was a little door leading down to three bedrooms and that was her house – no water, no electric.

SP *Jesus.*

MC And I was sitting in there that night, she made me a cup of tea from the...the...the black pot on the open fire, the fire was gorgeous. Anyway, all I really wanted from my aunt that night was my mother's address. Yes, I knew she was here in England and she gave me the address that was on the top of a letter. Well I screwed my hand up, my left hand, I didn't open it until I got back to

the hotel in Wexford. She [Breda] was living in Enniscorthy, I didn't know whether...where Enniscorthy was as opposed to Wexford so we just booked into the first one we...we found really like, you know. I got back to the hotel and I opened my hand and I put that in my purse and I thought, mustn't lose it. It was like a...a bar of gold I was given, you know, Sinéad.

SP *Yeah.*

MC It was s...so wonderful to have my *mother's address* you know. So, she said, 'will you come back in the morning Molly?' she said, 'I'd like to put some flowers on granny's grave,' my...my grandmother's grave. And I was delighted. I didn't drive then, it was Henry [pseudonym] that did the driving. So we were there ten o'clock – I said I'd be there at ten, got there at a quarter to ten. So we popped into a florist and we bought some flowers on the way, you know. My uncle was out working. He w...he was a forestry worker, he was...hardy old guy he was. So, we took m...took my aunty up to the grandmother's grave, 'Sheila McDermott' [pseudonym] was on the headstone like, you know, and McDermott followed me because my mother had me out of wedlock as you know. So that was my name also. And my aunt loved it that I made the time to visit her. And I went back to England anyway after our visit there, you know. And I said to George, I was in the...I visited George and Sharon, I was still living in Dunstable at the time but I always spent my weekends over in Fenbech with George and Sharon and I said to him, 'where is this place George?' And he looked at it and he said, 'we'll go over there tomorrow after dinner, when we've washed up after dinner'. I said, 'lovely,' and Henry had caught a trout in the river before we came back, because we were on the ferry you see, we...we...actually he caught two and we wrapped them up in a cold towel in a plastic bag. We took them back for our dinner that night. Anyway, he c...we went back home to Dunstable – he lived in Dunstable, Henry did – and George said, 'right, we'll finish dinner now and we'll take you over to...to this address'. Well I couldn't believe how close...ten minute drive my mother lived away from me.

SP *Wow.*

MC And I'm sitting at the back of this car, I couldn't get out it was only a two-seater, old Volkswagen Beetle with the crank handle on it? And I was locked in the back of the car. George jumped out of the driver's seat, ran up this driveway to this door. *Bang!* – He was rather abrupt this man. – *Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!* And the...the two children were in there – Keith and Sheila. [Pseudonyms] She had married by...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...the time...this time. And he...he had no qualms about what he was going to say, he said...and I could hear him from the window...the back window, 'I've got your long lost daughter out in the car'. Well my mother was green in the face coming down that drive and she was shaking like a leaf. She must have dreaded that day for all her life, you know. And I said, 'can we arrange...I'll come back to Watford tomorrow if I can meet up with you?' And Sharon said...she gave me the key of her house and I met my...we...Henry picked her up from Watford Junction and she looked all around before she got in the car – I'm sitting at the back, I let her have the front seat, you know. We got to Sharon's house and... she said to me, '*he's not stopping is he?*' I said, 'no I'm going to make him a cup of coffee first'. He was an insurance salesman and he went about his business, you know. And I said, 'give us a couple of hours Henry please, okay?' He said, 'of course'.

SP *Hmm.*

MC So, I started asking questions after she drank her coffee and the waterworks kept going on. I wanted to know my father. That was very important for me t...to know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I wanted my father. Anyway, I sort of kept in touch with her and she said to me, 'don't tell your sister where I am, right?' And this went on for about eighteen months. She never, never left me into the house. My friend Pamela, [pseudonym] we worked together, she used to always drive me over and I'd know...she'd wait in the car, Pamela would, always very good she was and I'd go in, and the foot was always in the door. And [she would] say, 'he's [her husband] in the back'. And life is one big coincidence, because I tell you what, my friend Pamela worked in the...the ABC Printers, [pseudonym, location removed] was a...a big printing area. She worked in ABC Printers in the...in the canteen. My mother's husband worked for the print company in [location removed], the ABC Printers. And Pamela's Mum told Pamela, 'tell Mary, your friend, that her mother divorced Jack Clancy [pseudonym] three years prior to her finding her'. So I was armed with this bit of information.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Knocked on the door this day and I said to Pamela before I got out of the car, I said, 'I'll call you in in a minute'. Whether she was invited or not, this was how I was working it. I knocked on the door – *my foot* was ready this time – and I said, 'can I come in?' 'Oh no he's inside'. '*No!* He is not! *You* divorced him three years ago prior to my finding you!' '*Come in,*' she says, in an abrupt manner, she didn't want anyone to hear what was going on. I said, 'can you please put the kettle on, my friend would love a cup of tea also'. 'She coming in as well?' I said, 'please invite her in, she's brought me over here all the time'. 'Yes she did, didn't she?' She didn't want me in her life. It was *total rejection*.

SP *Oh, Jesus.*

MC Total rejection. I finally got married, I had little Luke in the April, the Christmas...following Christmas I bought her a lovely steam iron because she had an old crappy old iron and I...I saw the...the boy and the girl coming in from school one day and little Sheila – I'll explain the Sheila bit in the minute – little Sheila looked very like me when I was a girl...

SP *Oh.*

MC ...young girl – dark hair, roundy cheeks, everything.

SP *You hadn't been introduced to them...*

MC *Never.*

SP *...properly?*

MC *N...she* – and I even said to my mother – I said, 'if they wonder who I am, I'm just somebody that knew you from Ireland'. I was never going to betray her or say that I was her first daughter, as I thought.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Anyway, that Christmas as I said, Luke was only eight months old and my sister was with me and I remember my car had broken down and I said to my sister, can I borrow Ben's [pseudonym] car, her husband's car. And Ben said, 'go ahead Mary, go ahead'. I was very fond of Ben. And so I drove over to my mother pretending my sister was my friend, I called her Sadie. [Pseudonym] I said, 'oh,' I said, 'this is Sadie'. I said, 'this is my little boy Luke who's eight months old'. I remember he had four front teeth, I remember that very well. And she didn't....she didn't have the m...the instinct to even want to cuddle him, you know. I kept him on my lap. She gave us tea and some Christmas cake, I remember that. And then we stayed only very briefly and then I said, 'oh I better go home, it's time for babies to be...to be in bed'. I was no sooner home and she phoned me and said, 'that was not your friend, that was your sister'.

SP *Oh.*

MC She obviously knew her own, you know. And she said, 'I did ask you not to bring her'. I said, 'she had every right to know who you were and where you were as much as I did even though I was the one that did the finding'. And she said, 'don't get in touch with me again'. I left her alone for maybe three years and all of this stuff about the Magdalene Laundries came on the television – what was it called? *Silent Witness* or something like that. I can't remember the actual name of it, I've got it at home on the VHS tapes.

SP *Hmm.*

MC And it stirred up in me the emotions, and my sister was off work at the time, she wa...she wasn't very well. So, I rang her up the next morning at eight o'clock and I said, 'what are you doing today?' 'Nothing much,' she said. And I said, 'right,' I said, 'I'm going over to Watford. I'm going to see the mother'. Anyway, I went over, had breakfast first around the corner from where she lived. I was full of butterflies after three years' break, you know. And...I said to her, I said – oh no by this time, sorry, I...I've jumped a lot here – after the three years I went to call on her again and I went to go to the house and the house was all boarded up!

SP *Oh.*

MC Yeah? So I thought I'll knock on next door, which is like a semi-detached. Knocked on next door and who answered the door but my own mother! I said, 'oh my God,' I said, 'what are you

doing here?' 'Oh I had a fire in the house'. I knew she was trying to get away all the time from me, you see. I said 'my God, imagine you m...landing up here'. I had my own car by then, you see, and...and I said, 'you're going to let me in? Are your children out?' And I went in anyway, had...had some time with her. Then, I decided I'd bring Betty over with her boy Austin.
[Pseudonym]

SP *Hmm.*

MC And I knocked on the door where she was. A man answered the door. I said, '*oh!* who are you?' I said, 'where's Mrs Clancy?' You know. He said, 'oh she's moved out'. So see what I mean, she was moving and moving to get away from me.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And me thinking on my feet once again, I said to him, I said, 'oh my God, do you know where she is, because I owe her an awful lot of money!' I didn't owe her any money, of course. He said, 'yes, she's only just around the corner,' I sa... '[location removed]'. I said, 'thank you very much, she'll be very pleased to see me'.

SP *(Laughs)*

MC My sister had her boy with her – Austin you know, and I had Luke with me. And I knocked on the door...I checked first to see which window she would look out before she'd answer the door, yeah? And the window was to my right, so I put a scarf around my head, knocked on the door and I said – I left Betty outside first with Austin, you know – I said, 'can I come in?' 'Oh it's you again!' she said, 'how do you always find me?'

SP *Oh Jesus!*

MC Yes. I said, 'hold on a minute, I've got my sister and her boy'. No, she shut the door, she wouldn't let Betty in, would not let her in. No. So, that was that, I spent some time with her again. Then...oh yeah, I...I managed to go into...this film came out, as I said, and my sister was off on sick and I said, 'come over with me,' blah, blah, blah, had breakfast and once again I knew what side to cover my head. Knocked on the w...door, I told Betty to...w...I'd parked my

car way back away from...in case she...under...knew...knew my car, like, you know. So I parked away from her house. There was a big high hedge and I said 'Betty, wait there'. So I knocked on the door, she opened it and I said, 'hello, can I come in?' She said, 'oh it's you again!' That's all she ever said to me. And I said, 'and I've got my sister this time'. And I wouldn't let my foot away from that door. Betty came in, I came in, I sat down on the settee bes...in, behind the door. She stood behind the settee and Betty stood in front of her. I said, 'right now,' I said, 'my reason for visiting you today is, I've seen an awful documentary on the television last night about the places I was locked up in. On Channel Four,' I said, like that. 'Did you see it?' 'No,' she said, 'I don't know what you're talking about'. Anyway I carried on talking and in spite of not seeing any Good Shepherd nuns on that film, it was all Mercy nuns, I said...I said, 'and even the nuns were shown on there'. And she said, 'well it wasn't the same nuns as you had'. 'Oh you did see it then,' says I to her. Caught her out, you know. And she started putting on the waterworks and my sister was getting very sympathetic. She said, 'oh,' she said, 'oh, Mary!' I said, 'leave it be, leave it be' I said. I said, 'I'm here for a reason...'

[Identifying information removed]

MC And...and I said, 'this is her way of worming out of it,' I said, like. I said, 'I found you. I've had many years looking for you,' I said, 'and you've given total rejection to me and now my sister and her family,' you know. And you know, all of that time...she died in 207 [2007], she had fallen down the stairs...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...and from '72 to 207, that's twenty-five years, she never wrote to her sister Breda for giving me the address. And when she actually di...when..when my aunty died, yeah... Seamus [pseudonym] my cousin in Ireland rang me up and said, 'Mary will you tell your Mum,' – his aunty...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...Aunty Grace, [pseudonym] my mother's name was Grace McDermott...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...that her aun...her sister had passed away'. And I got straight on the phone to Keith, the youngest boy, I said 'Keith,' I said, 'tell your Mum,' – I could never call her Mum – 'tell your Mum her sister Breda has died'. 'Okay Mary'. And I immediately went to the travel agents and I booked my passage over, I was going to go to Auntie Breda's funeral, you know. And...and Keith rang me up later that afternoon, he said, 'Mary,' he said, 'I'd love t...for you to come in the car with us on the ferry'. 'Don't worry Keith,' I said, 'I've already booked my own passage,' I said, like that. I said, 'I know it will be awkward when we're over there at the house, Seamus's house,' you know blah, blah, blah. Anyway, I said...I decided to take Luke with me and Luke wanted his friend to come because we were staying at Seamus's house...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...you know. And Luke was running around the ferry, it was such a...a...a treat for him to be on a big ship, you know...boat or whatever you call it. And all I wanted to do was put my head down, I was tired. And we came up from the dining part of it, we were hungry, and I went to go left...right and Luke went to go left with his friend and I heard him suddenly saying, 'oh, hello Uncle Anthony, [pseudonym] hello Uncle Keith,' you know – her two boys. And apparently the mother was sitting here and...and the two boys were sitting there, about three rows back, she was sitting there with a scarf on her – it was quite cold on the ferry I might say that – and she turned around to Anthony and Keith and said, 'who was that?' And Anthony, being outspoken – Keith was a mummy's boy – Anthony said, 'oh that's your grandson, one of them was your grandson'. '*Huh!*' she said. So we got to the house, Seamus's house, before the mum did, you know and...oh yeah she got lost on the ferry and Keith and Anthony were flying all around the ferry looking for her, and they bumped into me and they said, 'oh Mary, have you seen Mum?' I said, 'perhaps she's done you a favour and gone over the side,' you know. 'Oh don't be like that,' says Keith, you know. I said, 'have you tried the toilets, the ladies' toilets?' He said, 'no'. I said, 'I'll go in there,' and...and there was only one door locked and I could see her shoes, I said, '*is that Mrs Clancy?*' 'Yes?' 'Your sons are looking for you,' and I ran out of there like a devil out of hell, you know. And I said, (*whispered*) '*she's on her way,*' you know to Keith and Anthony. Anyway, we got to the house and if I was in the living room, she'd be out in the kitchen, because you know how big their kitchens are over there...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know, and vice versa. And...and at the funeral, yes, probably had lots of regrets and sadness that she lost touch with her own sister for all those years because of her giving me an address. And 207 [2007] then as I say, she fell down the stairs. She lived in [location removed] in Watford and 207 she died. But she always concealed her age from her children because when I went through the Redress Board, the genealogy department of [location removed] County Wexford...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...Barnardos did a lot of tracing for me. And Ellen [pseudonym] the lady that was doing mine – Ellen Mahony – wonderful person, she'd always keep me in the loop, she'd phone me up if she found anything new, send me all the documents and everything. And she phoned me up this day – I always thought I was the first born – and she said, Mary, she said, 'you were the third born of h...of your mother'. I said, '*what?*' And I said, 'how's that?' She said, 'we don't know where the first born has ended up. The second born was a girl and she was Sheila'. She named her daughter Sheila...

SP *Wow.*

MC ...right? After her mother.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Right? And that child lived for nine months only. Then, when she finally did marry she named her daughter Sheila again after her own mother.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And at the funeral that day, because I...I live quite near [location removed] cemetery...crematorium, she was cremated, and I...I just sobbed and sobbed when I saw her coffin coming in. To me, it was the end of my very long search for my answers that I was asking for her...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...all those years, you know. And...

SP *You never found out about your father?*

MC No, no. But my aunty had told me, a few years prior to all this going down you know, in the Redress Board and all that, she told me that my father...father's name was Michael McDermott [pseudonym] and he got married in Enniscorthy, but that he was dead, so that I would never ever [have] been able to meet him – he had his own family. So somewhere out there I've got half-brothers, sisters maybe.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I'll never know, never know. Of course she had...she had those two girls...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...myself...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...my sister and a boy out of wedlock – she had *five* of them...

SP *Wow.*

MC ...so something was wrong there, you know.

SP *Yeah... And of course the repercussions in terms of health, like you were...*

MC Yes.

SP *...telling me before...*

MC Yes.

SP *...if you want to go, like...*

MC Exactly.

SP *...into that?*

MC Exactly and, as I said, when I became diabetic you know, I've had lots of operations in my lifetime, but the diabetes one and then when I got the cancer you know, they said...did I have anyone in the family? By then I knew my grandmother had diabetes. I said, 'well I know my grandmother was diabetic,' I said, 'but as for the cancer side I don't know enough about my medical history,' you know. And I did write to my mother and I said to her, I said, 'by the way I...I am getting a lot of help from the search people'. I tried to simplify what I was doing for her, you know, 'from the...the...g...looking for our families,' you know, I said, and I said, 'they're getting good headway,' I said, 'and I've just been told that I'm your third-born child, I always thought I was the first'. So I said, 'where are those children now,' you see? I never got an answer. I got a very nasty letter from her. I still have it to this day, you know. And she said my reason for looking for her was just to make her unhappy, break her...her up. All I wanted to do was belong to somebody you know, to find an identity for myself, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And that...that was never to be, never to be, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And that's why I sobbed my heart out that day she was...of her funeral...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know. It was the end of my long search.

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MC So...

SP *It's...it's...very...jeez, it's very tough, yeah, and you had all that institutional...*

MC *Yeah.*

SP *...kind of...backgrou...and then the rejection of your mother, it's...*

MC Exactly, exactly. But the only way I think I'm...I'm a bit stronger [identifying details removed] is because in my own way I've forgiven the nuns for all...all they've done to me and when I had to see a chia...psychiatrist on...on behalf of the Redress Board...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...I said to him, I said, 'I've forgiven them nuns'. And he... 'what have you for...got to...to forgive them...forgive them for? They should be p...asking forgiveness from you!' And I said to him, I said, 'but,'... 'Mr Smith [pseudonym],' I said, 'if you were reared up by a bad step-father' I said like that, 'would you always hate him or would you love him and respect him?' I said, 'they were my family, I knew nobody else as a family,' you know. And I said, 'that's why I'm forgiving them'. And...and I...I think in a way that when I went back to the school for the help, Mother Peter thought that I was...she was protecting me because I was so naïve, I didn't know the difference between a boy and a girl you know, I just did not...

[Identifying details removed]

MC And...what was I saying? Ah yes...

SP *They were your family...*

MC They were my family, and in a naïve way I think Mother Peter thought she was shielding me from the evils of the world by putting me into the Magdalenes, but it wasn't the way it should've gone...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...you know. And the hard times we had in there, the *coldness* of our beds – the *fleas* in them dormitories – I was in...in one of the dirty packing rooms one day and my friend, she's dead now, God rest her soul, was it Winifred [pseudonym] was her name in there, her house name, Mary was her name also and she was undoing this laundry with the twine wrapped around it and I used to always say to her, 'if you get any of *The News of the World* or *The People* save it for me won't you,' you know. I'm standing there one day because the nun in charge of that room, the dirty packing room, I...I...there was clean rooms and dirty rooms and she was working in the dirty ones, and I'm standing there and as she was opening up the paper, the fleas were hopping up and I went, 'ew!' I said, 'Winifred,' I said, and that's where I was getting all the fleas in the dormitory from, the people...we were all mixed up, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and the fleas were falling off of them onto my bed. I...I was in a clean environment, I was *sewing* all day...

SP *Yeah.*

MC Lovely altar...altar stuff and the banners for the processions and everything. The work I did was fantastic, you know.

SP *Actually y...were you sewing for the religious orders or was it for...like what kind of work were you doing?*

MC We...all our material was got from France – Viyella. We used to make Confirmation dresses, Holy Communion dresses for Rhodesia and all those places, and the Viyella dress and they were all hand smocked. There was a team of smockers in the middle of the sewing room, you know. Then that bit of smocking went to Alice. She cut out all the...all the bits, she'd roll them all up. Piece work, I would do it, I would put it altogether all day long, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And each dress I put back out, I'd tack up the hem, it would go back to the...the...the hem finish for the bottom of the...the dress, no stitches was seen you see, and that went all day long. Then there'd be a different line of work next week maybe. There's a...a...a load of altar servers' clothes to be made like the cassocks and surpluses you see, and they were very fine work, the...all flat seams and they were very particularly done, you know. And then another week, then, I'd have some Confirmation dresses to make. The...I remember saying, 'why do the Rhodesians wear three-quarter length dresses for Confirmation?' To me a little girl should be in short, knee-length dress, you know. I never did get a straight answer on that. Then the big capes that the priest wore for Benediction...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know how big they are, yeah? They were embroidered by my friend Noreen on a big...she was bent over this embroidery machine all day long, you know. Then, all the backing had to be put on that once it was embroidered, very heavy! Then a lining and then I'd put the braid all around the outside of it...machine it. Then once the...the lining was on that all had to be hand-sewn all around. We had *huge* big tables just to hand-sew all these...and then the...the...another time there might be banners to be made for the local processions out in the town...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...you know. Then every year we did a load of work for the Sale of Work every November. I did lovely gowns, night gowns, bed jackets and the robes, the gowns, the dressing gowns on top they were all beautiful.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I used to do novelty little jobs like little pin cushions. I remember making a pin cushion once. It was th...made out of white satin and it was of a swan, right? And very fine work. I lined it actually so it...I wouldn't see the stuffing through it. Then one of the girls, she used to do painting, she painted on the beak, the orange and the black, on this beautiful swan. And I went down to the farmyard and I picked all the feathers for the swan and I sewed them on and they were going over the swan's V-shaped tail, you know.

SP *Wow.*

MC And it was stuck onto a little mirror with little sequins all around the edge of that mirror. It was like the swan was on the lake, you know.

SP *That's gr...beautiful.*

MC Yes it was beautiful work. And then...

SP *This...*

MC ...one of the nuns...

SP *...sorry, this was all to be sold, was it?*

MC Oh yes, yes, yes. People came in every day to buy our work...

SP *I see, yeah.*

MC ...dresses and all that you know. And then one of the nuns said, we've got a new line of tapestry and I...I...I was taught it. It was done by a little tiny machine, but it was hand-done. It was like doing a carpet and the needle was adjustable for the pile that was coming out through the front. It was worked from the back and it was all...yellow maybe one, blue might be two and so on, it was...you had...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...it was done by wool. And I remember doing these...this stag's head and when it was done, what you did, you put Copydex [glue] at the back, right? All the front of it was cut and then you brushed it into one another, it was fantastic. And I remember doing three little kittens, they were really done as fire screens and the material that they were done on was báinín material, have you ever heard of it?

SP *No, no.*

MC Very loosely woven material. It wasn't white, it was cream, beautiful. And that was done on báinín material. They did buy the best, the nuns did. And I remember at the Sale of Work I had two of them done. They were just loose and me, I would have put them in a frame, myself you know. And although I was behind the counter, explaining about the work you see, we weren't really allowed to talk to the customers that came up.

SP *Okay.*

MC The nuns were there to take the money, you know. And this...this business guy came over and he saw this stag's head at each side and all the gowns and everything hanging up, you know, and the dresses and the novelty stuff, little rabbits and bears we used to make, everything. And this man spotted the stag's head. It had the green eyes on it and the antlers were beautiful and brown and he said, 'my God,' he said, 'can I have a look at that?' I didn't even speak. *(Whispered)* 'Yeah'. He said, 'who did that?' I said, 'me'. And he said, 'how long did that take?' I used to do it during my recreation times, it took nearly six months to do one.

SP *Wow.*

MC Yeah. And I tried to teach other girls you know, that wanted to learn it, but no they couldn't...couldn't catch. And...and he said, 'what would you use that for?' And of course I had to answer him, I got the nod from the nun. I said, 'well they're really made as fire screens, you know, for years gone with glass in front'.

SP *Hmm.*

MC And he said, 'oh,' he said, 'I will have them,' and I think he paid about fifty punts for them, that was like fifty pounds and that was years...that was over...

SP *Yes...*

MC ...forty-four years ago.

SP *Yes, that would have been a lot of money.*

MC Yes, and he...he said, 'I'm going to have the two of them for Christmas presents,' he said, like that and he ordered two more for next year. And I thought, '*hmm*, no more recreation for me for another year!' And I did, and the cat sold very well as well. And I remember also doing cushions, these were made of satin and they were embroidered cushions as well, smocked cushions, not embroidered.

SP *Yeah.*

MC There was the embroidery, the...the smocking at each end and all the pleats fell into place and there was a button going through it and they were really exotic. And the square one was made of all little...little pleats in the shape of a diamond sticking up out of them. And the other one was round with the button going through it...

SP *Hmm.*

MC I still have the pattern of that at home, you know.

SP *You seem to be very proud of your work.*

MC I was very proud of my work because everything I did was meticulous. If it wasn't I'd rip it out and try and do it again you see.

SP *You were a perfectionist.*

MC I am yes, in my sewing and to this day you know, I do alterations for people as a sideline. It keeps the wolf from the door, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I...I started d...doing bead work about four years ago, I do bracelets, necklaces and stuff like that...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...which I'm very proud of also and I teach other women how to do it. And to this day I teach other women how to use the sewing machines you know.

SP *Wow.*

MC So...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...yes, and I get a lot of work. The craft store where I go to do my beading on a Thursday with all the other women, they keep my number there. If anybody comes in [looking] for sewing to be doing, 'here you are, ring Mary,' and there you are, I've got work.

SP *Yeah, that's great and it's paid work...*

MC Yes it is...

SP *...is it?*

MC ...oh yes.

SP *Exactly, yeah, yeah.*

MC Oh yes, I...

SP *So, you're...you're paid for your work now?*

MC ...indeed so, yes I won't do it for nothing, you know, and...and people do come for advice, you know, and they say, 'how would you be able to do that?' you know...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...would you be able to do it for me?' And I always try and satisfy...satisfy the customers, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And some of them come to my home and I do curtains, shorten curtains, I make curtains if they want them as well, you know. Anything that can be sewn I can do it, I'll copy...copy designs from a shop, I'll go along to the shop with Esther sometimes and I'll look at this and I'll say, '*oh that's very nice*'. And I'll look at the price, and I'll say it to her, 'I can do that for a fiver,' you know. And I never buy it, I will make it you know, so...I n...never...I've never bought a nightdress in this country yet, I...I like my nightdress to this day very full. I don't like being restricted in bed. And a...a friend of mine, she's rather big, and her Christmas present every year from me is two nightdress...two new nighties every year. She doesn't buy nighties anymore. She gets them from me.

SP *Very good.*

MC Yes, yes.

SP *And tell me [identifying details removed] what was... [identifying details removed] ...the hierarchy...*

MC Yes.

SP *It was nuns, the auxiliaries...*

MC And then us.

SP *And you...*

MC *Yeah.*

SP *Yeah.*

MC We...we were the lowers...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...they were the alpha males, whatever, those auxiliaries were, you know.

SP *How did you r...what was your relationship towards the...*

MC Well I think...

SP *...auxiliaries?*

MC I got on very well, I got on very well with them all...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...actually, you know.

SP *Hmm.*

MC In my own way I'm a very easy-going person. I...I don't like arguing and things like that. I...I would...if Stuart starts to argue with me I'll just leave him sulk for a few hours you know, which he does and then I'll say to him, 'you finished sulking now? How...t about a nice cup of tea?' And this is how our...our life has been for nearly thirty-six years, you know. He is a big sulker and I won't put my husband down in any way. He's...he's been a very good provider you know, he only retired last March at sixty-seven you know, so...and I said to him before he retired, I said, 'in order for us to get on together, we'll be under one another's feet now twenty-four hours a day,' I said, 'I'm used to my time on my own,' I said, 'so when you actually do retire Stuart, a couple of days a week I'll do my own thing and you do your own thing, so that way we're not on top of one another all the time'. And so far it's worked very well.

SP *Very good.*

MC Yes.

SP *I think you do need your own time.*

MC Yes, you do, you do.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Now. So, yes, and I taught him how to drive...

SP *Oh, wow.*

MC ...I taught both my sons how to drive, you know. I was...always wanted to be independent and I always wanted to learn to drive, so I did.

SP *Yeah.*

MC You know.

SP *Brilliant!*

MC Yeah.

SP *Better than...I don't know...so... (Laughs)*

MC Oh and Mother Peter actually arranged a reunion for us in nineteen...in the early nineties. He r...she arranged one over here first, in Surrey, because she got a gir...very good friend she knew in the school. I know her as well, and she arranged a...a reunion for the girls over here and then she arranged one in New Ross, yeah.

SP *Okay.*

MC By then the Mercy nuns had bought the convent...

SP *Oh right.*

MC ...off the Good Shepherd nuns and I hated them for that. That was my home that was bought from under me...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you see, right!

SP *Yeah.*

MC And we had this reunion over there and I decided to take Luke with me. He was about nine years old then you know, and I thought, 'he must see where I lived,' you know. And I remember I flew over with this other lady that held the reunion in Surrey, Thelma [pseudonym] was her name and we hired a car from Waterford Airport and we got all the food made. And I remember this day we went up to the Good Shepherd nuns, rang on the doorbell and this grouchy old Mercy nun answered the door and there we were with two trays of the...of food, 'yes?' I said, 'there's a reunion here with the Good Shepherd girls and the Good Shepherd nuns,' I said, 'and as you can see we've got food, we're coming in'. I didn't say, *can* we come in – we're *coming* in! Well, we went up to the refectory and put it in the refectory, although it ceased to be a convent anymore if you know what I mean. And we kept coming and...backwards and forwards to the car, she parked herself out in...out in the rose garden off the corridor. We used to do our processions up and down there in May, my God they were a laugh. Anyway, she was spying on us all the time as we were going up and down and every time I passed the window where she was sitting there doing her knitting I went (*makes a gesture*) and carried on, you know and...and quite a lot of the girls came to that reunion and I remember the, the nun Mother Peter said, 'wear your...your name badges please,' you know. And I put Molly McDermott on mine. And I remember this other Molly McDermott, she was older than I was and she saw...she looked at my nam...name badge and she said, 'oh my God Molly I remember you!' I said, '*oh lovely!*' 'You were so naughty,' she said. '*Oh, is that all you remember about me?*' 'Oh but I do remember you used to sing lovely.' '*Anything else?*' 'No,' she says. (*Laughs*) That's all she remembered about me, that I was very nau[ghty]. And I remember we had Mass in the church there that day... Father Grehan [pseudonym] he's still alive, he's ninety-four now, I believe, he's convalescing...

SP *Wow.*

MC ...in Dublin somewhere, yeah. And he came to say the Mass for us, he had a beautiful voice, he...I remember him singing *Bless this House*, the...*oh*, he used to sing that so beautifully. And we were actually in the nuns' bit this day at the...at the Mass. We *never* saw the nuns' bit before and there was pews all down the middle and Luke decided to sit in one of the nuns' side pews you know, and halfway through the morning before the...we had the eats – we had to have Mass first and then the eats – Luke said, 'Mum, I'm very thirsty'. So I took him down the Irishtown to get him a bottle of Fanta. So that made him happy and he said, 'can I have some food in there?' I said, (*whispered*) '*not yet, no not yet*'. I think I bought him a little sandwich or a bun or something like that just to keep him happy. Then we were at the Mass and he was sitting at the side of the pew, opposite my pew and he had his bottle of Fanta with him. And halfway through the Mass...because I did...I did get him christened as a Catholic you know, but he went his own way. I told the priest that baptised him that I won't be forcing him. So, he's sitting in the pew there. Halfway through the Mass I heard this *glug, glug, glug, glug* – the Fanta bottle was up to his mouth and I was mortified and I'm thinking, 'oh my God [if] the nuns see him doing that, they're going to say, "how is he being reared up?"' you know. Then when it came to going up for Holy Communion, he followed me. He hadn't even reached his Holy Communion did he – no. He followed me up and he did the same as I did you know, he stuck his tongue out and he received his Holy Communion there and then. And he said to me, (*whispered*) '*what do I do now?*' I said, '*just swallow it!*'

SP (*Laughs*)

MC '*Go back into your seat,*' like that, and I thought, 'what a little pagan I've reared,' you know (*laughs*), 'what a pagan!' But that was it, that was him.

SP *Yeah.*

MC That was him. He amused himself.

SP *Yeah. Aww. And how did you find that reunion, going back to the place where you...you'd lived?*

MC I was very, very, very excited about it. *Very excited about it because ever since I left the convent, even the Magdalenes, I've never met anybody I knew...*

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...that I've grown up with...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...*never*, except Vera Delaney down...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...in the town for that one brief moment, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...*never* met anybody, you know...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...I'd love to...

SP *Okay, it was nice to...for...*

MC Yes.

SP ...*for a reunion...*

MC I mean, I often say to Sally [Sally Mulready, co-founder of survivor support group], 'I wish to God at the meetings we might bump into somebody'. I don't think I'd know anybody now. It's a long time.

SP *Yeah.*

MC We all change, don't we?

SP *Yeah.*

MC You know, I wouldn't recognise them by their face and I never knew their real names anyway...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...in the Magdalenes – pardon me – in the Magdalenes, never.

SP *Yeah, yeah. I meant to ask you as well, did you...did you have any fears and anxieties when you were in the laundry?*

MC Yes, my...my one fear was, 'will I ever, ever get out of there?' *(Pause)* We were very humiliated by the nuns. I remember one day I went out to wash my hands in the...in the laundry, w...washing my apron, and I heard this nun in the laundry, and it was a *very, very* hot summer; and I heard this nun saying to this very old lady, 'you *stink*, do you ever wash?' Now we never had hot water to wash in. How were they expecting that poor lady – she was a heavy person as well.

SP *Yeah.*

MC She obviously smelled of BO, she couldn't help it. She couldn't stop in the middle of the day and have a wash and freshen herself up. That was not allowed, you know. And I...I heard her saying that to that poor lady and that's the sort of thing we went through...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...while we were there you know, all the time...

SP *You...*

MC ...the embarrassing moments.

SP *That's what I was going to say, did you experience like, humiliation like, or psychological abuse?*

MC Not I personally.

SP *Hmm.*

MC No, no. As I said I...I had a cushy job really in there...

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I didn't...I didn't have much to rebel about except my loss of freedom...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know. I never questioned if I was ever to be paid or not, I just didn't think we were allowed to be paid.

SP *Yes. Okay, maybe I could ask you actually...there was something here...oh yeah...what were your hopes and dreams?*

MC My hopes and dreams? *(Pause)* To get out of that place because it was the worst day of my life. My dreams? That it would never, never happen to me again or anybody I knew. I dreamt that one day I would move on from there and that would be the end of it, you know. When I first went out, I was not able to cope at all as I told you, and I always felt I was a nobody, which they made you feel all the time, they always told us we were nobodies anyway...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...in the school, that was...

SP *In the school...*

MC ...mainly, you know.

SP *Hmm.*

MC M...my hardest time was in the school rather than the Magdalenes if you know what I mean. That's where my tough times were...

SP Yeah.

MC ...the beatings and everything. So, yes my hopes and dreams, I...I...I never thought anybody would ever even want to marry me you know, but I'm very grateful to the man above that they sent him along you know.

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

[Identifying details removed]

SP *And...no, in...I understand, yeah. And did you have any survival techniques?*

MC What, for when I got out?

SP *Sorry, for when you were inside still in the laundry, like, for...for getting through the day or...*

MC N...the on...the survival techniques was to do as you were told, really...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and do as much work as...as possible...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know... to please them...

SP *Yeah.*

MC Not into...not to get into bother. You couldn't answer them back and you didn't do so, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC That was my survival, way...way of coping with it, you know.

SP *Yeah, yeah. Although you did try to run away once...*

MC Oh yes, yes...

SP ...so...

MC ...indeed so, yes. I managed it for two hours but there you go.

SP *Yeah. And you never attempted to run away after that?*

MC No, no. No, no. I was there...t...I was...twe...I was twenty-two years old when I did that and I was...I left two years later...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...with the... the help of Father Ahern.

SP *Yeah. And can you tell me one word or phrase that best describes your time there?*

MC Degrading, because I *never, never, never* thought that would happen to me and I wished and prayed that none of the children I grew up with in New Ross would ever find out that I was there. I mean my sister was working up the road from me, you know...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...and she was never allowed to see me when she came to the Magdalenes, *never!*

SP *Right.*

MC And only she knew that I was in there of...of the school girls, you know. I *never* wanted any of them girls...because you were looked down on, you know, and all...all sorts of thoughts came into the children's mind. If I knew somebody was in there, I'd say, 'oh I wonder why is...she's in there?' That...that was the shame of it, you know.

SP *Yeah, yeah. And let's talk...if we can talk a bit about the after effects. Can you just in general think of anything [identifying details removed] of how it affected you after?*

MC When I left the work?

SP *When you left the laundry, yeah? And...*

MC I had very, very, very low esteem, no confidence whatsoever. I bragged my way through a lot of my life really, you know and I...I was...I covered up my...my...my shyness, my...my backwardness by being cheeky, making jokes with people to hide my inability to have a conversation. I...I couldn't have a social life at all. I remember the first time somebody tried to take me to a pub here in Dunstable years ago and – it was my friend and her boyfriend – I was...I was...I was on me...me own you know, it was my friend he was with, and we went to go into the pub and I went, 'oh, there's loads of people in there'. I reversed out and...and...and Ian [pseudonym] said, 'what's the matter? What's the matter Mary?' I said, (*whispered*) 'there's loads of people in there'. And I said, 'can we find an empty pub?' I wouldn't have minded going into an empty pub and then loads of people coming around...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...but to go into a pub like that with loads of people, I thought everybody knew where I came from and they'd be looking and talking about me.

SP *Yeah.*

MC That was...that was in...that was in your mind all the time.

SP *Okay.*

MC Yeah, yeah.

MC *That's really interesting. How about your religion? How did it affect your religion?*

MC Well, when I came to England...once again, I didn't like to be in crowds. Going into a church full of people you...we always look around to see who's coming. That I didn't want happening to me...thinking, 'oh they know where I come from,' you know. I...I didn't go into church for twenty-one years after I left Ireland.

SP *Wow.*

MC No, I did not and that was only because I joined a choir. The choir brought me back there, the singing brought me back there. But then when I did join the choir, there was lots of hymns and music that reminded me of the convent and I'd break down. I couldn't...I couldn't sing, you know

SP *Yeah.*

MC And my choir mistress, being a convert to our faith, she...she...she had a word with me one day after choir practice. And she said to me, 'are you alright Mary?' And knowing what a good person she is, for the very good Catholic she was, and I said...I said, 'my...my life was traumatic when I was younger,' I said, 'Maria'. [Pseudonym]

[Identifying details removed]

MC And...oh yes and...and all the other girls were gone and...and I s...I told her, I said, you know, 'I had a traumatic life,' I said like that, 'and some of the hymns tonight and the music made...made me cry because it brought back all the memories of my hard life,' you know. And she was very, very sympathetic. So I said to her, 'if you ever see me breaking down it means I just cannot sing,' you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And, 'I understand now Mary,' so I said 'carry on playing, otherwise everybody else will notice,' you know. That's what was happening to me really, you know. And she understood. Very good friend of mine...

SP *Good, good.*

MC ...very understanding.

SP *And educationally, I know that you received an education...*

MC Uh huh.

SP *...but do you feel that you lost, you had a loss of opportunity in...in...*

MC Indeed so, indeed so. I didn't have the courage to go for the...the type of jobs I would have liked to have done. I really would have loved to have been a qualified nurse...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...because I loved working with people, hence I did caring for fifteen years...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...in the elderly people's homes, in the elderly people's homes and...and that gave me fulfilment to know that I can do some type of nursing, but not qualified. I didn't mind not being qualified after all that because I was still working with people...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...but, I would have loved to have qualified as a nurse but I didn't think I was good enough to do so.

SP *Wow.*

MC In...not that I'm...I'm dull or...or unintelligent, I am quite bright...

SP Yes.

MC ...but I didn't think my place was to be a nurse, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...what I mean?

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...my...I don't know how to explain it (*pause*) that...I didn't...I wasn't high enough in the world to warrant having a...a...a career like that, that's how I...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...I d...I just didn't feel I was good enough to do it.

SP *Yeah. Did it have any physical health effects, the time in the laundry or...or even your time in the convent before that?*

MC I...I never was a very strong person at all.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I remember when I was about ten I got quinces, very bad where the throat is...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...very bad and I remember the music teacher, Mother Anastasia, [pseudonym] she was lovely. I remember because we had very little eggs to eat, Christmas and Easter we had a boiled egg, and I remember she used to get an egg from the convent...her side, she'd write Molly on it,

leave it in the kitchen so it'd be boiled for me when I was in bed. I was in bed quite a lot, I...I had a weak tummy as well. M...my health on the...on the whole was not good. I suffered a lot of headaches later on in the life, it was...turned to migraines, you know...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...and my period didn't come until I was fifteen and a half. The psychiatrist said I was trying to keep it at bay because they used to check our underwear and everything, you know, and I was afraid of soiling my underwear and stuff like that...My health wasn't good...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...full stop.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And it still not is today.

SP *Yeah. Do you think who you are today is different to the person you were when you were in the laundry?*

MC Oh yes, yes. I've come a very, very long way. I was painfully shy until I met my husband and he's a very outgoing person, he MCs at clubs all over the place. He...he's very, very outgoing and I'm very backward in that way you know, I've c...I...I've come out of myself a lot...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...because I s...I remember when I first started in the shop and the old fella that was the manager there, if...if we weren't doing much on the checkouts he'd always pick on me to go and fill shelves. And this day I thought, 'I'm ready for this guy now'. He came to me this g...day again and there was two other girls sitting on the checkouts doing nothing just like I [was]. And he came to me and said, 'Mary would you mind...doing some shelving?' And I said Mr Fletcher [pseudonym] there's two other people there. Just because I'm green...I'm fresh from Ireland,' I said like that, 'don't pick on me all the time,' I said like that. And I s...called out, 'Charlotte

[pseudonym] would you mind doing a bit of filling up for Mr Fletcher?' And Gillian [pseudonym] was the other one, 'Gillian, would you mind...' 'I'd love to.' 'There you are Mr Fletcher you've got two offers there, don't call on me again,' and he never did.

SP *Very good.*

MC Yeah.

SP *You stood up for yourself.*

MC I picked up for myself there that day and I...I haven't looked back and I always say, "if you don't ask, you don't get'. There you go.

SP *And do you question?*

MC Yes, I question *everything*. Even down to my illnesses if I go to the doctor, like the other month he said, it's been happening a long while now, my kidneys are not functioning properly. It's all down to my diabetes you see. And I said to him, 'now doctor, how do I make my kidneys work, please?' And he said, 'drink lots'. I do drink lots, I drink lots of water every day and that brings more blood into my kidneys and they function better. So, I'm constantly being blood tested...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and everything, you know. But it's the diabetes...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...no matter what water or teas I drink, it's not going to get any better.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I'm just putting up with it. I have to do so, but I keep very well in myself, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...I really do, I look after myself.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Yes.

SP *And how do you feel towards authority figures?*

MC Well (*pause*) authority, now let me think about this one, now (*pause*) if this...if...if...if the boss asked me to do something and it's doable I will do it of course. But, if it's being asked of me t...just to be spiteful, then I won't do it [identifying details removed] then I won't do it. And people...I prefer a man boss any day, put it that way. W...women boss, it gets to their heads. And if I think I'm being harshly treated I will say it. I remember...working in a home one day and...and it was my day off and the boss in charge said to me, 'Mary will you come in, we're a bit short of help'. And I was supposed to come in and sit and wait for the day care patients to come in from the public. They were brought into our home, you see, our day care centre. And she said, 'wha...what do you want me to do?' I said, 'All I'd like you to do, Mary is make sure you're there for when the...residents come in for the day'. I said, 'fair enough,' and this one, she was fr...from the Caribbean or somewhere, she was black – we had about three black people working there, I got on well with them. In fact one of my friends was a black lady, she's dead now...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...God rest her soul, lovely person, Muriel [pseudonym] was her name. And anyway this one came in late this day and she said, 'oh you can go upstairs now and get the residents up'. I said, 'I'm not here to get them up today by the way,' I said, like that. 'Who said so?' I said, 'the officer-in-charge, okay?' I said, 'I'm here to see the residents in and that's what I'm going to do. If you have got any problems with that, go to the office'. And she went into the...oh no, she started arguing first and I said to her, I said, 'you have one big chip on your shoulder about your colour,' I said, 'the other two girls,' I said, 'we all get on very, very well here,' you know, 'we work as a team,' I said, 'but you think you're above us all? Let's go to the office.' Went to the office, sorted it out in an...in an orderly manner. I didn't want her accusing me of being racist or

anything like that. So I went into the office, it was a...a female officer and I said, 'Stephanie, [pseudonym] why am I here today please? Can you tell Amanda?' [Pseudonym] And Amanda said, 'That's not fair!' And Stephanie said, 'Amanda, if you don't like it, there's the door'. And ever since that she didn't like me, but I was there to do a job and I did it.

SP *Yeah, definitely.*

MC Exactly.

SP *And just to finish up so that we give you time to...because I...I'm conscious that we've...we've been talking for so much...*

MC It's alright.

SP *...and thank you so much, what are the most memorable events in your life?*

MC My first Holy Communion day was a very nice event because I was in a lovely white dress and little patent shoes and I remember very well, there was this great big gate out in one of the fields and we were never allowed to swing on it and I was allowed to swing on that gate that day and I remember somebody pushing me backwards and forwards and that was so great! I was allowed to swing on the big gate! And I remember the nun afterwards saying to me that I...I was one of the most reverend ones coming down from the altar after receiving Holy Communion and that was a...a...a lovely day. We had food in the parlour as well, you know. And...and I remember going out to make my Confirmation out in the town, because the bishop didn't come up to the school, we went out to the public, and I didn't want to wash the...my forehead that day because it was special, the bishop was there! And then the next day...time was my wedding day, you know, and then having my son.

SP *Yeah.*

MC They're my four memorable days in my life.

SP *Lovely.*

MC Yes, yes.

MC *And...of all your accomplishments what are you most proud of?*

MC *(Pause)* I suppose my sewing. My sewing is my top priority and being able to help people.

SP *Yeah.*

MC My...my husband always says to me, you always find some elderly people that want to cling to you. I looked after a gentleman for fourteen years in my home. He had no one and I advertised a room because I had four bedrooms in my house...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...you see. I advertised a room when we first moved over here, and this poor old gentleman came along with another man and the other man didn't stay long so I left Grandda...we called him Granddad...

SP *(Laughs)*

MC ...because my husband's name was the same as his was...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...Stuart and Luke was only a little one and he started calling him Granddad as well you see. And he had a big heart, Granddad and, as he was getting older I was having to do everything for him even though I was still working with the elderly, you know. And I used to bath him, shave him, cut his hair, nails, everything – wash, cook for him, you know. He was like part of the family. And then one day he said to me, he said, 'oh,' he said, 'I must get in touch with my sister,' as she lived in Florida, Bertha. [Pseudonym] I said, 'oh I didn't know you had a sister in Florida, Granddad'. And he said, 'yes,' he said, 'I'm going to get her number from my other sister in Luton'. I said, 'do – so, we'll catch up with her,' you know. So I phoned her this day and Granddad had two hearing aids so he found it very hard on the phone. So, I...I...I rang the phone anyway to Florida, it was after six, it was cheaper then. I said, 'Bertha,' I said, 'you don't

know me,' I said, 'but your brother is living in my house, Stuart,' I said, like that, 'he's got two hearing aids. He's finding it a bit difficult to hear on the phone but I'm going to put you onto him now'. And he started talking to her all wobbly...

[Unidentified background noise]

SP *Aww.*

MC ...because he hadn't heard from her for forty years, you know.

[Identifying details removed]

MC And...he used to do his own thing every day like, you know, he used to get up, have his breakfast, he loved a...a good breakfast, a...a fried breakfast I did for most mornings and he sat at the dining room table, he had his own little seat there and he'd have his breakfast, then he'd totter off out...out to the town, Luton. He'd go everywhere, anywhere. And I...I'd say to him, 'try and get back by four and then we'll have dinner at five,' you know. And he'd come back, take his top part of his jacket off him, peel the spuds, he was a great spud peeler you know, and...which I hated doing anyway and still do to this day. Anyway then he'd totter off up to bed at about half past nine, you know. And we...we looked after him very, very well and I remember one day – he was a bit of a racist, actually – I remember one day I was on the bus behind him. He didn't see me get on; he was right at the front, you know. And somebody told me that he was nasty to the coloured people getting on and off the buses you see, and I didn't believe it, you see. And I was on the bus this day, I was sitting about two rows back from him, he sat on the front bit, and this black man got on, he was from Pakistan. And he went to go and sit down on the opposite seat to Granddad and Granddad said, '*you don't sit there, you can get back to the back of the bus! I nearly died!* So, when we were walking back to the house I said to him, I said, 'you didn't see me on the bus, did you?' '*No!* What, were you on the bus? *Whoa, whoa, whoa!*' He used to always say that when he was talking, when he got frightened! I said, 'yes,' I said, 'and how you treated that man from Pakistan,' I said, 'it wasn't very nice,' I said, 'one of the days you'll get somebody hitting you,' you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...I said, 'you should be very careful'.

SP *Yeah.*

MC I was wonder...I was only worrying about his safety, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And...yes, and then after about...I was in touch with his sister all the time then. I always made sure she had cards at Christmas, her birthday and all and she was so delighted to be in touch with her brother you know, and she...every time I spoke to her on the phone, she'd always say 'thank you, Mary'. And I remember when he was ill you know, he was ill for just about three weeks. I kept him at the house for as long as I could, you know. He started hallucinating and all that you know, and I thought it's time to call in...he had the early signs of Parkinson's as well...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...he was shivering all the time, you know. And then took him into hospital, he stopped eating and that was it. And I phoned his sister and said, 'he's passed away s...peace...peacefully in his sleep,' you know. And he had a good send-off, I gave him a good funeral. And he wanted cremation because I'd already talked to him about that, you see. And what I did was, I took a tiny little bit of the ashes out of the urn, put them in cellophane, put them in Berth...a...in a little letter to Bertha and when she got 'em she rang me up, she said, 'Mary,' she said, 'I have Stuart beside my bed every night. Thank you *so much*,' she says...

SP *That's lovely.*

MC ...and you could hear the tears in her eye[s] you know. And...I said, 'well,' I said, 'he had a...a good fourteen years with us,' you know.

SP *That's lovely.*

MC And he was very, very happy. He could do what he want, come when...when he wanted and I remember I took up fishing, angling, with my husband, and...and I always out-fished him. I was

better and I remember when Granddad was there and I'd try and get in before Stuart, from the fishing, and I'd say, 'don't ask about the fishing, Granddad, for God's sake,' because it was always...I got better fish, you know. And he'd say, '*I don't know why he's like that, he's just such a child!*' I'd say, '*shh!* Granddad, for God's sake,' you know. And one day, he said to me – I'm glad Stuart wasn't around – he said, (*whispered*) '*I hate that man* for the way he treats you sometimes!' you know, I said, 'don't worry I can handle him'. He...he was very fond of me, very fond of me...

SP *Lovely.*

MC ...yeah, he was like the father I never had I think.

SP *Yeah, yeah, I was going to say...*

MC Yes.

SP *That he was like...sort of like a family.*

MC He was a h...had a heart of gold. I remember one day he went to bingo in Luton and he came back and said, 'I won a hundred pound today!' And he handed me fifty pounds.

SP *Aww.*

MC I said, (*whispered*) '*Granddad, that's your money!*' '*What am I going to do with it,*' he said, '*except waste it? You buy yourself something nice*'. That's the sort of a man he was.

SP *That's lovely.*

MC Very generous. Yeah.

SP *And tell me how do you feel towards Irish...the Irish State and Irish society in relation to what happened to you?*

MC Well, they've been in denial so many, many, many years. Even my own family that I have left over there you know, if you bring it up they're really not interested in listening to how you felt at all. You felt you're an alien in your own country really. That is anybody that knew of your past, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...which you...you daren't let anybody know. But I felt...I felt very bitter that they knew what was going on behind the...the...the four walls, you know. I remember going down to confessions one day as a child about eleven, because the priest didn't have time to come up, and I remember walking down the Irishtown and there were these two women hanging over their stable doors, right? The terraces were so close, they were like that together, you know. And they talking and I heard this old woman with a...a bun in the back of her head and I heard her s...saying things about us, that...'look at them, look at the way they're dressed, they're in rags and you can actually see the...the vermin on their necks,' and so on. My hair has never, never had...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...vermin on it.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And...and I...I thought of that. I went down to confessions and I said to the priest...because we never had any sins to tell really you know, we made them up, so I did have sin that day. I said...I said, 'oh by the way,' I said, 'I do have a sin today, Father...Father Grehan,' lovely man. And I said, 'I've got evil thoughts about this woman down the Irishtown. She said something horrible about us children as we were coming down here today and I intend to pull her up about it'. 'Oh please don't, be a nice girl now'. I said, 'Okay, Father, I'll be nice,' but I wasn't going to be nice. Came out of confession, did my penance, whatever it was, a few Hail Marys, coming back up the Irishtown to get back to the convent, I said to the girls...the other girls, I said, 'you go ahead, I have to do my laces'. I was pretending my laces were undone and I...I bent down, when I saw them out of ear shot I carried on walking up and she was still there hanging over her door. I said, 'I heard what you...witch said to me on the way down,' I said, like, 'about us,

and did you know something? Vermin only live in clean hair. That's why you haven't got any. Look at the state of your hair!' I said, 'you could fry the chips in it!' She said, '*you brazen little hussy!*' she said, '*I'm going to report you!*' I said, 'would you like my name?' 'Yes!' I said, 'it's Molly McDermott,' and I knew they didn't have a phone in them days...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know. And yes I was reported and it got to the head nun up in the school bit, it was reported in the convent bit. And she told the one on the hall door, Mother Agatha [pseudonym] and I got whipped. I didn't care, I had the satisfaction of telling her what I thought about her.

SP *Well done!*

MC I did, I was very high spirited as a child, always.

SP *Yeah.*

MC So I didn't let her get away with it and I never did see that woman again. She was never around her half-door again.

SP *Yeah, no...Jesus, the attitudes of people...*

MC Well that's what they thought of us all the time. I mean there was glass on the top of our walls. We used to try and see over into the Irishtown and you'd see all these old women all the time but we were annihilated, we were aliens really, that people didn't want to know about us. They did not!

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I'm afraid, when I made my statement here to Enda Kenny, [Taoiseach/Irish Prime Minister] I said to him, 'I know a lot of the Irish people will hate us now for stirring up all this because it will mean that if there's compensation going to be paid it will probably come out of the people's taxes.' It's the innocent people that always pay for the...the evil doings of other people, which will happen there.

SP *Yeah.*

MC *Yeah.*

SP *How do you feel towards the church and the religious orders?*

MC I...do...I don't want to blame the church itself or the man above...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...it's human error that our lives were mapped out as they were. The...the convent started off on a good footing but then turned bad. *Greed* turned it bad you know, and they were making *mega bucks*. So no, the church, I...I don't blame them at all. I'm not a fully Cath...lic...practicing Catholic. My local parish priest, Father Scott [pseudonym] is a wonderful guy, a human being really, you know. And he would never preach or try and drill in the faith to you and whenever I see him, my friend relies on him a lot so I go over and sit down and chat with him, with my friend, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and she talks to him like I'm talking to you now, very casually. To me, talking to a priest I would always just say Father Scott or Father whatever his name is and not just Father Scott, and he always says, 'just call me Scott,' and I find it very hard not to call him Father Scott, the reverence is still there in me...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know. And when I'm leaving him he always gives me a cuddle and a little hug and...and I say, 'Father Scott, I'll see you when I see you'. 'I know, Mary,' he says. He understands because he knows all about my life.

SP *Very good.*

MC I went for a drive one day with him. We were supposed to be going to this party and he knew exactly where he was going but we got lost. It should have been a forty-minute drive. It was three and a half hours later...

SP *Wow.*

MC ...we arrived because I started speaking about myself

SP *Yeah.*

MC And I said, 'Father Scott, we're very lost. I'm going to ring my friend'. 'Mary, I love getting lost, carry on telling me your story'. He was very sympathetic.

SP *Very good.*

MC A very...a very good listener, you know...

SP *Good.*

MC ...and he's a very kind human being. Not just a priest...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...he's a human being. So yes, I do go over and...and say the odd Mass because he always says to me, 'Mary come over and help with the singing'. He always...if he meets anybody new he always says, 'Oh Mary here has a wonderful voice'. So I say, 'Father Scott, stop swelling my head please!' And of late they've started asking me to do readings in the church and I'm not very good at that either. It's people looking at me...

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MC ...you know, it's...I've still got that shyness in me...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...I brave it sometimes but there you are. I'll never be fully like my husband, outgoing you know, never.

SP *And in terms of...so you're involved in a s...a survivor group...*

MC Yes.

SP *...can you tell me about that, the survivo...can you tell me about that, the survivor group?*

MC How we got into the survival group, my friend and I Esther, after the Redress Board, while I was going through the Redress Board, I realised that my friend Esther was put in the Magdalenes at such an age when really in actual fact she should have been put over to the school at my side of the convent in New Ross because I was in the school in New Ross. And I tried different solicitors in Ireland to see if they would take [Esther's] case on, but she couldn't get through, they *did not* entertain the Magdalenes at all, you know...

SP *Right.*

MC ...and [identifying details removed] she went down to London and met Sally [Mulready].

SP *Yeah.*

MC And that's how we got...we didn't know anything about the Redress Boar...the...the...the survivors' group at all...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...we were out of the area...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know. And...

SP *When...sorry, when you went through the Redress...*

MC Yes.

SP *...for your own claim...*

MC Yeah.

SP *...that was, like, long before the survivor group or...?*

MC The survivors'...the survivors' group, I think started in 202 [2002] and my redress was finished in 206... [2006]

SP *Ah, okay, sorry.*

MC ...so that's when I went...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...to the Redre...to the survivors' group...

SP *Oh it was af...I see...*

MC ...you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MC That's how...how I got connected. And I would never have known about the Redress Board if it wasn't for a friend of mine. She rang me up one day and she said, 'Mary,' she said, 'do you buy the *Irish Post*?' I said, 'now and again'. 'Go out and buy it,' she said. I said, 'why?' She wouldn't tell me what was in it, you see. So I jumped in my car, ran around to the newsagents and got it and she said, 'it's on page five,' the ri...the...five or six, the right hand corner anyway, it was, and I opened it and it says, 'have you been in an institution?' and so forth and so forth. And

Hodge, Allens and Jones were putting this advert in for people to get help. So, I rang her back, I said, 'thank you very much'. A friend of mine two years prior to that; that was 24 [2004]...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...prior to that, in the choir, her name was Melanie, [pseudonym] she was trying to explain to me about the Redress Board. I didn't understand what she was saying and I just let it drop...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...because there was no...no advertising over here, the media, television...

SP *Hmm.*

MC ...nothing. There was nothing on...in the media or the paper or anything to tell us that we could get help. Redress Board, the word redress didn't mean anything to me then at all, you know. And...and that's how I found out. Otherwise I'd have never known...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...about the Redress Board and then it went from there and finding out about the...the...the survivors' group was through Esther...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and me trying to get her some help.

SP *Yeah.*

MC So, me trying to help her paid off as well for us being part of that group.

SP *Yeah.*

[Identifying details removed]

MC [Identifying details removed] ...there's one or two people we don't like because anytime they talk about it, it's about themselves only.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Nobody else.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And we all went through it in that group...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...not just those people.

SP *Yeah. Is there a lot of anger amongst the group or...?*

MC Some of them yes are very, very bitter. S...some of them are...i...it's still very raw with some of them...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you know. They want...they don't want to let go and in...in... my...in...my thinking there is they're only making themselves unhappy by dragging it through them...through their whole lives, you know. I'm quite a happy-go-lucky person, really...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...I always have been and...and if people start moaning I think to myself, '*oh my God* here we go again,' you know. Really don't want to hear that there you know. If they want to gripe they should do it quietly...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...that's how I look at it.

SP *Yeah.*

MC We are survivors and we should be trying to move on,

SP *Yeah.*

MC Not go backwards.

SP *Yeah. And what was your experience of the Redress Board when you went for your compensation?*

MC I was very nervous. I...I was awaiting a hip operation at the time I...I wasn't walking very well and when Penelope [pseudonym] rang me – my husband used to do night duty, and I asked a friend of mine Maxine, [pseudonym] the one that showed me...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...the advert, would I be able to have the interview at her house because Penelope offered to come down...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...I offered to pick her up from the station from [location removed] and I said to her, 'let me know when you're near [location nearby removed] and I will pick you up,' you know. Okay, driving was fine, it was walking that I couldn't cope with. And...picked her up, took her to Maxine's house and that was when I said to her, you know, 'how will they believe that I was in the school,' you know, and when she said, 'we've got registration papers on you, Mary,' I just couldn't believe it. I thought, 'my God I'm somebody...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...I really am somebody now, I'm down on paper,' you know. And that to me was a buzz, but as...as the interview went on and the...the gory bits started coming out, it was my first time to talk about that sexual abuse in fifty-nine years of my life and I just broke down.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And Maxine said, 'stop here please,' and she gave me a tissue, she went out the back, she cried...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...and she made coffee for us, you know. And I got over that little hurdle and then carried on with the interview, you know.

SP *Okay.*

MC So once I'd done the...the...there was always in my mind while we were going through this Redress Scheme, 'will people believe us? Will they doubt our stories?' you know?

SP *Yeah.*

MC That was the big worry I had, 'will they doubt my story?'

SP *Okay.*

MC You know? And then when they said I had to go to see a psychiatrist, I said, 'I...I'm not mad!' You know, they said, no, the...the government need to know how your life...how your past has affected your life today.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And he did me credit. I told him everything...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...everything he asked me I answered. I was very embarrassed by the questions I had to...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...ask...answer I mean, but I had to do it because that's what was asked of me...

SP Yes.

MC ...you know.

SP *Yeah. And were you satisfied with the process? With the whole redress process?*

MC I was, yes.

SP *Yeah.*

MC Yes I was, yes.

SP *And you were happy with the compensation and everything?*

MC I was...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...I mean...the...the solicitors, they didn't do anything without letting me know.

SP *Very good.*

MC They were very, very good. They phoned me, I remember once I got a letter from...through the solicitors from the nuns' solicitors Millet and Millet, [Millett and Matthews] because one of the solicitors made a mistake by saying one nun was in a convent that she never was in. So I...I rang them up and said, 'look so-and-so wasn't in that convent, she was in Cork'. The girls were mixing up the nuns' names...

SP *Oh, yes.*

MC ...because I was in two convents...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...you see.

SP *Of course.*

MC And they were very strict these s...the nuns, through the solicitors...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...very...they picked on every little mistake...

SP *Okay.*

MC ...that appeared on paper. But, yes the solicitors were very good and when it came to going to Dublin about it they gave me a choice, they said, 'did I want to go'. I said, 'no,' I did not want to be grilled anymore by other strangers. I didn't want to go through all that grilling again...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...it was tough enough giving my statement in the first place.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And Tanya Hughes...Penelope Norton [pseudonyms] started my...case for us and then she moved on to do another job and Tanya Hughes, she was very good, very young girl and she said, 'Mary don't worry, you don't have to go over'. And she sent...sent over Sebastian Baker [pseudonym] in my place. And all the time while he was over there, he was faxing or texting back or emailing...

SP *Yeah.*

MC ...Tanya and Tanya was phoning me that day letting me know how things were going.

SP *Very good.*

MC Yes it was very good and she said, 'Mary, they've gone out now to deliberate...we're not sure why they're deliberating'. It's because I got so many points and...and the...the award was based on how many points you got, you see.

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MC And I got quite high points and...and then she rang me back and she said, 'they're back in now, Mary, and the award is coming up'.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And she told me. And I...I didn't take it in really, I didn't know Euros from Sterling really, it didn't mean anything to me, the amount she told me. And...and I said, 'tell your colleague I thank him for representing me there in Dublin,' you know. So...

SP *Yeah. And what do you hope for this [Magdalene] redress or like...okay so the apology has happened first of all...*

MC Yes.

SP *...how did you feel after the p...the apology and secondly what do you hope for after?*

MC First of all the apology, I had some words written down here for Enda Kenny and in...in one of the bits here it says – I was going to say this – and it's written down here in my handwriting. 'That apology might relieve the State of guilt and the religious orders. It's not words we need, it's action and soon.' That's what I said to Enda Kenny. To me, apology...the word 'apology', I know he's made them to the nation and I'm glad he...he mentioned the word 'the nation', not

just...particularly to us ourselves because the w...the apology meant nothing to me. All the nuns that treated me badly, most of them are dead, there's only one I know.

SP *Yeah.*

MC And the apology should have come from the religious orders, not the government. That's how I felt about the apology.

SP *Well I think I've grilled you enough.*

MC Okay.

SP *I...I...unless...do you have anything else to add?*

MC Well I was asked by one of the reporters in the embassy [Irish Embassy in London] when they did the press conference (*pause*) now let me think now...ah my word it's...it was so strong in the paper, I was so strong about it, I can't remember the word now. Oh, 'what about closure, Mary?' Closure? There never will be closure 'till I'm six foot under. It will be with me all my life. The Redress Board money, it might have helped me financially but not mentally, it's here all the time. Something in every walk...every day of my life will remind me of my life. A phrase, a word, a hymn, a piece of music. There's always something in my life that will remind me of my...of my past life and that's where I will never get closure, never will. I've moved on, yes, because I want...I don't want to be making my...my husband or my son miserable. I've moved on a bit but it's...it'll...I'll never heal in here, never heal. I still break down and I can never explain why I'm crying, never. So, there you are Sinéad and thank you for your time.

SP *And tha...no, thank you and thank you for being so honest...*

MC It's alright.

SP *...and so open.*

MC I hope when the youngsters in generations to come read their history books, they will know all about what happened to us unfortunate people and...and...the...the nuns knew they could do it

to us because we had no one to tell our stories to, no one to call out [to] for help so that's the sad part of it.

SP *Yeah, thank you so much.*

MC It's alright Sinéad,

SP *Thank you.*

MC It's alright.

[Interview ends]

[End of Audio File 2]