



Magdalene Institutions: Recording an Archival and Oral History

A project funded by the



Reference Code:	MAGOHP/18/ANON
Oral History of:	Margaret Burke
Pseudonym?	Yes
Status:	Survivor
Keywords:	Sisters of Mercy Magdalene Laundry, Galway; St Ann's Industrial School for Girls and Junior Boys, Lenaboy, Co Galway; inaccuracies with birth certificates and lack of acknowledgement of birthdays; survivor views on lack of education; isolation from Industrial School friends after departure; St Joseph's Industrial School for Senior Boys, Salthill, Co Galway; distance among siblings due to separation in Industrial Schools; Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB); Section 28 (6) of Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002; St Joseph's Workhouse, Ennis; St Joseph's County Home, Ennis; lack of financial autonomy (County Home); Mercy Magdalene Laundry, Galway; auxiliaries exercising discipline; physical abuse; hair-cutting; system of family members signing girls out of laundry; funeral practices in Magdalene Laundries; rule of silence; escape from Industrial School; differences between Industrial School and Magdalene Laundry; religious sisters controlling money; emigration to escape feeling of entrapment in Ireland; member of British Army; depression; changing one's name; suicide attempt; self-education; literacy issues; difficulty sharing Magdalene experiences with family; stigma of illegitimacy; depression; suicide; love of animals; survivor support groups; difficulties with solicitors at RIRB; Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries; Magdalene redress scheme; health issues.
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Transcript:	120
Number/Format of Audio Files:	One .wma file
Interviewer:	Dr Sinéad Pembroke
Records/Papers included:	No
Access Conditions:	Anonymised interviews are freely available to the public. Immediate release of transcript and anonymised audio; interviewee's identity will not be revealed in the future.
Conditions Governing Reproduction:	Interviews can be reproduced, however the citation below must be used at all times.

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Notes 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.
- The interviewee has difficulty hearing and thus the interviewer had to repeat many of the questions.

Notes on Redaction and Transcription Process

Interviewee Initials: MB

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

- Named individuals have been assigned pseudonyms
- Certain locations have been removed to protect the interviewee's privacy
- Dates have been accurately transcribed

List of Pseudonyms

Pseudonym	Status/Relationship to Interviewee
Margaret Burke/Amelia Jones	Interviewee/Survivor
Sr Kieran	Third Party Religious (Industrial School)
Sr Ignatius	Third Party Religious (Industrial School)
St Peter's	Workhouse where interviewee was born
Sr Veronica	Third Party Religious (County Home)
Sr Teresa	Third Party Religious (Matron of County Home)
Miss Kirwan	Teacher from Industrial School
Breda	Third Party Magdalene
Felix	Interviewee's pet
Leah Donnelly	Child from Industrial School who ran away with interviewee
Jacinta Adams	Child from Industrial School
Mr & Mrs Farrelly	Interviewee's former employers
Fiona Mullally	Interviewee's former workmate
Niall Farrelly	Son of interviewee's former employer
Aisling	Interviewee's daughter

Greg	Interviewee's son
Paula	Girlfriend of interviewee's son
Mick	Interviewee's friend
Oliver	Interviewee's son
Tony/Anthony	Interviewee's husband
Deirdre Burke	Interviewee's sister
Richard Burke	Interviewee's brother
Sr Theresa	Third Party Religious (Industrial School)
Emily	Support group organiser
Alice	Interviewee's friend
Jane	Support group organiser

Basic Data from Interview

Name/Pseudonym	Margaret
When Born	1943
Born outside marriage?	No, but born in workhouse
Raised by	Family until age seven, then industrial school
Education	Industrial school, which interviewee describes as 'minimal'
Order	Sisters of Mercy
Laundry	Galway
From	1958
To	1958
Duration of stay	Seven months
Age on entry	Fifteen
Entered Via	County Home
House Name/No	No
Haircutting/punishment?	Yes
Circumstances of Departure	Removed by a teacher from Industrial School
Emigrated?	Yes
Physical ailments?	Yes, backache from standing
Of Note	

[Interview begins]

[Intermittent background noise from television and animals throughout interview]

SP *Okay Margaret, [pseudonym] so I just want to ask first of all that you confirm that you agree to participate? That...that you agree to participate in this interview voluntarily, and that you are familiar with the Information and Consent Forms that I...that I showed you?*

MB Yes.

SP *Okay, great. Well first of all maybe you could tell me something about yourself?*

MB I was born...I was born 19...1943 in [location removed] County Clare. From...at the age of seven my mother died and my father died, so I was put into an institution, after which I was sent in to St Joseph's Hospital, Ennis, County Clare to work as a ward's maid. From there – two nuns took me – from there to the Magdalene Laundry in Galway.

SP *Okay. Can you tell me more about your life prior to being sent to the laundry?*

MB I don't know why I was sent to the laundry and I don...I never was told so, I h...I have no idea.

SP *Okay. And can you tell me about your time in the...in the Industrial School?*

MB Where I grew up?

SP Yes.

MB Yes...when...my time was...when...from when I was seven years of age until I was fourteen and a half but they had got my date of birth wrong and my years. So I was only fourteen and a half when I left there. And then from there they sent me on to work in St Joseph's Hospital in Ennis County Clare.

SP *Okay, alright. And while you were growing up what had you heard about the Magdalene Laundries?*

MB When I was growing up in the school we...we...we had heard of the Magdalene Laundry, it was a very taboo subject. It was as if...if you were naughty you were threatened with the Magdalene Laundry. So therefore...therefore you were...y...y...the Magdalene Laundry was a taboo to you, it was like an asylum or where bad people went.

SP *Okay. And what was life like in the...in...in the school you were in?*

MB Where I went to school, it was very, very strict. We had to do...do a lot of work. The schooling was very, very minimal and wishfully I would have liked to have had a better education, so it would have helped me later on in life. I think education is very important. Without it we are held back, we are kept prisoners in our own rights. So, I found it...the nuns were...were very very...some of them were alright and some of them were very strict and...you had to kind of...you couldn't ask questions and they were always trying...pushing you and telling you what to do and shoving you around and...you were always working. When you...when you came to the...around the age of ten, eleven you were looking after the babies or cook...down in the kitchens or in the laundry, which we had a...a...a laundry part. And as we had children from...from infants up to...especially boy children, we had infants from...any age from six, seven months to say about seven, which after that then the...the boys would be sent to an Industrial School you know, for boys. So, I found it very, very harsh and lonely and frightening. You never really made...you made a c...one or two friends but when you left then you often wondered where those friends were. So, it was a very harsh...very harsh time and it was a time that you'd want to kind of forget about. There was very few happy moments there, the only happy moments were when we'd make a little laugh amongst ourselves...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, and have a few giggles or...you know, amongst ourselves. But other than that, that was it. And it was ver...the food was very, very basic and it was all work and prayer, it's all work

and prayer, but the...the main education was religion. Relig...religion was the subject that was drummed into you. The other subjects didn't seem to matter so much. So long as you can read and write, the other things weren't game.

SP *Okay...and can you tell me, did you have other siblings; other brothers and sisters?*

MB Yes I had three brothers who were in St Joseph's in Salthill, Galway, St Joseph's In...Industrial School. My sis...my younger sister and I were sent to Lenaboy Industrial School, Taylor's Hill, Galway. She was three years younger than me. So, our...we didn't stay close because we grew up in kind of two separate kind of groups. So, I was more or less in the group of the age...we were always in groups of the ages we were.

SP *Hmm.*

MB So I just knew her to be my sister because we did spend some time with my mother. We never had a...we just accepted one another as sisters, but we...we were never, never close and we're still not close...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...you know so...

SP *And what about with your other brothers?*

MB Oh my brothers they're...I have two up...n...no I don't...at the moment I've only got one brother left...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and he's very old and frail but I do keep in contact with him and he keeps in contact with us by telephones and...and find out how we are and...by Christmas cards and birthday cards you know, so...because we knew one another before we went into the Industrial Schools.

SP *Hmm, yeah.*

MB So we did have that little bond.

SP *Was it easy to keep in contact with your brothers?*

MB No.

SP *I mean while you were in the...?*

MB When you were in the...when I was in the Industrial School? No, because for a start we just knew we had two brothers. I think in all my time I saw my brothers maybe three times while I was in the Industrial School, once then was when the b...boys were in the army, when they left the school they came and visited us, my two e...eldest brothers. My younger brother died when he was only nine years of age in the school. And he died from Hepatitis B, and I didn't know that at the time, I didn't find that out until later, many years later. I always assumed that he died from childhood diseases but he died in a hospital in Galway. That now, is [as] far as...I've always felt very much alone because...and even though I had brothers and sisters, we were separated at a very early age, that we weren't...we were en...we were never encouraged to keep in contact and you could never write letters because you knew you couldn't...letters would be...we weren't allowed to seal the letters, [if] you had someone to write to...you couldn't because you want to put in the letters the things you want to put in, but you can't because the nuns wouldn't allow it.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So, in that sense even if I did have...if I did want to, I wasn't...I g...I...I...it was no use writing a letter if you can't put into a letter what you *want* to put in.

SP *I know, yeah.*

MB So...

SP *And what was your regime like? What was...you know, the routine in the Industrial School, like?*

MB In the Industrial School, you get up in the morning and I think it was...we'd g...the first thing would be, you go down to where...oh, I can't remember the name of the room, it was a big room where we'd all kind of groom ourselves and then go up...clean ourselves, kind of wash our face, comb our hair before going up to Mass. And then we'd go up to Mass and when we'd come from Mass we'd have breakfast and then after breakfast the younger girl...children...would go to...go on to school...oh yeah we'd do a bit of house work...when I say house work I mean some may have the...the dormitory, some may do...have the washing up. We all had different chores. And then school would come on and then...until twelve o'clock and then you would have dinner, and then you might have a half...fifteen or twenty minutes play time and then back to school. And then four o'clock I think we used to get a mug of cocoa and a slice of bread and butter. And then study would go on from five to six, and you had to study in silence. And there was one time...few...not once, twice or three times, because you'd have cocoa at four o'clock in the afternoon and you're in a quiet room and you're studying and there's a nun walking up and down, up and down, up and down, and there was no noise, and you'd f...you feel like sleeping, which happened to me *many* a time. And once I fell asleep and Sr Kieran [pseudonym] who was the teacher...teaching nun, she had a big long stick and she walloped me on my shoulders to wake me up. And of course when I jumped up and realised what she had done...I w...had...I didn't realise I had fallen asleep. But when she did I...I...I screamed out and she hit me again with the stick, and I screamed, and I screamed and I kept screaming because that was my only power – I was not going to cry for her. She wanted me to shut up but I wasn't going to, while there was breath in my body I wouldn't, because she hit me for no reason. She put me down to the back of the classroom, she made me kneel on my knees and told me that I was f...I had *demons* inside of me, *devils* inside me, and she kept...the more she hit me, the more I screamed. So, in the end anyways she let me go because the other nun had come in for the religious lessons at...at six o'clock. And so that was...that

would...that would be the end of the lessons for the day and then six o'clock you went up to the ch...up to the chapel and you had what they call the Rosary too. And how...at half past six then you'd have something to eat you'd have a mug of tea and s...some bread and butter. And then you had to do your washing up but wherever...whichever you were located to, whatever chores you had to do, you all had different chores. And then maybe half an hour then, or an hour well, more or less half an hour, we were allowed out to play if it was winter time. In the summer time y...at that time you'd have to go and do the fr...the gardens in the front. And then it was...you'd...before you go to bed then you went into the...I don't know what they're called...balutions [ablutions] or what...I don't know what you call them now, can't remember the name, where you did your wash...the wash room I'll call it, and you washed your face. Then you went up to bed and there was times when I was in bed, I used to have lots of nightmares and I was always told that I was mad because I had nightmares and that I would go into a lunatic asylum. And there was this one time I had...all this now went down in the Redress Board [Residential Institutions Redress Board]...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...so does it my...does it matter if I continue with it?¹

SP *No, no it doesn't at all...*

MB *Yeah.*

SP *...these are your memories.*

MB There was...there was one...I remember one time when...I was...every...every Friday was the bath day and the children had to get up, the *older* children, the ones maybe eleven...about twelve, thirteen and fourteen year olds. They'd take it in turns to get up to light the boiler for the baths for

¹ Interviewee is referring to Section 28 (6) of Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002, which states:

A person shall not publish any information concerning an application or an award made under this Act that refers to any other person (including an applicant), relevant person or institution by name or which could reasonably lead to the identification of any other person (including an applicant), a relevant person or an institution referred to in an application made under this Act.

the whole Fr...F...throughout Friday. And when it was my turn I used to be so frightened I'd be late in getting up because I would have to have an alarm clock for six o'clock in the morning to get up...or...no sorry five...it would have been about five o'clock. And this time...this...this night it would have been Thursday night, early morning of Friday morning, I would have been walking around in my nightdress and the nun in the dormitory would ask out...I'd be having...I'd be sleep walking, sleep walking was it.

SP *Hmm.*

MB And the nun asked me one time, Sr Ignatius [pseudonym] and she said, 'who's out of bed?' And I was able to answer even though I was sleeping and walking at the same time. And I said, 'Margaret Burke,' and she said, 'go back to bed,' she said. And with that she came out and she was all in white – I think nuns when they go to bed at night they're all in white...and...white...white thing to cover them, they were like a ghost really, you know, when you'd see them and...and she said to me, 'go back to bed,' and told me that I was mad. She almost...and then she went back into her...into her own cubicle and the next morning...I couldn't go back to sleep, it kind of woke me up you know, but I was sleeping while all of this was going on. When she...the next morning I wasn't very well so she told me to stay on in bed. And every so often I had nightmares every so often, and the nightmares were about being frightened about being...not getting up in time. And some of the times in my nightmares I would be going into the woods to pick up the wood. And when the nun would ask me I would say, 'I'm going to the shrubbery to pick up the wood,' because the Thursday, whoever is responsible [for] lighting the fire Friday morning would have to have the wood work and the turf and everything prepared for to light that fire the next morning, which would be Friday morning. So it used to c...I used to...it used to affect me so much, being frightened that I would be late getting up in the morning, that the nuns u...would hit me for being late, you know, so.

SP *Yeah.*

MB *(Pause)* So that would be like say...that would...th...Friday was the bath day that would be once a week. So I've had many a nightmare and I think they got used to me walking around in my sleep, th...they took no notice of me after that.

SP *Okay.*

MB My sister once told me (*laughs*) I was standing in my nightdress – I don't remember but my sister does – she said, 'I'll always remember,' she said, 'you were standing in your nightdress in front of a mirror'. There was a mirror at the top of the war....on top of the dormitory, in fron[t] there's...a wardrobe and there was a mirror in front of the wardrobe and...and I was dancing in front of the mirror (*laughs*) in my nightdress! My sister told me that story, you know! And sometimes I used to think I was gone doolally and I always felt maybe when...I was mad, it left that imprint that I was mad you know, that especially when the nuns said because of the nightmares and the sleep walking that I would end up in a mental hospital, you know, that was kind of...or the Magdalene Laundry or something like that...

SP *Right.*

MB ...you know so.

SP *Gosh. And do you have much memory of your time before, like your...time when your parents were still alive?*

MB Oh yeah they're the fondest.

SP *Hmm.*

MB There's...they...we were very, very poor but we didn't notice it and...and of course my mother had six children and it was a hard time for her but we were always fed, and we were always loved. So therefore, they were the times I missed most because knowing that we were poor, I don't remember ever going hungry and that's the strangest bit about it.

SP *Hmm.*

MB We...we probably had an awful struggle but I can't remember going hungry. And of course there was the love there...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and I had my brothers and sisters and my father.

SP *Yeah.*

MB Sometimes I'd see my father but not that often, he'd be away most of the time, but when he'd come back...but it was mostly circled around my mother.

SP *Yeah.*

MB Hmm.

SP *And so your mum died of TB?*

MB She did, my mother died of TB. She died in...in St Peter's [pseudonym], the workhouse in [location removed] Co Clare, where I was born. And she died in a TB unit there, which was separate from the rest of it because it was very ripe [rife] in those days you know...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...if you were poor.

SP *Yeah. How come you were born in the...a workhouse? Why...why were you born in the workhouse?*

MB Because there again, there was a lot of poverty...I'm going back in 1943...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and that was what...it was...it was...in its...before that, it was like say a workhouse turned into an old person's home for...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...a home for...and it was called St Peter's and it was a hospital so that sometimes mothers that couldn't afford...

SP *Ah.*

MB ...to go into hospital they would have their babies there.

SP *Okay.*

MB Because we're going back now in 1943...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...so I think a lot of children were born there.

SP *Okay.*

MB And then the...my mother would take me home to the rest of the family.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So I think most were born in there.

SP *Yeah. And what did your father die of?*

MB He died of bronchial problems, old army wounds.

SP *Okay.*

MB Hmm.

SP *Oh right. Okay well we're going into the sort of...the laundry bit...*

MB Hmm.

SP *...of your life. So can you tell me how you came to be sent to the laundry, if you could remind us again...that story that you told me earlier on?*

MB Hmm. When I was...when I was only fourteen and a half but I did not know that at that time, I thought I was sixteen because we never had birthdays in the school. We never had birthdays, we just...each year came that we just thought we were that year older. You know, so while I was in school, June was my birthday, the 1st of June, I don't know why, because I think that was the first day I was in the school...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...according to my records. And I suppose that's where they...where my age came in, that was born...or I...I...1st of June was my birthday, so on the 31st of May was the day I left the school in 1958 and the nuns got me a job down in the County Home – St Joseph's, the County Home in Ennis Co Clare. And I was sent...sent down there and I worked there as a ward's maid, that was my job. And I worked there and I helped out, I did all sorts of jobs there; I scrubbed floors in the wards, gave food to the patients and helped the nurses when they needed help. So I didn't mind that so much, you know, I was used to hard work since...from very young anyways. So that I didn't mind at all.

SP *Were you being paid at this stage?*

MB *No, no, no!*

SP *No.*

MB *No.*

SP *Oh right.*

MB The nun had said to me, Sr Veronica [pseudonym] said to me – the one that was over me on the wards, she was in charge of the wards – she said to me you know, ‘I’ll hold onto your money,’ she says, ‘because,’ she said, ‘I know you’re very young and you’ve never handled money,’ which was true.

SP *Hmm.*

MB And she said like, ‘if you want anything just ask me for it’. So that was...that was the situation as far as money. She went up to Dublin once and she asked me did I want anything. To be quite honest I was frightened to ask her. So she said, ‘do you want any underwear or anything?’ So I said, ‘yeah I could do with two pairs,’ and she brought me down two big long bloomers with those elasticated bottoms and of course I couldn’t say nothing (*laughs*), you know, it was coming out of my money, you know. But, yeah that w...when it came to money that was the situation and I didn’t dare ask her, I still had a fear...this fear of nuns inside me. And, so one day then I was...it was a Saturday actually – the days are very important in my head – I was coming into the County Home and I just happened to be passing the morgue and I looked in. And as I was in there, another man, one of the porters came in and a nun had seen *him* come in, Sr Veronica again, she had spotted him going...following me...whether...what his reasons were I don’t know, I’ll never know. And she came in behind and she saw me in there and I had a little bag of sweets in my hand and one sweet got stuck in my throat I’ll always remember, and she says, ‘*out!*’ She says to me, ‘*out, you out!*’ So that was it, the next day was Sunday and after 12...after 12 o’clock Mass, the...the chapel was so

close to the morgue you see, it was...and I was told to change the flowers on the altar – that was Sr Veronica again. And while I was changing the flowers, she came in one side door and she said to me, ‘you can...you can f...finish off there,’ you know, so I said, ‘okay’. And as I was coming down from the altar, I got this awful strange feeling something wasn’t right. It was...I couldn’t explain the feeling I got but it was a very, very strange feeling, a feeling of entrapment. *(Whispers)* *It’s okay, she’ll go away.* [Speaking about an unidentified third party] *(Pause)* It was a feeling of entrapment and so...but I didn’t know at the time there was another nun on the outside, on one side and there was a car with a driver in it.

SP *[Inaudible whispering]*

MB *(Whispers)* *Close the door. Do you want to close the door?* And...and there was a driver in the car and the two nuns Sr Veronica and Sr Teresa [pseudonym]. Sr Teresa was the matron of the County Home, and between the two of them they pushed me into the car. And from...they took me...as we were leaving the County Home and on the way, I was very confused and very frightened, didn’t know what was going on. And I started to cry and I was crying and crying. And the next thing was I said to her...I said to the nuns, ‘what are you doing, where are you taking me to? Where are you...where...where am I going? Where am I going?’ That was...those were the words. And they said, ‘well, you’ll find out, you’ll find out soon enough’. And I asked them were we going to Galway, I recognised...because I knew that area going into Galway. And then out...outside the Magdalene Laundry, this green door, which I’ll never forget, it was a small green door into the side of a big walls and in there...and shoved me in there.

SP *[Inaudible whispers]*

MB *(Whispers)* [Speaking about an unidentified party] *They probably want to go out the back.* [Interviewee walks away for a moment to close a door] They...when I took...I cannot remember, I can’t recall from the moment they put me through the doors I can’t remember that bit, and going through what looks like glass frames. Now I could be wrong...in through those doors and a big long corridor and I cannot for the life of me, remember from that moment until the next morning when this big girl, this...one of the senior girls came to me and gave me some cl...uniform to wear and

told me get on with...follow the girls. So, I wore this clothing anyways, it was a dress with a pinafore, a long pinafore going...and...and then I followed them on, and they w...they were going to Mass. From Mass afterwards then it was breakfast. Breakfast consisted of a slice...two...maybe two slices of fried bread and a mug of tea and then I...then went back to...to...I had to scrub...at the sink...stand at this big, big, big, great big sink and it was a row of us, row g...of girls by those sinks, and we had to do all the shirts, those white shirts come in. It was like a factory and they would be scrubbed with *Sunlight* soap...*Sunlight!* (*Laughs*) I remember the *Sunlight* soap, scrubbed with a hand brush and I had to do the collars and the cuffs because that's where they got the...the dirtiest and then I would pass them onto the next girl, and she would pass the next bit on and that's how it went, you know. It's...so, that...we did that now until...all the time they kept...work kept going, work kept going, work kept going. Just...just like a factory now. And I think the bell would ring around twelve o'clock then for your dinner. And then you went into...you went into this big dining hall and you had this big long...couple of big long tables and there'd be benches and you'd be sitting down and you'd get a plate with some bacon and cabbage maybe, very fatty bacon and...and then for potatoes then they would be little potatoes that you would normally either throw out because they're too small and they'd be greenish. So, they would be in those three or four plates right in the centre of this big long table. And I'd learned to have...to *grab* them when they came, otherwise you'd go hungry. And so I'd learned if you went in with manners you came out without! It doesn't matter, it was survival really...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...that's what it was, because potatoes would fill you up, whatever else was on. And then...of course then, you'd go back...back to work again and then I think it was at six o'clock was the next meal we had, and we went to...I think we used go to the chapel for...for Rosary and after the Rosary then and...hang on, we had bread...bread again and dripping and a mug of tea, and that was that for the rest of the night. Then after that then you...you had what would we call it, recreation kind of...a...a bit before going on to bed like. That was your normal day, that was every day except Sunday, Sunday was the only day you didn't work in the laundries and Sunday was supposed to be the holy day and you went to Mass. But when you didn't...when...after Mass then

you would spend Sunday cleaning your dormitory, cleaning your own surrounding areas, or cleaning the day room or whatever.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So, you were all the time kept working, it was non-stop, it was sheer slavery!

SP *Hmm.*

MB And, it was...it...it was like...it always reminds me of the ships that used to go out to Australia and it always had that kind of feeling about it like, when you see if a man stood up and spoke out, you were put down into the gulley [galley] and...and you would be chained and...and you'd be...you know, when he'd get dinner it would be just pure slop and you had...they had to eat it because there was nothing else, you know. So Magdalene Laundry always reminded me of...similar to that...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...the...you know. And so y...it was survival, it was very much survival. We all f...it would be...you couldn't...you couldn't have any contact with any other girl. You'd...especially like, sometimes you might have a little giggle with a girl next to...because they're nearly around your own age group anyway, so sometimes you'd have to have...you'd have a little giggle and one of the bigger nu...girls would come up and tell you to stop talking and stop laughing, whatever you were doing and *get on with the work*, the work was...you had to get...just get on with it. And they were *thumping* you, and calling you names and pulling your hair and putting their fists through you, you know. And...and then if they...if it was a thing that you got too...if you retaliated they'd call the nun, if you had long hair or anything like that, they'd cut your hair. So, it...and...and that was kind of...the regime that went on there continuously. So, you learned...you learned h...to keep your head low and behave yourself – what they called 'behave yourself' – because you...you didn't want to go through all of that, you know. It was...it was all so painful and you would see it happening to other girls, all you want to do is cry, but crying is not going to get you anywhere because you know

you're there for the rest of your life. There was nobody to take you out and that was the thing about the Magdalene Laundry, the doors are locked behind you. So, you cannot get out and we're...you'd...once you're there you're there for life and the only time you'd get out of there was if somebody with some kind of respectability would claim you to take you out. Say if you had a brother or a sister had a...had a good job and they'd take you out, they would be responsible...held responsible for you. So they would have to sign you out...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and so that was the only way. And if you had no family you know, you were just lost in the system.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So, that was the situation, so you had to get on with the way...what they *wanted* from you, and...and...get...because...you know, you just...it was survival, it was very, very...and one day then I remember this poor girl, she was dying by this window. I didn't know her but I r...I know she...I know she was a young woman with black hair and as we used to go through the dormitories she'd be lying there, she wouldn't be talking, she'd just lie there for days. We all knew she was dying, we all knew she was d...we didn't talk to her, we didn't talk to her, and...and then when she really got bad, when...when her time came, that she act...was...actually died, she was moved over to another small room on her own so we were allowed to go in and say goodbye to her. And when we went into this [room] she was on her last breath really, and this...then the next thing we knew she was dead. And then the next morning then she would have been in a coffin and she would have been up in the altar, up in the altar in this coffin and we'd go to Mass and we have to pay...pray for her, and yet there was no...there was no...none of her *family* or anything there. There was...it was so, it was so, so I mean, I was fourteen and a half and to see something like that, and you'd say to yourself, 'God I'm going to go like that! That's me when my time comes! *I'm going to get out of here, I'm going to get out of here!*' And I *vowed* and I *vow*...I *prayed and prayed* to St Anthony or called out to my mother and begged her to get me out. I know she was dead but I still spoke to her from my heart. And I then start...I said, 'I'm going to have to get *out*'. I was trying

to think because you couldn't get out – all doors were locked, doors were never opened. And so I had to think. I took this child's or young girl's navy cardigan right? From...I...w...I stole it from one of the bags that came in the laundry...I didn't know how...because if you were going to make your escape, you're going to have to...think of changing...not going in the same clothes that you were in the laundry. So, you had to have clothes that nobody would be suspicious. So anyways, I got this...I started off with this one cardigan and I started taking the...the...what's it called now...the li...the little tag that's at the back of all the...your...all laundry clothes, where the laundry puts them so they know who...where they belong to. And I plucked out the...the tag that was at the back of this little cardigan and I put the cardigan away in my locker up by my bed. So I didn't tell anybody, I never told *anybody* about it. So, as we say then, Christmas time, at Christmas time then when we were singing Christmas carols and hymns, they used to bring nuns from outside for we to entertain them, and it was whilst we were at...singing in that choir...in that choir – I was one of them, the ones in the choir – and obviously one of the nuns had spotted me and she recognised my face. Now I didn't see this, I didn't know this at the time. And the next thing then, Christmas was over with and months went by and I think it was the spring and one of the girls said to me, 'go upstairs and go to your locker and get out of those clothes. I've left some clothes on your bed'. Never telling me why, I had to obey her it was just like a prison command, you know, I mean...so I...I went upstairs, she stood by the bed there, and the navy cardigan was taken out! (*Laughs*) And 'twas gone. But anyways, I must have been brought...put on the clothes I went in with and when I came downstairs – you were never allowed to talk, you never all...discussed...talking, talking didn't come in, you weren't allowed to be talking. And silence was always...it w...it was like...you...you lived in silence most of the time. And so you were taken downstairs and then you were...I was taken out and Miss Kirwan [pseudonym] from the school was standing on the outside and I had this little case with my clothes in and she took it. When I went outside the gates of the Mag[dalene], the same green gate I came through, nothing was ever said to me. And I remember going into Eyre Square in Galway because the laundry is not very...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...far away from Eyre Square, and you know what? I felt alive! I didn't jump in the air, I just saw the *beautiful* daffodils in Eyre Square and...and I felt for the first time being alive. I don't know if that makes sense to you?

SP *It does.*

MB I didn't jump up in the air, I didn't...I just felt alive when I saw the daffodils, the beautiful green. Because the laundry was so *dismal, dark, dull*. It...there was no colour you know and to see the beautiful yellow daffodils...was like being alive, if I...like if I came out of a dungeon or something and I see the blue skies. And then she said...yeah, she didn't...she didn't really talk to me much, Miss Kirwan, she just took me back to the school. And then seeing Sr Ignatius, she *never* asked me why I was there and I couldn't ask her anything, [it was] as if it never happened.

SP *This was the school that you were originally in?*

MB In...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...yeah, and...and she was...she was the head nun...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...that...more or less as I was growing up...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and so she knew me. And she *never asked me why* I was there, as if it never existed! And of course I couldn't ask her *why* I was there, it would be impertinent to a nun...to a nun to ask. So I just...she said, 'wait, I'll get you a job,' she says, and she says, 'but I need you to take a few...a

week or two rest'. So, that was the end of the Magdalene Laundry for me. But it was a *horrible* experience and it's an experience I'll *never, never, never* forget.

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MB You know.

SP *Oh.*

MB It was so *dark* and it was so *dismal!* Sometimes I used to feel I was on the...those ships going out to Australia...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...do you know, down in the dungeons when they used to beat these people and...you know. So, it had that kind of effect on me....

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you couldn't believe, that you were still in holy Ireland and this was going on.

SP *And your sister was never in a laundry?*

MB No, my sister was still in the school...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...at that time, 'cause sh...because don't forget she was three years...

SP Yes.

MB ...younger than me. But what my sister had said to me once was, was that she had said that Miss Kirwan had said to her if she didn't behave herself she'll end up in a Magdalene Laundry, 'like your sister'. You know, so.

SP *Oh.*

MB But, it...it...it was strange because they never discussed the Magdalene Laundry or nothing...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...as if it *never, never* existed, what happened.

SP *And so what was the year you were put in...what...the year that you were put into the laundry...it was...?*

MB It was 1958...

SP *1958.*

MB ...as far as I can remember, yeah. The same year as I left the school...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and it was my first Christmas there...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...you see, so that's how I...I know it you know.

SP *Did they give you any information about the length of time or...or...your...any...or your rights?*

MB No...

SP *No.*

MBno, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

SP *So you just went in there and you didn't know how long you were going to be there?*

MB N...well I knew I was going...well, it had a reputation that once you went through those doors, you were there for life.

SP *Yeah.*

MB It was like going into a mental hospital, mental...mental institution.

SP *Okay.*

MB It had that effect that you were in there for life and it was a very big taboo subject, you know. It's like if you say, someone's gone down to prison for life, you know, I mean you know they're not going to come out.

SP *Hmm.*

MB That was the same effect the Magdalene Laundry had on us. Only mad people or bad people or...went in there and that was the end of it.

SP *Yeah. And can you describe to me the kind of work that you did?*

MB In the laundry?

SP *Yeah.*

MB Yeah. Well as I said it was just all laundry, scrubbing...you'd have, you'd be standing from after Mass 'til your prayer time at six o'clock and all that day. You'd be standing in this...you'd have this big...basins, don't know what you'd call them now, they'd be...they wouldn't be tin they weren't made of tin...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...but they were...and there would be a row of them so each of us...and we'd have this washing board, this washing board and you'd have your bar of soap and...and you'd be scrubbing and scrubbing and you'd b...all of your clothes would be wet. And your *back* would kill you because you were standing up – I was very tall...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and of course your back would *kill* you at the end of the day. You'd pick up lots of colds and flus and things like that, but you'd get hardened to it.

SP *Hmm.*

MB That's the only way I could say it, because you never saw a doctor, and there was no use complaining, you couldn't complain. You just wiped your nose, forgot it, and you know, you'd have to be falling down before they'd let...release you from your job like, you know. So it was very, very *hard* and very dismal. And it's...the hardest bit about all of that is to think that it was your own people, the nuns, who you...you grew up to think were good people, people of God...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...could they have been responsible for all of this.

SP *Hmm.*

MB You know.

SP *And can you describe to me your living conditions?*

MB The living conditions were very minimum. It was like a dormitory with so many beds...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and there was one toilet and I think there was one bath where you probably had a bath once a week if you were lucky. And...that was...that was it, so you were so tired you went to bed at night...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...you'd just fall asleep. You'd probably do a bit of thinking and a bit of crying...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and you'd fall off to sleep. 'Cause see you had learned not to think anymore because you know you're there for life. It's no use thinking on the outside because the hope was gone.

SP *Hmm.*

MB Any hope you had ever of life was gone once you came through those doors.

SP *Yeah.*

MB And so, you'd be so worn out from working all day long, you...you know, you'd just try to get off to sleep as best as you could; you'd be twisting and turning but you'd go to sleep because you'd have to go to sleep and you'd be too tired anyways, you know. And, you know...you know, you'd hear all

the other girls crying and whining in their sleep. Sometimes it was very distressful because you'd hear...you know, people crying out because there was people there that grew up with their families...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...grew up with their mothers and fathers, and you'd hear them crying out for their mothers or whatever. So it was very, very pitiful...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...d'you know, to hear somebody...I mean you have your own feelings, and then all...you might hear someone crying out, 'mammy, mammy,' you know, and they might call out in their sleep you know, and...and you hear this and you...you...you cry because it's...it's very, very emotional. It's very, very touching.

SP *Yeah. And actually were you allowed to speak to the other girls at night?*

MB Well you couldn't get out...you couldn't get of bed, you couldn't because there was always bigger girls that would be in the dormitories...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...you know, it was...you could never get away from it and...and the only way you...I mean like, when you'd be washing there'd be other girls around your...same age, and if we had a...like a little giggle about something you know...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...say...say the girl next to me here, we'd be having...or...girl next to me...there was only...and...and the bigger girl would probably see us and...and she'd come and *thump* us and –

'*get on with the work, get on with the work!*' – you know, there was no time for talking, there was no time...silence was everything. Silence was a very *must*, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...so, it was...

SP *So...so you had the nuns and then you had...you talk about bigger girls. Were these girls the ones that were kind of in charge of you?*

MB They would be more or less in charge of us. You'd see the nuns from time to time, you'd see the nuns in chapel, you'd see them in the laundry and you'd see them sometimes going around and – 'what's going on?' – if...if the bigger girls complained to them about one of the younger ones...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...the nun would come down and sometimes she would have her strap in her hand and she'd belt you, and...you know, that would be the severity streamed...that if you were mouthy to the bigger girls, if we were inclined to be a bit on the mouthy side and you complai...you know, you said...or back answered or something like that then the severe punishment then would come from the nun, where she would cut your hair and belt you with a stick or something like that. So, in time you learned to keep your head low.

SP *Hmm.*

MB So this...the bigger girls were always like big *bullies* there...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, and you were always just as frightened of them...

SP *Hmm, yeah.*

MB ...because...I don't know, th...they were probably there a long, long time and they probably had some privileges I don't know...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...you know. But I do know that the bigger girls that were there a long time, they used to do special nuns' laundries and things like that and then like say around Christmas times and things like that, the nuns used to give them a...little bars of smelly soap as a kind of a thank you...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...you know so...so I think that...that's how...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...as I say I wasn't there for years...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...so I can only tell you about my year, the...the...the seven months I was there, you know.

SP *Yeah. Did you ever receive punishment? Did you ever receive a punishment?*

MB Oh I...I did, I...I got...one of the nuns had belted me once and...and you know, because I think it was I wouldn't...I wouldn't eat the food or something. I wouldn't eat...something about...the...the bread, I was feeling sick...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...when I would go to swallow it down and...and...and I couldn't eat the bread with the dripping on it like, you know. And...and she said...you...what used she say...she used to say, 'be *grateful* for what you get! That is *God's food!*' And she'd be belting you at the same time, you know, she'd say...and...and you had to swallow it even though it would be going down, you had to swallow it because you know if you didn't eat it, number one you'd...you'd go hungry, number two you didn't like it and it made you feel sick, but your body...it's strange how your body becomes accustomed to it; so you could only take a little bit, by a little bit, by a little bit, you know. And you have...emotionally you would tell yourself, 'if I don't eat this I'll be hungry tonight'. And when you go to bed that's when you'd be thinking of the food and you'd be so hungry...your body sometimes...you...you know like, your body gets used to having a certain amount of food in it, you know like...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ..if you're used to say having good food and all of a sudden you're thrown into...into a place like...you feel the hunger for the first...maybe the first week or so, the real hunger. And then your body becomes accustomed to that amount of food...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. You can dream of nice food but that's only a dream.

SP *Yeah. Do you remember any girls running away when you were there?*

MB I...I couldn't honestly s...answer that one because I...I didn't know, I wasn't there long enough.

SP *Hmm.*

MB I'm sure they...I'm sure they made the...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...attempt, I'm sure they made the attempt...

SP *And you...you were going to run away?*

MB I was...I was...yeah...no, as I said I would start off with the cardigan, the clothing, and then from the clothing I was going to figure out how I was going to get out. But then I had to start with the clothing first.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So obviously it was in my head to do so.

SP *And as you were saying the door and the windows were all locked?*

MB Yes, yes...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...the nuns always kept the keys on them...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...always on their side there.

SP *And were you given a new name when you went into the laundry?*

MB No, no.

SP *Okay, that's interesting.*

MB No.

SP *Or a number? But you would have had a number from the...*

MB I...

SP *...Industrial School, would you?*

MB ...I would have a n...I...I had a...num...those...number...no, no...the...I had a number in the Industrial School although, you know, it would be on your clothing and stuff like that.

SP *Yeah.*

MB But I didn't have...I *might* have had it on my...I didn't...I don't honestly know about the Magdalene Laundry.

SP *Hmm, okay. And you were...were you paid?*

MB Oh no, no didn't handle money at all.

SP *Okay.*

MB Didn't see it, didn't handle it.

SP *And so how many days were you working in the laundry?*

MB You'd work six days because five...you...you...not six days, seven days because you'd work six days in the laundry...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and then the seventh day you still had to work, you still had to clean the dormitories, you still had to clean the day rooms, scrubbing the floors and polishing them and...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...some would be up in the chapel doing the chapel or whatever so, I...or the nuns' refectory or wherever.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So you still had work of a Sunday but it wouldn't have been the laundry because the machines would be switched off...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, and...and then they would go...be on from Monday to Saturday, and so, that was the...the regime of it.

SP *And what was...you said that there would be a recreation just before bed?*

MB Yeah, there would be a kind of...after ...after...after supper you'd have...there was what you call...might call...be a recreation hall and you were allowed to go in there and I think there might be a radio in there, I could be wrong, no, I think...might have been a radio there. And I don't know, some of the girls did smoke, I don't know where they got their cigarettes from...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...I think now...I could be very wrong. I think some of the bigger girls smoked. We were never allowed kind of, to be human, really! We were never allowed to get that close...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...to one another...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. Although we had our...you know, we had our minds and our thinking and all that but we were never allowed to develop a friendship because one would always be thinking, one would always be thinking that one would be spying on you. You'd get...you'd get to that stage that you were frightened to say something because somebody else over in the corner would be watching and they would pass on, and maybe pass onto the nun or you get knocked or beaten or something because you were sw...found whispering or something like that. So it was a vicious circle...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...so you just learned to...keep your head low...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...do you know, because y...y...you couldn't trust nobody...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...there was nobody you could trust. See you don't know who you're...there was only one girl like...I got close to her and when I say close, the closest I could get like as if she was my sister and her name was Breda [pseudonym], and she was a blonde haired girl and I looked at her as my sister. See don't forget I was only fourteen and a half and I looked on Breda...and she...for guidance, for...she used to tell me like, 'oh be careful,' little things like that. And of course I'd grown on her, I...she was like my big sister and that's the only one I ever had any kind of...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...friendship with. The others were just numbers.

SP *Yeah.*

MB That's all I can describe.

SP *Hmm. And did you ever get to go...was there any recreation outside...*

MB No...

SP *...or was it all indoors?*

MB ...no, not for the time I was there...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...anyways, no.

SP *Yeah, okay.*

MB ...I never saw outdoors.

SP *Okay.*

MB I never...that's why when I did leave and I saw the beautiful...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...flowers, it was coming alive...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ... you know. So everything was very dark and dismal.

SP *And what...what made Christmas or special events different?*

MB It wasn't...it wasn't...Christmas wasn't different as far as...as far as hearing the Christmas carols and that probably would have been a Sunday anyways.

SP *Hmm.*

MB And there would probably be nuns coming in to hear it and nuns going around to their pets – what you might call their pets – and giving them their little bars of sweet soap and stuff like that. But that's...

SP *That...hmm.*

MB ...that was Christmas, you know...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...there was nothing special [other] than that. It was just hearing them...the lovely Christmas carols and things like that, it's...you know, it goes back again to when you were a very young child, when you were still at school and how Christmas carols do affect you...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...you know.

SP *And...can...sort of...can you remember any visitors to the laundry? Like any outside...can you remember any outside visitors like from...*

MB No, I never had any outside...

SP *...inspectors or...?*

MB ...or to the other girls...any of them...th...I...there was no...I never seen anything...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...I never seen any letters or anything like...any contact with the outside world...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...once I was in there.

SP *And you never wrote a letter?*

MB No, I...I was never encouraged to write a letter. I had two brothers over in Birmingham and I knew there was no use writing to them, I didn't know where they were. And...and also, if I did, that...they wouldn't probably have been in a respectable job to take care of me if they did come and say, 'I want to take my sister out,' because they had to prove some way of...being able to take care of you and...and that they'd have to sign, so...

SP *Yeah. Can you remember any accidents in the laundry?*

MB I...oh, I remember you'd...you'd see some of the girls slipping on the floor and things like that but you'd have to get up off the floor and get on with it...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...regardless of what...you'd be all bruised or something from when you'd fall or...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...because the floors used to be always wet and soggy. And one of the women would have to come in and she'd have to clean it with a mop. But the ground...but the floor was always...it was like tiled floor and all the steam that goes on in the laundry and all the slopping around and your clothes soaking wet, you know. It...it was like a sweat shop...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, that's the nearest you can s...and if you fell...if you fell you just had to get...get up and pick yourself up and get back to your work...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know.

SP *And what would...what would they do for periods, when you had your period? What...what would...would they pr...would they provide you with the necessary...?*

MB Now that's...I can't remember that bit now, that's a bit I can't remember.

SP *Yes.*

MB ...I just remember...well they must have provided sanitary towels because for the simple reason why I know that, because in the school...in the school it was...the sanitary...we didn't get sanitary towels in the school...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...we got...towelling. So you had to wash them over and over again to keep them clean and use them again over and over again. So I think it's probably...that's what we did...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...because I can't remember...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...much more. I can't actually remember using a sanitary towel, nor using that. But I would imagine...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...that would be the...and it'd be tied to your bed just like same as the school...

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MB ...you know.

SP *And were you given toothbrushes and things?*

MB No...

SP *No?*

MB ... no, no...

SP *No toothbrush?*

MB ...no, no I can't...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...if they did I can't...I do remember the school [tooth] brushes...in...in the school...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...we would be always made to [inaudible] but I can't remember anything there.

[Unidentified background noise]

SP *Okay. Do you want to let...*

MB That's...that Felix [pseudonym for interviewee's pet].

SP *Yeah shall we let Felix in?*

[Interview paused]

SP *Okay. And did you have an opportunity to receive an education while you were there?*

MB In the laundry? No!

SP *Okay.*

MB I didn't see anybody ever having an...an education.

SP *And were you verbally...were you...did you receive verbal abuse form anyone there or criticism?*

MB Physically yes.

SP *Hmm.*

MB Verbally...by your surname like you know, you say...you know, like they would say, '*Burke, Burke,*' and things like that and when they're *thumping* you '*Burke, get on with it, get on with it,*' this kind of thing.

SP *Hmm.*

MB But that was well...that would be it on the whole. I think it was the beatings and the thumpings and so...that's...that is the situation there as far as...if there was something about another girl or something...they might say, '*you mad one!*' Or you know, pull their hair or you know it's...it was...it...some would have nicknames and be called them because of certain reasons...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, so. Just...that's the general outlook.

[Unidentified third party enters the room]

[Irrelevant conversation removed]

[Interview paused]

SP *And...did...this is for both the school and the laundry, were you ever made to feel worthless?*

MB Oh yes, yes you were...as far as the school to start out with, you were meant to...to feel that – i...in fact you weren't *meant* to feel it but you were told it – that all you could ever be good for was...scrubbing floors, in so many words. And the laundry, there was no future for you in the laundry except *in* the laundry. And as far as...while you were in the laundry, you weren't getting out. So that's what you were ever going to get.

SP *Okay.*

MB That was your days...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...unless...you know, unless [as] I say like, if someone was to claim you out but if the...that wasn't possible then you had to get on with it, shall I say...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, the...not to expect too much...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...because...as far as the laundry was concerned once you were in there, you were in there for life.

SP *Yeah. And you never received any visitors from family or anything?*

MB No, no, no. Nobody was told and nobody knew I was there anyway.

SP *When you were in the school did you receive visit...when you were in the school did you receive any visits?*

MB Oh my sister, my s...my eldest sister!

SP *Oh yeah.*

MB Wait now, my eldest sister was over sixteen so she didn't go...

SP *Hmm...*

MB ...to the school. But my e...my eldest sister always came to see me and my younger sister...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and my brothers.

SP *Okay.*

MB *Yeah.*

SP *But then she didn't know that you were in the laundry?*

MB She was...she was over in England...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...she worked in the laundry and then moved over to England and my sister...she couldn't read or write so...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...she didn't know nothing. And then she...when she...when eventually she did come back she got married and you know, so. So, she didn't know, and she didn't...sh...and if she did know there wasn't a lot she could do about it anyway, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...it was just...it was a t...tabooed subject, you didn't talk about it. You didn't want anybody to know about it...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you didn't even want your sister to know about it. You know, my younger sister knew I was in a Magdalene Laundry and I never discussed it with her...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ... you know, I never...we never...it was such a taboo, it was like if you said somebody had spent so many years in prison and when they come out and wouldn't want to discuss it with somebody who doesn't...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...know anything about the inside. It's...it's [the] very the same thing.

SP *Yeah. Did you say your sister worked in a laundry, or...?*

MB My sister?

SP *Your older sister.*

M My older sister?

SP *Yeah.*

M She was...no she never was in the laundry...

SP *Oh, sorry, sorry.*

MB ...no, she came over here to England...

SP *I apologise, yeah.*

MB ...but when she came back to Eng...I never told her about the laundry.

SP *Okay.*

MB I never mentioned to her about the laundry...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...yeah.

SP *And what...who were you doing the laundry for? Do you remember any big contracts for...?*

MB All I know is as I grew up in Galway, as I grew up in Galway, and as I...as...the fact...I used to see the vans, they would come up...those big vans with 'Magdalene Laundry' were written on the outside of the vans, and the basket, weaver baskets with 'Magdalene Laundry' written across them. And every Friday – when I was in the school now I'm talking about...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...every Friday the...the men used to come in and collect the dirty washing and bring in the cleaner washing and that would be every Friday. So, we knew it went on to the Magdalene Laundry. We don't know which one...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...we only thought there was *the* one and that was the one in Galway.

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and, so...no, there was *vans*, we knew there was men that was driving around in those vans...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...because we used to see the vans come in...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...when they come into the laundry and...and fresh baskets go off...go onto them and the baskets from outside that would have to be done would be taken off.

SP *Hmm.*

MB So each...it was like a big factory, each part had...each girl and each member of th...of the girls that were there in the Magdalene Laundry had a part to play...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...in the run of this whole big, big, big factory.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So, you knew that...that bit we *knew*. So, there was men coming in for them...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...but of course the doors would be they locked and when they would b...leave.

SP *Yeah, yeah. Do you remember any...who you did the laundry for? Do you remember that?*

MB Well I...I know the laundry did a lot of schools...for the...for colleges, and for...schools, hospitals...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and even for *local* people...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...even for *local* families you know, that could afford it.

SP *Hmm. And just in relation to the woman that died, what did she die of?*

MB Who, my brother?

SP *No, no, no, the...you said that a lady died?*

MB Oh girl in the...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...Magdalene Laundry...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...yeah! We never found out...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...didn't know...

SP *You just knew...*

MB ...it was just the person that was lying there dying for days...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...and days. And then we...but we knew she was dying...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...it was like...the girls would say, 'ssh!'

SP *Yeah.*

MB You know, weren't all...it...it was like you weren't allowed to talk because...it was over there.

SP *Hmm.*

MB And then...then we were all...b...l...I think what had its effect on me was that the next day when she was lying in the coffin and we were saying the Mass, I guess we...that was every morning, and to know, when we looked around the only ones that was in the chapel was us girls and the nuns.

SP *Okay.*

MB And that...and that was very sad, that was very, very sad.

SP *Yeah.*

MB We don't know where she was buried or what, you know what I mean.

SP *I was going to ask that, yeah.*

MB Yeah, don't know where she was buried or anything like that...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...because that's as far as we knew of...of her...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...the last we heard a thing of her. And you weren't allowed to discuss it anyway either, do you know what I mean, it wasn't...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...something you talked about. You weren't ab...you w...you were so...information and...and talking...o...you weren't allowed any of that...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. You weren't allowed to ask questions...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...or get too friendly.

SP *And how were you...so what was the difference in the way that the Sisters...that the nuns lived?*

MB Lived?

SP *Yeah, in...in relation to you. Was there a difference in the food and the living conditions?*

MB Oh yes, yes they were different because you just see them...the nuns, you knew they got beautiful food because they had their own kitchen, their own girls who would c...who would cook it for them and they were always well fed and looked after. And...and as you say like, you...you just...you didn't think it was not normal because you were *used* to that. When you were brought up in an

Industrial School you were used to that because you seen the food they got. So, it wasn't...it didn't...it's just what you...you would feel that you could have done with some of theirs (*laughs*) if you know what I mean...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...but...or even a little bit *better* than what we were getting, but the extreme was so extreme.

SP *Yeah. And how...so what made a Sis...a nun good or bad?*

MB A nun...what I would describe a good nun as...a n...a nun that was...was a ver[y]...was toler...you know, she would tolerate...she would be...she wouldn't be chastising you so much, she was more *human*. Granted she had to fulfil her duties...and...but she didn't...punch you or she didn't...you know, drag your hair or that foul language they would come out with, '*Gahhh!*' you know, this kind of...no, she would...what I would say [a] decent nun what I describe as a decent nun and there were very few...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...you might get two out of five you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...that were good. But then at the same time when you study it all later on in life you know, they were carrying out what they had to and if they say...if it...got in the way or anything they would probably be pulled away from there and two worser nuns would be brought in...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...do you know what I mean? So...so, you did...you know, they...that's what...how you would only describe them. They wouldn't be doing you any favours but you woul[dn't]...they wouldn't be going out of their way to hurt you...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...is the only way I can describe it.

SP *Okay. And can you tell me anything positive about the...the laundry?*

MB Nothing. No it's...its's...it's a hell of a nightmare.

SP *Yeah. And what was the worst thing? What was the worst thing about the laundry?*

MB The worst thing?

SP *Yeah.*

MB Never being able to get out of it and no hope.

SP *Yeah.*

MB It was...they talked of hell; that was the nearest step to hell, only in hell they said it was fire.

SP *Yeah. Did you have any fears or anxieties?*

MB Oh all the time...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...all the time. You know, you'd have your dreams when you were a child at school and you...one time if you're dreaming that *oh*, when you leave this school you're going to get married to somebody like Mario Lansi [Lanza] or something and have...children didn't come into it strangely enough...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...your dream wasn't to fi...to be with somebody and like...and he was going to *love* you, take care for you for the rest of your life. Well, those dreams wouldn't have been in the Magdalene Laundry because once you knew you were there, you were there, th...so there was no use dreaming. But you'd...you know, you would like I would go back, I would be all the time going back thinking of the time with my mother and my sister and my...my sister that lived in [location removed] and she used to come to see us, and the lovely time I had with my mother, and okay, the few of the girls we went to school with, that we were in school with, the ones we kind of formed a...a bit of...some kind of relationship and the laughter we'd have amongst ourselves. There would be...there would b...there'd be no kind of going forward...there'd be no one...you wouldn't be thi...there was no hope really because it was in your head that you were there, and...and unless your f...your brother comes and he has this good job and he doesn't even know, you know. So...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...y...you...it was kind of something that you learned to accept, that you were going to be there forever.

SP *Yeah. Did you develop any survival techniques?*

MB *(Pause)* I'm not very sure now, in...in...when you say techniques – what description are you trying to...?

SP *Just how you got through the day?*

MB Through the day you just...you just did! You just h...you just did because you knew that...you knew if you didn't, if you just didn't get on and do your work and go along with the other girls you would get an awful beating. And as they say again, it's survival, you didn't want that beating, you didn't want to be traumatised, you didn't want to be going to bed crying at night...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. So it was very...you had *resigned* yourself, that's the word I'm looking for...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...*resigned* yourself. This was your day, this...this was the food you were going to get, and you may as well get on with it, you're here now and that's it the doors are shut – they're locked...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...unless some kind of a miracle. So that was...so you have...it's either that or lie down and die, be beaten and beaten and die. Sometimes if you took a gun t...if you, you know like if you st...studying later on in life...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and sometimes if I was still there...if I were still there and that was the outcome of everything then I would sooner have a gun and shoot me...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...or commit suicide. Because I couldn't...I don['t]...I...I'm too strong for that...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...I mean...I...I...I've always been a bit of a rebel inside me, even in the Industrial School when I ran away once, so...

SP *Oh, you ran away?*

MB *(Laughs)* I w...when I was...but only for...for the day and I had no money and I had to return!
(Laughs)

SP *Ah! How old were you?*

MB Myself and another girl. Oh I was about...probably twelve, between eleven and twelve. And the *beatings* I got for that day! And we were called runaway girls *(laughs)* we got the nickname runaway girls, myself and Leah Donnelly [pseudonym]. But that instinct, you either have it or you haven't. My sister is very, very...docile in comparison to me.

SP *Hmm.*

MB Do you know, I mean...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...she's the kind of person...she's mousy...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...if that's the right word to use!

SP *Yeah.*

MB Where[as] me, I'm fiery...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, and for me to be in a place like the Magdalene Laundry, and...you know, I had to chew on my tongue and chew on my tongue and tell myself that...you know, that I was planning *in my own head* – I couldn't tell anybody else in case there was spies – and in my own head I had to – when I saw that girl dying – I had to get out of there, if I was to *break* out...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...you know. And if I was to get *shot* going out it was better...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...than *living* in it.

SP *Yeah.*

MB You know, it was better to be dead than to be living in that...that kind of a life...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know.

SP *Tell me about...actually when you ran away from...?*

MB Oh, the school! (*Laughs*) There was myself and this girl Leah Adams and...and Leah Donnelly, no...Leah Donnelly and Jacinta Adams, [pseudonym] the three of us, we were kind of pally together, the three of us. And we were talking about running away from the school, and...and the three of us had planned it anyways, together, we were going to run away. We had no money and even the uniform at the school had w...so Leah had an o...an aunt that lived down in Claddagh – Claddagh is Galway – and she had an aunt down there. So she said 'we'll be ok, we'll go down to

my aunt's'. So I said, 'okay then'. Jacinta Adams chickened out so there was just myself and Leah Donnelly and off we went down the next day after dinner, we went down into Claddagh, and we went to Leah's aunt, very nice lady and all like that, and she give us bread and jam and a cup of tea. Of course we couldn't tell her we ran away! (*Laughs*) And then she gave us...God help her, she gave us sixpence each, if I remember...and then when...and she told us, 'go on back home now, go back to the school now,' you know what I mean, 'bye bye!' You know, and g...we didn't tell her we'd run away of course, we couldn't.

SP *Yeah.*

MB And w...we were lost then and we didn't know where we were going to go. We had sixpence, where were we going to go? So we had to go back to the school and by this time we were missing. And they were all...it was summer time I remember because they were out doing the gardens, the children were doing the garden. They had their rakes and everything in their hands. And they were all standing up and jumping and as we come through the gates we seen all these children and the nuns and (*laughs*) they said, 'where,' the nun said, '*where* did you go to, *whaaaaah* did you go to?' And with that, she took us out the back and made examples of us and what they did do was put two big benches out and all the nuns and all the school children around, and they pulled down our knickers and *leathered* us with a leather belt and you couldn't get up. That was to teach *all* of us a lesson...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...if you were ever [to] do it again, you know, if anybody ever was planning on running away, look at this! (*Laughs*)

SP *And did you ever try again?*

MB Did I? Ever tr...well I...you know, it's just...it was...it wasn't that I wouldn't have tried, but at least with the convent you *knew* you were going to get out, that was the difference.

SP *Yeah.*

MB You knew *one day* you'd get out those gates.

SP *Yeah.*

MB And you weren't...the gates were...there was ways of getting out if you really *wanted* to, you know what I mean? Like, there was a front gate, and there's a little side gate and a big gate for the tr...for heavy traffic going through and a side gate and if you *really wanted* to go out you coul...you could because the dormitories wouldn't...they were only locked at nights. But during the day time you had the opportunity to be able to go out. So, there was a difference. In the Magdalene Laundry once that gate shut, that was it, once the gate was locked, that was it. And the dormitories would be locked, and *everything* would be locked, everything was locked behind you when you go in...if you opened...you came out, so you were total...in prison, you know. So that was the...that was the difference, you knew you'd come out of the school but you knew you wouldn't be out of the laundry...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...if you were unfortunate [enough] to be put in there.

SP *That's...that's fine. So, going back to leaving the laundry, how did you find being outside of the laundry? You know, coping with life outside?*

MB Yeah. Well, when...I could never really adjust because I don't know what I was looking for.

SP *Hmm.*

MB Trying to cope...I was...it wasn't that I was...never frightened of hard work because I was used to hard work. The nun...when I came...you know, when I was up in the convent after coming from the laundry, I got a...the nun got me a job in Athenry and I went there, and everything was okay when I

was working for a family. But then, I felt...I felt that I wanted to leave there and like...I all the time I wanted to leave, wanted to leave but I could never adjust too long in the one place all the time. So I got a train up to Athenry...not up to Athenry, up to Dublin, and I still had nowhere to go, I still had nowhere to go but it was like a sense of freedom, a sense of freedom...I...I can't describe it because I just felt so alone and there was nobody there for me, there was nobody to call out for me, there was nobody for me to fall back on, there's nobody for me to when I'm unhappy or anything like that to go home to. So, I got on the train to Dublin and what I was looking for was probably *more work*, I was looking for more work.

SP *Hmm.*

MB I wanted...I don't know why I couldn't settle too long in a job. So, I knew there was a place up in Dublin that used to...they used to have an agency in O'Connell Street and she used to do all domestic agency, and I thought she might be able to get me a job. If...I didn't know which part, all I knew is it was on O'Connell Street. Now I was never in Dublin before, but then I thought to myself, when I got into Dublin, 'what do I do next? What do I do next now, you know, I'm all alone'. So I thought to myself, 'there's...there'll be a hospital here. I might get a job in a hospital'. So, I went up to the Mater Hospital. I found my way up to the Master...Mater Hospital, as I said before I was never in Dublin...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and I found myself up by the hospital and I went into the main entrance, it was all steps. And as I went in there I said I was looking for work. So, he sh...whoever at the reception, one of them said to me, 'well what kind of work?' I said, 'I want to work as a ward's maid on the wards'. So, she said to me to go around, go out, go down the steps again, turn right again, there was a door there and you go in there, and what...which I did. And there again it was a nun, so she asked me my details, where I grew up and all the rest, so I told her. I never told her anything about the Magdalene Laundry now, you know. So anyway, she took me on board and I got a job working on...on the wards. There were a whole lot of other girls. And the one thing she said to me again was, 'as...as

you're not used to money,' she'd say to me, 'I'll look after your money,' see, always with the nuns, 'I'll look after your money,' so I couldn't say yes and I couldn't say no.

SP *Yeah.*

MB I was still [with] that fear of nuns inside me. So I said, 'okay Sister'. And so I was there...I d...I don't know how long I was there, wasn't very long, when I got this feeling of wanting to move on again. I alw...I always have this feeling...I was never frightened of work, work wasn't my problem. I never knew what it was but I just wanted...I didn't want to be there anymore. I felt controlled, there...there was something about it that I always felt controlled. And so when I...when I told the nun that I was leaving...granted I didn't have another job to go [to] either, but I wasn't going to tell her that either! So, when...when I...the day...the evening that I was leaving, I had to call to her to ask me fo...ask her for my wages, you see. Like that in the story, she knew this and she was prepared for it and she had a ca...she had a cab waiting for me to take me to a place in Stillorgan [St Philomena's Convent, Stillorgan]. And Stillorgan is another place run by nuns. And these were children in there that would have been in there, like say, they wouldn't have been babies, they would have been something like from twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen that were put in there by the courts because they were unruly...what you might class as unruly children w...when living with their parents...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...or something like that, and...and they'd end up here. But the regime in there was still very harsh as well too. But because I was supposed to have been sixteen, the nuns said to me there, 'you...you're sixteen, you'll have to work for your keep, you'll have to go out and work for your keep'. So anyway, so she got me a job with this Mr and Mrs Farrelly [pseudonym] and I used to work there during the daytime and come back at night. And when I got my wages of a Friday, I used to...I used have to hand over my wages to her, you know because that was for my keep!
(Laughs)

SP *Jesus!*

MB So, it was a kind of...then I got out of that situation and I got a job in Limerick working in a hotel and for the first time I liked it because they were *ordinary people*. They were people that were running a hotel. They weren't nuns, they weren't priests and you just got on with your work. And...and then of course I saw a lot of magazines, *Women's Own* magazines and things like that, and they used to be advertising there for girls to join the army and things like that, and I did, I joined the army!

SP *Really? Wow.*

MB *(Laughs)* And that's how I came over here to England. And I joined the army from Limerick in the h...in the Royal George Hotel, the old one because there's a new one, you know, rebuilt that same...after that Christ...first...but that would have been my...one, two...third Christmas out of the school.

SP *Hmm.*

MB And...and after Christmas then I was going up to Belfast, because I had to go there to Belfast to get a medical examination and tested and everything else, and took me...they took me on board. I was only seventeen and to join the British Army you had to be seventeen and a half.

SP *Okay.*

MB So...I...they had taken me on but they took me on, on those grounds because every so...they don't...they do it in groups and by the time the nes...the next group would be...would come up I would be already gone seventeen and a half, you know what I mean. So, they took me on at that stage. And I got on the boat with the rest of the girls that were joining up with me; they were mostly from the North, I was the only one from the South! *(Laughs)* Do you believe it? And we were taken over and...and we did our training in Guildford and then after...I was a stewardess, training to be a stewardess. I did ar...tr...army training in Guildford for six weeks and then I was post...posted up to Woolwich...was with the Artillery. That's where I met my husband, you know. So...

SP *Why do you think that you applied for an army job?*

MB I don't know. I had actually wanted to go to America.

SP *Hmm.*

MB I would have loved to have gone to America, but I didn't have the funds, I didn't have no money...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...I didn't have anybody to get me there...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. But, and I...then I second...I settled for England second but there again I had no money or nothing and...i...it was just...myself and this other girl...we...that worked in the hotel with me, she chickened out in the last minute – Fiona Mullally [pseudonym] – she chickened out in the last minute so I went ahead and got on with it and got my train up to Northern Ireland, and got the boat over with the rest of the girls and I suppose I could say it was...I was away from Ireland. It was a sense of freedom. I left...I left everything behind me. I didn't want to remember Ireland at all. It's as if I left my dirty linen there, you know. And...and I was in...in a place where people respected you as a person, if you know what I mean. You were a person regardless of your background. You were given your wages...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...you were treated the same as one another, and you had your sense of freedom at the same time when you were off duty, you were off duty, you know. So, it was all a new beginning for me and...and I loved it.

SP *Yeah.*

MB I loved it. The first time I was kind of free.

SP *Okay, yeah.*

MB I was free...I was free...I was free from the religious side of life.

SP *Yeah.*

MB I had my commitments in the army...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...but then, I signed on to do that...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...to go in there. That w...that was the difference I wasn't pushed into it.

SP *Yeah. No, exactly yeah.*

MB You know, that was...that was my choice...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and the choice of the army was because I didn't have any funds. I...I didn't mind...I would have liked to have gone into the American Army actually! *(Laughs)*

SP *Yeah. I just wondered if your choice was because there was...it was the regimented-ness of...did that play any part or even the fact that it was a live-in, you would have got your accommodation I presume from...did that play any part in your choice?*

MB It probably did and probably didn't because you knew at the end of the day with any...anybody away from the religious order, regardless of anything, that you would get paid to do your work and...and secondly, I...I would have accommodation, I would have my food, I would be able to mix with people, I would be able to...talk with people, have a laugh like other people, so...

SP *Yeah.*

MB And as I didn't have anybody over here as well, that played a big part in it. But having done that I did not know what to expect, but I knew if I didn't like it I probably would get out of it.

SP *Yeah.*

MB But I didn't feel the same...the same...entrapment that I always felt in Ireland.

SP *Yeah.*

MB That's why I could never settle in any one job...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...it...it was like as if I wanted to be free all the time, get away...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. Because wherever you went it was always nuns...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...or something there, you know.

SP *And what did you have to do, what was your role in the army?*

MB I was trained to be a stewardess.

SP *Yeah.*

MB I used to wait...wait on...on officers on th...at the table, waitressing kind of work. And then I used to be in the RAF, planes sometimes you'd have to wait on the soldiers when they're flying them in and out in the air...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...you know. So...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...that was more or less waiting on t...like a waitress really...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...but you still had the same, regimental routines as...e...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...every soldier had its own job.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So, you wore a uniform and everything...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, and you were the same as a soldier. They...you'd...they'd...you carried out your duties but that was your...your...what do you call...that was your job...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. So I mean they always gave you a test but if you wanted to further your...if you wanted to get better or...or try...try something better you had the...the opportunity to do so if you were long enough in it like you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MB They would have trained you...

SP *And...hmm...*

MB ...you were capable of doing it, you know.

SP *And I also found really interesting what you were telling me earlier on about how you changed your name.*

MB Oh yeah! (*Laughs*)

SP *Could you tell more about that for the tape?*

MB Yeah, when I when I le...I hated who I was in Ireland. Ireland to me was a very damp, cold, *miserable, miserable* part of my life. More so from the Magdalene Laundries point of view. I felt like a deep depression there, and I have suffered with depression all my life.

SP *Hmm.*

MB And...and so therefore, it always...I wanted...it was like it was washing it away from me; Ireland, the Magdalene Laundry. Not so much the school mind you, not so much...but it was the Magdalene Laundry that had that...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...*weighed down, dull* effect on me. And so, I wanted to wa...it was like...like Margaret Burke belonged in Ireland, not me.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So I changed my...my...my first name...I changed my first name...was Ame...Mar...my name...first name was Margaret and...and I changed it to Amelia [pseudonym] only because there was a song out at the time and I liked the song so I started calling myself Amelia. And I...it's not illegal, it's not illegal because don't forget I was in a new land...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and people didn't know me.

SP *Yeah.*

MB In legal documents, I'd have to put my right name. But as far as outside, I could tell people what I...who I was, so I used to tell them I was Am...Am...Amelia my...my name was Amelia. So, Jones [pseudonym] was my married name...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...so, that's where the...the two names came together.

SP *Very good, so you said there...actually one of the questions I was going to ask is how...how did it affect you psychologically? So you suffered depression did you say?*

MB Oh, I...I...I have suffered depression for *years!* For years and years! In fact when I was working in Ireland for the Farrellys, by this time I was very, very low in myself. I didn't know...I didn't know it was depression. I knew something was wrong...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and I was frightened of being talked into the Magdalene Laundry again. But I knew something was wrong, I couldn't enjoy...I couldn't...it's like getting up in the morning and seeing the sun coming out; it gives you an inspiration, it gives you feel good...something good about yourself. But this feeling I had for a long time was a feeling of...emptiness. It was a feeling of...dull, heaviness, there was no...no sunshine. It was...it was...what I was to learn later on was depression. And when I was working for the Farrellys, they were very nice people, they were very nice people. Mrs Farrelly, I...she would often make me a cup of tea, which she...which she would make when she was making one for herself, which was very raw to me, b...very humbling because, you always made the tea for someone else. So, when Mrs Farrelly said, 'I'm going to have a cup of tea, will you have a cup of tea?' you know, and make it especially there for me. To me, that often brought tears to my eyes because I wasn't used to that kind of treatment...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. So, and...and she'd say t...she had one little boy called Niall [pseudonym] and Niall would have gone to school and her husband gone to work and...and...and I think she was expecting at the time, but, she used to have medicine in the kitchen, she had this unit in the kitchen, this cabinet...cupboard or whatever you call it, and up on the top there was all her medication and stuff like that, and this day anyways...and I couldn't...I couldn't...I couldn't talk about it, I didn't know what was wrong with me. And that was the strangest bit, I thought I was going around the bend, do you know, I really thought I was going around the bend and I was

frightened to say anything in case I was put into the Magdalene Laundry. So what I did do was took a lot of tablets.

SP *Okay.*

MB I just wanted to die. I had given up by now anyways, I had given up and I was...I must have collapsed in the Farrellys' house anyways. I remember...I remember Mrs Far...Mrs Farrelly take me upstairs to their bedroom and lying on the bed and bringing me up a cup of tea and I remember being sick, and I remember then she took me back to where I was living. And...herself and her husband – she must have called her hus...her husband – and her husband, he had the...this car and I remember then being taken to a hospital and I think it was in Bray. And for the life of me I couldn't tell anybody what I had done because all the time the Magdalene Laundry was in my head, if I said anything like, because I had taken these tablets...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...I couldn't explain *why* I took them; I just felt I wanted to *die*. That's the only way I can...I didn't want to go on living I wanted to just *lie down* and never get up. It was...and...while I was there anyways, I remember a doctor examined me and he's saying to me things like, 'open your eyes' and...and like that. And...and then the only thing they found wrong with me was in my urine. And for the first...the first time they gave me Mispotsit, I'll always remember that. That was a medication for a bladder infection or...you know, whatever the tablet[s] had done to me, you know. But I still couldn't tell anybody who...what I had done. So anyways, the doctor was kind of anxious about me and he asked me who...he wanted to speak to my parents, or my guardian or whatever. And...and I said I didn't have parents and...and he said who...I said they're like the nuns that I grew up in Galway with, in the school. So, the...the two nuns came up to see me, Sr Ignatius and some other nun and for the first time they found out my age. That's when they found...and they were very sorry. They...they came up to see me in Dublin and I remember if...it was Christmas time, just before Christmas I think, I...and I remember they said to me...they were very sorry that I was out of the school before my time. And in a way I think they tried to make it up to me and they said that when I come out from hospital and I get better, they'd come down. And so, when I was finished in

the hospital, I went back to where I was in Stillorgan and – I was brought back there by the ambulance anyways you know – so while I was there anyways...I remember the Christmas going through and then after Christmas I remember going down to say goodbye to Mrs Farrelly and God help her, she gave me some money, do you know, God love her. I cou...still couldn't tell her what I did...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...you know. And so, I left there and I bought myself a new cardigan (*laughs*) for the first time, something new, of course with the money she gave me. And the next thing I was down...I was landed down in...down in Salthill, Galway with the nuns again there, you know, so...that was...you know, that was the depr...the time of my depression. And somehow it lifted when I was working in the...in the hotel in Limerick.

SP *Hmm.*

MB And then I was happy in the army and then I got married while I was in the army, and then I think it was through my pregnancy I got the depression come back *very, very, very, very* bad.

SP *Hmm.*

MB And it never...it never really left me so I'm still on anti-depressants...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...and sometimes it used to...when my children were young it was very bad. But I had ECT...

SP *Wow.*

MB ...a very heavy treatment. I used to have injections and everything. I have the paperwork with my medical forms there. And...and sleeping tablets, I've been on sleeping tablets for *years*. I'm still on sleeping tablets.

SP *Hmm.*

MB I think it was...I think it's...I think it's...it's stumped [stemmed] *really, really* from losing my mother and going in and...and then kind of coming out of the Industrial School expecting life to be good for you.

SP *Hmm.*

MB Okay, you were so used to the hardship of the school, at least you had some hope left. And when you went out of there you were st...telling yourself, oh you're going to live this kind of a life, you're going to have...you know, all the nice things in life that comes with it, your dreams, your ads...and then to end up in the Magdalene Laundry was a big, closed door on me. It was so bad, so *bad, bitter hard*. It's...it's so hard to describe it. And I think I had a lot of backache from...with...standing.

SP *Hmm.*

MB I got so much backache and...I'd years...I couldn't...could not...I found it very difficult to iron, iron my children's clothes and things like that because you're standing up and as you're...you're bending down aren't you, to iron?

SP *Exactly. Yeah.*

MB And...and I always felt from those...from that...from the time I was in the Magdalene Laundry – don't forget I was a very tall girl...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and you would spend the best part of the day...and you're scrubbing and scrubbing and scrubbing and I think that's where it really stemmed from.

SP *Yeah.*

MB And the depression of not being able to communicate, talk and...and...and discuss, the silence and everything you thought about had to be always inside, *inside, inside*. So...so, there was no opening up.

SP *Hmm.*

MB So, I...I think the depression stumped [stemmed] from then really, it really got a hold of me. Not realising...those days people didn't talk about depression.

SP *Hmm.*

MB It was kind of like...if you...if you tried to explain to somebody how you felt you'd probably end up in the asylum...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. That was...so you couldn't talk about it...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...so you had to suffer.

SP *Yeah.*

MB And you'd get bouts of it and then it would lighten up. And I think sometimes when something happens to you and some kind of stress or something happens to you and you're not able to handle it, anxiety takes over and later on the depression lifts its head...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and then you're in *limbo* for a long time.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So, sometimes you just want to sleep the whole day. I haven't got it now for a long time but I'm still on the tablets for it, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So, now I can talk about it...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and...and my doctor knows about it like, you know.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So, he doesn't know about my...much of my background but he knows a little bit.

SP *Okay.*

MB So, the Magdalene Laundry did play an aw...play an awful hard, knock on me.

SP *Yeah. And can you also say how it affected...or how everything affected your education like, what you were telling me about the reading?*

MB Yeah. And you see not having much of an education in...in the children's school, you know because I was...turned out to be...I mean I was always brought up to be able to be more or less...education wasn't important. So, I had to...tune myself into...being a domestic, somebody's servant or someone like that. So, in those days women mostly...women when they'd leave school and they had a job or whatever, then they'd gradually get married. And this is where my daydreaming would take over like, you'd get married to the most handsomest man in the world and you'd be very happy and *oh*, everything would be rosy, and you'd go on from there. I never dreamt...I never had anything about children in it mind you, and...s...so what was the question you asked me there?

SP *Oh your education?*

MB Oh, my educa...education, yeah. But as time went by, because my education wasn't gr...great, I was only limited so I could only do a stewardess job in the army. But okay, I got by on that. But then I...when...my husband was [a] very, very intelligent man. And sometimes when I had to work I'd be so ashamed of not knowing things, words, especially arithmetic and things like that. And when I'd go to work and I'd come back from work and...and...and you'd get your pay packet and you'd get a little slip in it and talk about your...you know, your tax and everything like that and deductions and all like that, and you couldn't understand it, you couldn't understand yo...you know and you wouldn't know if you were being cheated or not. So, I remember I used...I used to always ask my daughter, she was very clever as well. I wouldn't ask my husband because he'd know how much I was earning! (*Laughs*) But I'd ask my daughter and I would say Aisling, [pseudonym] 'would you look at that and see if that's in order,' because she...I knew she was clever as [inaudible] and Aisling used to do it for me but never understood it. And...and then as I say like, I used to see like, say...say see magazines and things like that in your do...you're...maybe you're in a doctor's surgery or waiting room or something and you see magazines, well you'd love to know the story behind it. You'd know...you'd know what's in the picture and then you'd pick up words and words that you'd know, you know, simple words that you'd know and then you...and I don't know what it was, it was my husband really, he was a man who always had the papers and he brought the papers *every single day*. And as we were living in Germany for quite...quite a lot of my married

life...there wouldn't have...there would have been televisions but they'd be in German. And so he'd always have the papers and he'd bring them home. And when the children would be in bed at night, I'd be going through the papers and any little thing I'd be reading, I'd be screwing in to read it...read it. And I think that was...and I think my...my husband, I don't know if he ever...he's dead now so can never ask him...I think...I think he suspected there was something but he never said anything. I think he understood but it's...he kept it quiet. Sometimes, like when it came to figures or things like that he'd always say, 'do it this way'. He was very gentle mind you with it, so I have got to be grateful to him for...for that. But the papers, like, the papers and things like that. That was the start...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...of being really able to...and then going to the magazines and then being able to read...you...you felt you were coming into another world, you're beginning to open up. You're beginning to see the broader aspect in life, where before you were just you, you know, and...and...and...and your surroundings and you didn't know what went on there because you couldn't read about it, but being about to read about it then you looked at life in a different light. And so, I got...once I was able to get over reading the magazines, my first book was *The Thorn Birds*, I bought *The Thorn Birds*, and I *couldn't* for the life of me leave it down.

SP *Hmm.*

MB And that's what got me into reading. Oh it's not perfect...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...but anything I don't know like, any word or anything, I look in the dictionary. And I cannot...every night I read in bed, every single night I read in bed. I have to read before I go to sleep.

SP *Yeah.*

MB If I don't...if I don't read it's like going to bed hungry (*laughs*) I don't know if that...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...that describes anything. It's just like...like something that you have to have, it...it's like...finishes you off like, the day like, you're fulfilled.

SP *Yeah.*

MB Your f...it's like a fulfilment really...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. So, in a way I taught myself and...basically my husband was an intelligent man, maybe if he wasn't...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...who knows?

SP *Yeah.*

MB You know, I wouldn't...I wouldn't have got into the reading, although I wanted to. And another thing where...what...in the...in the school, in the Industrial School was, I'll always remember, a Friday morning when bigger girls had to get up to do the laundr...not the laundr...the...the baths, we'd have to...to light the fire – they'd have the big boiler going so there was hot water for the bath for Friday – and we had...in the big kitchen there was two tables, a bit bigger than this one now, and they used to cover them with the newspapers. Now the nuns used to have their newspapers upstairs in their rectory room, and when they were finished then they would put them...use them on the table as tablecloths. I remember, when...while you're waiting, like when you get up say I think it was around five o'clock on a Friday morning to get the fire going and so when the fire was going

you're just killing time and I'm looking at all those little cartoons, *Rupert the Bear* and all this kind of things (*laughs*) but never knowing what is being said, so it holds your interest. And I think...and...and you're looking around the papers and you'd wonder what Rupert is doing, you know and y...you're trying to put the...the letters together and form a word like, you know. So, I think that was it really...

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MB ...things like that.

SP *Yeah. And how do you feel towards religion or the Catholic Church now?*

MB I feel very...I...I...I feel very, very hurt by the Catholic Church, in the *whole* of it, the *whole* of it. I felt when I left Ireland that was a side I wanted to leave. I didn't go to Mass, I didn't get married in a Catholic church, I got married in a registry office, I didn't have my children christened because I didn't *believe* in that, because what I belev...believed in there was a...some kind of a God up there...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...some kind of a God there was, but not the kind of a God that had its disciples doing what they did in Ireland, you know, if...that's the only way. So, in that case...the God they were telling us and he was the good God, and if he was that kind of a God then I turned against him. Only...only...you know, I g...I...I couldn't get married...I couldn't associate...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...I don't go to church, if I see a priest I walk on the other side of the road, you know, if I see a nun... I know now that...like looking back now, and all of this has come out, the whole lot, the...the Industrial Schools and all this has opened up and you study it from an older person...from my perspective, looking back on my childhood and all, and I find...I feel that...there is a maker up

there, there is a maker, and I don't...I don't see anywhere that the Catholic Church belongs to that maker, because to me now, it was an institution for making money, and...and for me, it...when I study it now I see...it was a *status*, a status in life. Whether their hearts were in it or not they would always be fed and clothed and...and money coming in...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...each week or whatever, but for some unknown reason we thought they were on the poor level, same level as us, they were trying to help us. But that wasn't so. So, when you look at Rome and you look at...you know here you see priests and they have cars, and houses and the Bishop of Galway living next door to you and the big palace he lives in. It can't be the same God as the one up...upstairs...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...you know, that's the way I look at it. So yeah, I went *completely* against it, I didn't want no more to do with it...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. So, I couldn't even...you know, as I say I didn't christen my children...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and I said to myself, my children will take their own paths in life...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, so I didn't.

SP *Do you think that...do you see yourself as rebellious now or how do you feel towards authority figures?*

MB Authority is good in one sense but the authority in Ireland as I grew up in...everybody has to have a law in a country or a place would go apart. So, the law plays a part in authority. The authority I had when I was growing up as a child was, 'don't do as I do, do as you're...' – what's the expression? – 'do as you're told...don't do as I do, do as I say'...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and I'd say that was what was in Ireland. And...so, that was the authority...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and I...I had no respect for it. I'd have respect for it in some ways because you have to have a law...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and...but on the most of it no, no respect for it.

SP *And do you think that who you are today is different to the person you were when you were in the Magdalene Laundry?*

MB *Oh yes, I am a different person, but I also have a lot of old wounds. The wounds that stemmed from the Magdalene Laundry and will never, never really go away. You have to learn to move on with them, and most, and most important, I will go to my grave knowing that they were exposed. That is the most important bit to me.*

SP *Uh huh.*

MB I can never really forgive as far as the Magdalene Laundry...I can never forgive whoever...whoever started it for what it did to those girls, because when I look back I think of the ones that went before us. Don't forget those laundries have been going a long...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...long, long time and I know more about the laundry now than what I did in those days. I just saw what just happened to me, but there's a bigger scale. There's a much bigger, bigger scale and then you see...you think of the ones, the poor misfortunate women that went to their graves, never seeing their families again, never getting out to have a family, meeting somebody, having a family what an ordinary person expects in life, what they were *born* to have.

SP *Yeah.*

MB They weren't *born* to be locked away and shamed away and they go to their graves.

SP *Yeah. Do...hmm.*

MB They were the silent people. So, I think that they're the ones that I feel very, very sorry that...I...I can still say that I seen justice being done...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, you'll never wipe it away, you can never wipe it away, that...it will always be in our minds. And...but, we were able to *expose*...we weren't able to talk in those days...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...very rare...and if you could talk about it you kept it inside...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...because it doesn't matter *who* you talk to about it in...in Ireland about the Magdalene Lau...I mean they might think you...that you'd gone loony that you were...you know, you were talking...no...because nobody expected this kind of thing from *religion*...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, i...i...it was...they would think in...in Ireland now they'd say, 'oh shut that one up, the...she is...it's devil talk!'

SP *Hmm.*

MB Oh they'd have nothing to do with you, you know, or you know, you were kind of ca...cast aside. So, you couldn't talk about these things and even now I couldn't talk to my neighbour, anybody about it...it – it...they'd never understand!

SP *Yeah.*

MB They'd never understand, they wouldn't know where to begin or maybe I read it out of a book, maybe I wrote it out of a book and I'm talking [about] it as *my* life experience, which it isn't.

SP *Yeah. And do you...did you experience shame or stigma...*

MB *Oh...*

SP *...in relation to...?*

MB ...oh it was shame, shame because I felt ashamed...it was the stigma from when we were growing up was just...being in there alone was a stigma on its own, it was *shameful*, and...so therefore you...you...you...even my sister up to this day I've never sat down and spoke to her [about] what

went on there. She just *knew* I was in there, but I couldn't even tell her, you know, it's...it's like something holds you back all the time.

SP *Hmm, yeah.*

MB You know it's like something...it's like most of us kids when...you're over here and you're talking to your children and children say to you...and of course children stop asking you questions anymore because you already told them, 'oh mum and dad died, whatever, whatever,' and we brought them...normally, and that...that seems simple enough, you know what I mean...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...it seems okay, there's nothing wrong with that, and that can't be helped but it was an awful lot more painful *burden* inside all of us...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...that you couldn't just describe it. And I think it has something to do with...that you don't want to pass your hurt, your pain onto your children to know that your children...to know that your children would feel the pain.

SP *Hmm.*

MB So, you don't want to pass it on...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and there was one...one time, my...my son Greg [pseudonym] – when it came to the Redress Board, I still hadn't told any of my children anything – but I had asked my daughter did she want to do something with her life, like...because in the Redress Board...in the...for the Industrial Schools they were saying like that a member of your family if...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...they want to go to s...college or something like that...

SP *Yeah, the Education Fund.*

MB Yeah, and so I said to my daughter one day I said to her, 'Aisling,' I said, it...it was...I had to be careful how I handled it because I hadn't let her into what went on there, and I said to her, 'if...if, what would you...if...I know you can't go to work because you have a child and all that but, if you were to...w...what would you like to do? Would you like to go to college?' This was the way I was kind of breaking it in gently...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and I said to her...and she said...she said to me, 'why?' She kept asking because she's very nosy, Aisling. And I said, 'oh,' I said, 'do you remember that school I went to when I was a child? Oh, because we didn't have much of an education they're giving us a bit of compensation,' you know, not going into the nitty-gritties.

SP *Yeah.*

MB And so she said to me, '*how much are you going to get?*' you know what I mean, and I said, 'no, no,' I said, 'I haven't got it yet, but...' I said, 'they're willing to help if any of my children...m...or any of our children want to further *their* education in some way they were trying to help *them* where they let *us* down'. And...and she said to me 'well I've always wanted to do a driving course'. So...and then she said to me would I...I said, 'do you want me to...do you want me to put in for a claim for you to do a driving...?' So the forms have to be filled in anyways...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and got it off anyways. So, that was the first bridge that...the doors were starting to open. But as far as anything else, I let her use her own imagination. But my s...but my son that died, he...afterwards, sometime afterwards, when he used to visit me, and we'd sit down and we could talk about anything and...and I told him about my past, some of it...it was always in bits, always in little bits. And...my son was kind of...you know, 'no big deal, no big deal,' you know he took...he took life as it was. He could mix with people he could...he knew that life was full of all different kinds and all different classes of people, there was the poor, the rich any...anything. And so therefore, he...you know...he just listened and listened and listened. And so, I knew then I got it into his head without really telling him the really bad parts...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...I didn't want to tell him the real bad parts. But I wanted him to see that life wasn't a bed of roses, that no matter what you do in life you have to work very hard for it, whatever you achieve in life you have to work very hard for it. And there's no...but there's no sugar daddy out there to give it to you, you know, I was trying to put him over...that sense. My s...my e...my son Greg, anyways, he...he...he was living with...he's still living with his girlfriend, for years, and when he seen the Magdalene Laundry on the television – the film, the old film, not the recent one – and he rang...I was in bed reading and he rang me and he said, 'mum,' he says, 'I seen this thing in Ireland,' he said, you know, he said, 'myself and Paula [pseudonym],' and he said, 'oh,' he said, 'oh, oh' he said, 'it was *awful*,' he said, 'I couldn't believe it'. And I said 'yes Greg, that was the way it was,' and he said, sh...you know, he couldn't believe it, and I said, 'yes,' I said, 'that's the way it was'. And he says, 'why didn't you tell us, why didn't you tell us? We...we were always moaning about *our* lives, you know, but when you saw that'. And I said, 'I didn't tell you because it was a very black...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...patch in my life that I couldn't even tell a stranger, so *how* could I open up to my children? I didn't want to put my hurt on you'. And he...I could feel his tears coming down and as his tears were coming down, my tears were coming down, but I didn't want him to know I was crying, you know? And...at the end it t...and I...I didn't go...I never got back to him, I never got back, I s...I'm still kind

of scared of the subject. There's something...that won't let it go out of me. It's like...I know he knows that he saw a sample of it on the television and he's come to me with it. So, I've o....I've opened the door a *tiny* bit and let his imagination do the rest...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...I don't want to hurt him anymore...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...or hurt anyone through that.

SP *Did you...sorry, did you tell your husband...did you tell your husband about it?*

MB No, I never got...my husband is dead about maybe 20 years now...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and I never...it wasn't a very happy marriage, it wasn't a very happy marriage, and I never...I think he understood something...but I never...I just told him about what I told my children...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...so I never...but I remember...it was strange because I remember when I came up to [location removed] first and I was working in *McVities*, in the biscuit factory down in [location removed]. I remember meeting this young Irish boy and he was around the same age as myself, I'm going back now when I was nearly...not quite in my earl...middle thirties, and I remember we formed a very good friendship, when I say a good friendship, he was like a brother and I was...if he had no money he'd ask me for it, and if I had...if I didn't have any money he'd...you know, he'd give it to me. I...he was from Northern Ireland, he was from Northern Ireland and he had a room somewhere down in [location of *McVities* factory], and he said to me one day, you know, he was...he was very

bli[nd]...his eye sight was very bad, but he was also very vain. And if we were in the pub having a drink together he'd say to me, 'which is the lad[ies], which is the gents?' You know, in case he went in because he wouldn't have on his glasses.

SP *(Laughs).*

MB But we were very good friends. We were like brother and sister and we kind of looked out for one another, because when I came up to Christmas...I...I came up to [location removed] I was after getting away from my marriage, I was very, very vulnerable, I was very...you know. And I remember anyways then...suddenly he...he went...I don't know what happened we...we didn't see one another again for a long time, we weren't boyfriend and girlfriend...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...but when we'd bump into one another we'd often go and have a drink or something like that. And...and when I look back on my life I often wondered what happened to him? I used to wonder whatever...because he was a very decent man, you know, that he stood out in my life, there wasn't many men I could say that about, but he was a very decent man. And one day then, I used to just sometimes say to myself, 'I wonder where did Mick [pseudonym] go to? I wonder where...I would love to meet up with him now,' because you know, I was living in a room then at the time and he was living in a room with his brother and his brother was going to university and he was working on the building site and he was helping see his brother off to work, like you know. And then one day I was only after coming from a meeting in...down in Camden and I was standing down the Br...down at the Broadway, down there and I was talking away to this woman. It was Saturday, in the afternoon, and I could see this man standing behind me and...and I...I don't know he wasn't...didn't seem to be moving on, but I was yapping away this...to this woman now, the two of us, yap, yap and yap but I kept seeing this man and he was *smiling* at me, he was *smiling* at me. *And I thought to myself...*and then anyways when we split up anyways and the woman went her way and I was walking up there and he said '*hello Amelia Jones,*' and wasn't it Mick! And I said 'Mick!' I canno...it's like...I couldn't explain it because I had built such a relationship with him.

SP *Hmm.*

MB It wasn't an intimacy...

SP *No.*

MB ...relationship, but such a good friend he was. And I said, 'you know Mick, for years I've wondered what happened to you'. And then he said to me, he said...and I said, 'how did you know it was me?' And he said...he said, 'when I heard you talking, I heard you talking to th...that woman and I knew right away that was your voice and I kept looking'. But I said, 'I couldn't recognise you Mick'. And...and then...then we sat down and this was now before...the Redress Board was on board but we hadn't got...you know, compensation or anything yet for it. And I said, 'Mick, you don't know *how many* times I longed to see you, just to talk...just to be a friend like the way we used to be,' and he never to...he said to me...I s...I told him then, I let him in about the Industrial Schools...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and I said, you know, 'I don't know if you've been reading your papers, but,' I said, 'like, this is...I never told you Mick,' I said, 'but,' I said, 'you knew I grew up in an orphanage anyways,' I said, 'but,' I said, 'I never told you'. And he said, 'you know, Amelia,' he said, 'I *always knew*'. And I said, 'how did you always know?' 'I always knew there was *something*,' he said. And he never got around to telling me what that something was. And he said to me, 'I don't know what it was but,' he said, 'somehow I always knew'. Whatever it was I never...but since now, he's s...I think he must have been living with somebody or maybe has a wife but he never told me. And I know he's living up in [location removed] and every Christmas he sends me...and Easter, he sends me a beautiful card, 'I'm always thinking of you'.

SP *Aw.*

MB And he...his *handwriting is magnificent*. So, I have no way of communicating with him, you know, I know he's up at...so that's what makes me think he's with somebody and he doesn't want to hurt that somebody.

SP *Yeah.*

MB But he knows where I'm living because he sends my...he sends me the cards at Christmas...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and...and beautiful, and beau...and he has beautiful handwriting. But he said to me, whatever...I don't know *how* it was or what, he said to me, and I said, 'how did you know?' It was something...probably something in *me* that I couldn't see.

SP *Yeah. Actually speaking of friendships, can you form friendships? Do you...can you trust easily or...?*

MB No. No, no. I couldn't...you see, trust go...after...when you've been hurt so many times trust goes. I don't think I could trust anybody. Not...no, I couldn't say I trust anybody no, the trust goes.

SP *Hmm. And in forming relationships with other men, like, did you find that difficult or...?*

MB I would...I would find it difficult, I would find it very hard. I've learned to hold back, I've learned a long time ago to hold back, not to give your whole love or your whole person because along the way you're going to get hurt. So, I learned that a long, long time ago. I learned that when my marriage came to an end, and...to keep that little bit to myself. A woman told me that a long time ago, do that...

SP *That's good to know.*

MB ...because it'll save the depth of the fall you know, just hold a little bit back, don't give all.

SP *Okay. And was...did you find being a mother, did you find...how did you find being a mother?*

MB Yeah, I didn't want to be a mother because I had...before I was married I had my s...my two children with...I had the two of them, but same father, same relationship...

SP *Yeah. Just it was before marriage.*

MB ...just trying to...I had Oliver [pseudonym] first...yeah, I think I was expecting Aisling, that's right. And when...when I was expecting my first child...my child, my husband was most of the time abroad in the army, and we weren't married at the time, and I used to go to work, I worked in Kensington High Street, and I used to take the lifts going up and down, there used to be ropes in those days (*laughs*) I worked in *Derry and Tom's*, that was a big store then, and...and when I get...started getting a bit bigger and then they sent me over to the staff lift, because they...the customs lift, we used to press a button. But s I got bigger they put me over to the staff lift, which pulled the ropes going up, going down (*laughs*) was on each floor, you know. Anyway...what was it, your question, you asked me?

SP *Being a mother.*

M Being a mother, yeah. So, I was expecting Oliver and I didn't really want him because...beca[use] I felt this was part of Ireland, babies, laundry, and all the rest and being *unwed*, that was...so, I got on...I pr...every night I was coming home from Kensington High Street as I lived on [location removed] Road at the time, *hah!* And I used to go into a church there and I used to light a candle, and I used to pray that my husband would marry me, pray to God that my husband would marry me. I...I thought I loved him, it was the first...he told me he loved me...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...so I thought he loved me. I know now wiser h...I...it was the drink talking in him. But...and I think that in...in those days like, wh...the way we were brought up, if a man said to you he loved you, he

meant it you know, there was no such thing as *lying*, there was no such thing as...it...it was either black and...or white, there was no in between. So, if somebody said to you they loved you, then you took it as the way they said it, they...that they loved you. So anyw...at that time anyways my husband told me that he loved me and...and I was... then I found myself being pregnant and I found myself working up here in *Derry and Tom's* on the lifts and I didn't really want a child because I was unmarried and I prayed every night in the church that Tony would marry me. Tony [pseudonym] was my husband's name...

SP *Yeah.*

M ...Anthony [pseudonym]. And so, when I came nearer to the date, the manager told me – he was very nice mind you, very sympathetic – and he told me I'd have to leave you know, because the time...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...was coming near for me. And so, when I...when I left anyways, I suppose I had grown to accept that I was ha...carrying a child. I didn't know what...I was very frightened, I didn't know what to expect. I was very much alone in a little room and then when...I didn't...I didn't know anything, oh apart from going to the doctor and telling...and the doctor telling me that I was pregnant right, apart from...I never went to any hospital or nothing, never made any arrangements or nothing. So, I was...Oliver was born in Paddington Hospital in London, Paddington...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...Paddington, down in Paddington. And when he was born, now I didn't really care one way or another beforehand, but when he was born I always remember holding him in my arms and knew I would never be alone again. It was...I just held him and I said to him, 'me and you are always going to be together, that...I will never, never be alone again'. So, this was when we bonded, whatever the outcome of anything else and...as I say, in those days you'd be about a week in hospital, most of them don't go...back in 1962...When I walked out of there anyways, somehow, I

was *belonging* to someone, someone belonged to me and I belonged to somebody, you know, and that was my son. And the strangest part is that I couldn't wait for him to b...get to be a big man and we could walk down the road together...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...you know, it was something, because my mo...when my parents died, and then I was...I m...always felt alone, always felt...and then I was with somebody – deep down I knew he didn't love me, he was saying he loved me because he was after...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...what he was looking for. And whether he loved me now or not, I thought he did, you know I thought somehow he did love me but I know different now. And as I say, I loved my children, my husband was a very good father. He wasn't a very responsible father, he wasn't great bringing in the money...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...but he *adored* his children, he *absolutely adored* them. I love my children but *I* was the one to...I was kind of the provider...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...as well as loving them, I was the provider. And I remember my youngest...my youngest son he...when...when he'd come in from work or wherever he was whether it was in the army or was civilian street and he'd come in and he'd pick the children up and hug them as soon as he got in the door, he had incredible love for them. Whatever other faults he had, he had this bond with his children, which was beautiful...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...which I wasn't used to. And I used to say to him, 'go easy, *go easy* on the boy children because they're going to grow into be men one day,' and th...you know, this cus...kissing and cuddling and loving and all this, you know, that's alright when they're babies but they were going to grow and...and be finished with...you know what I mean, there's...so...they had to grow in to be men. So, I suppose it was...I'd say I was the better parent but he was the better lover...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...towards the children...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. I think...and you don't kn...I know I gave them all my love from here, I suppose I...I wasn't used to the kind of love *he* gave them...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. And I suppose that's...but whichever way they came, they both...we were both...we both loved our children and they were the most important things to us in life, you know. Whatever happened between us two...

SP *Yeah.*

M ...you know.

SP *And can you tell me, what are the most memorable events in your life?*

MB Bad or good? Does it matter?

SP *It doesn't matter.*

MB It doesn't matter. The first...I would say go back to when I was...my mother died...no first of all it was my father that died before my mother, and I'll always remember that being a Sunday morning and I was only maybe six or something like that, and we're all standing outside the...the hospital in [location removed] – not the same one now, not the County Home but the hospital – I think it's c...I think it's called St Joseph's as well too if I'm not mistaken, but it's the general hospital anyways in [location removed]...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...it's the general hospital, standing outside the gates and...myself and Deirdre and little Richard [pseudonyms] that died we were outside the gates and we...we weren't allowed in, you know. So, they went in, the bigger ones went in and they said my father...but as children you don't really...figure it out so much, you know what I mean like, y...you just know your dad is after dying, daddy's dead and everyone is being very kind to you and giving you money to buy sweets in the sh...corner shop across the road and all like that. But because my father was coming and going that...he wasn't as important as my mother. But, when my mother died, I didn't know because I was in the school. All of a sudden, the last time I remember with my mother was walking over a bridge in [location removed] and that is the last time I remember her and I *loved* my mother. And...when we went into the school, apparently my mother was still alive but she was in a sanatorium in [location removed] and it was years later on I discovered that whilst we were in the school she...that she died, the first year while I was in school she d...I don't know if she knew we were there, now I don't know. But...that...it's just that...never seeing my mother again...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...because my mother had a very important role in my life and...and that...that, and I think really when we went...went to the school and...and we were put into this bath and...myself and my sister, we would smell of the disinfectant in the bath, my hair all chopped off, and clothes torn from me and put on a uniform. That w...that was...then I kind of...got in with the rest of the girls and did what they did and I...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...you know. I remember another thing in...when I was in the...the infants' class – don't forget now I'm already nearly seven years of age, well yeah nearly seven but to them I'm about nine...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...going on ten. And I remember being in the first infants' class and I remember Sister Theresa [pseudonym] and I loved Sister Theresa because in...in the babies' classroom or in the first classroom, I went to school in there, and the little books and...and the pens and the crayons and things like that, she was a nice Sister...Sister Theresa, from what I remember anyways, because she only dealt with the...that class, you know. But I always remember somebody from Dublin sent me a doll...and a...a doll in...in a little crib and the doll was pink and the crib was blue. And, I don't know who it was, I will never know, but they had expected me to write them back a letter to thank them. And I think they contacted me maybe once or twice but I...I...because... because I knew what I would say in the letter – 'please take me out of here' – you know what I mean, that...I couldn't write because it wasn't being honest, you know like, I couldn't just say, 'thank you for the gift,' or whatever. But, I knew the nun would read the letter, so therefore I couldn't say what I wanted to in the letter. But anyways, this doll played a big part in my life. Every...the doll used to...the only time the doll would come out and go on the window with the rest of the toys was when somebody from Dublin would come down and inspect the places.

SP *Right.*

MB And I'd be looking at my doll, they were all...that was my doll, I couldn't play with it, it was only brought down for show. And when the...the inspector would go away – he'd only come down for the one day and look around and what not, he wouldn't really know what was going on really, we had to be on our best behaviour and clean and everything – and then when he'd be gone then the toys were put up, up in the cupboard where the school books were kept and every time that door...that door would open, I'd be looking up at my dolly up there (*laughs*), imagine!

SP *No!*

MB You know what I mean? And for years I looked up...while I was at that school I looked, and for a long time that played a big part of me because I got that doll, somebody gave me that doll, I don't know who it was but the person was in Dublin, and I couldn't play with it you know...

SP *Yeah.*

M ...and in the eyes of a child when you're poor...already come from a very poor background, you never had nothing...

SP *Yeah.*

M ...you know.

SP *Yeah.*

M So, that played a big part there. And...and then of course...I think...they were all...I think they were all mishaps, there were very few good times. The Farrellys played a big part in my head, as kind people.

SP *Hmm. And what...*

MB For the time I was there I loved them for...and y...and not so much him, because I didn't see much of him but she was so nice and making me a cup of tea.

SP *Yeah.*

MB That played a big part in my...in my head, you know little things like that they ma...they mean a lot, they mean a lot.

SP *Yeah.*

M And...and...wh...she probably couldn't understand because it's usually me that has to make the tea, I'm the maid, you know, you don't make the maid a cup of tea. And...and she'd say to me, 'would you like a piece of bread and butter?' and I'd feel in heaven for it, you know what I mean. And the thing about it was that she used to put margarine on the bread, where I...I was only used to eating butter...

SP *Okay.*

M ...you know, and the margarine *tasted* awful then but I couldn't...so she...I always...with fond memories of that short while with her.

SP *Yeah.*

MB And I think...I think the army was a good part in my life too. The army made me grow up a bit. The army made me grow up and see life in a bigger picture, there was other people and there was another part of life. Then when I met my husband I thought I was in cloud nine. I thought, 'oh this handsome man,' and all this and that, and never been in love before and...you know, I would have done anything for him, you know. And nobody loved me like this man, and all this...and really, really, he d...as I say, he was...I wish I never met him. But then that's life, that's a part of life you go through...you're lucky...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...you go [inaudible]. I...I did enjoy the first few years, my chi...of my children...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...when we had the children, we did a lot of travelling ten years, on and off, travelling, with the British Army. That was a good part of my life because...you know, I was so away from Ireland, I was away from Ireland away from...the thoughts of Ireland, aw...like I never even thought about it, you know, I was a completely different person once my children came into my role. It's like I didn't need anyone else. And then, I think then when the marriage broke down, I...I think I had one or two nervous breakdowns, I had about two maybe three and never knowing...it was like being very gloom. I suffered with that depression for a long time. And I didn't know until then in my marriage what it was. And then I realised how bad it was, how ill I was, and I used to go to work in this nursing home, this...in the mornings and...and pick up my children around three o'clock from the school. And I used to go in, and I used to be so tired, with the tiredness, the fatigue and I remember the matron saying to me, 'when you go home now you'll scrub all the walls, you'll be able to sleep'. You know, what she didn't understand is I had four children to pick up from school. I'll go home and start getting on their dinner and I'd be very tired. But I couldn't sleep, I could not sleep so somebody...I asked people what was good for insomnia and everybody was saying this and that and everything. And then I would take all their advice and I'd go into the chemist and ask the man in the chemist and he'd make up a prescription for me and y...you know, I was...he'd say to me, 'it takes a while before it will work'. I remember going to the doctors, I was crying and I went to see the doctor. I didn't know how to explain to the doctor how I felt and he said to me, 'I'll send you for a blood test,' he said, 'to see if there's anything'. He sent me for a blood test and the blood test came back and it was normal and he told me, you know, it was like giving me a clip around the ear, 'oh well, get on with life,' you know, th...th...that was it. He said to me, 'there is nothing I can do for you, I can't give you any tablets or anything,' he said, 'you have to get on with life'. And I remember always coming out from the surgery and walking down the road and it...because you go to a doctor when you're ill and you expect him to mend you...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and...and you'd go down...I was going down the road, and I was crying, crying, crying. I didn't know what was the next step...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...I did not know what was the next step. And I remember then this doctor...I got...I was getting restless legs where I couldn't...and I wasn't always very well in myself at the time and the doctors...I think in those days the doc...the lady doctor seen me said to me, 'would you like to g...have a rest? Would you like to go away and have a rest?' I think that's how she described it. And I said, 'yes,' because all the time I felt very tired, that was a part of the depression. When the kids were gone to school...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...if I had a few hours I would lie down. And yet I was frightened to go into the bedroom, but...and...and then, and then of course I was taken in, into hospital and then realised later on it was a mental hospital...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...down in [location removed] and then I was given ECT, a few courses of that. I did find that helped me. I couldn't understand what...what was...why it was. Like if you cut your hand...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...say if you were peeling potatoes and you cut your hand, you can see where the bleeding is coming from [because] you cut your hand.

SP *Yeah.*

MB Depression is a different thing altogether.

SP *Yeah.*

M Depression you cannot...it can come on you like that...

SP *Yeah.*

M ...and it could be with you for six months, it could be with you for three months...

SP *Hmm.*

M ...you know, it's...it's...it's got his own rule and it will come and go when he...it wants. And you'd be up so early in the morning, do you know, it was an *awful, awful, awful* time.

SP *Hmm.*

M And I think...I couldn't see it at the time, I couldn't see it at the time, but I was so unhappy in my marriage too that everything was coming back to haunt me...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...the...the Magdalene Laundry and everything was like in...in a tumble dryer, it was all mixed up. And...I never...I couldn't...I...I couldn't fix myself, I couldn't...but anyways I was put on these tablets and...and medication and a nurse used to come to me every...every fortnight and give me an injection for...for...for...the...the depression as well as taking tablets. And, so I managed to survive somehow, it was a very dark time and it was a very, very, very dark time and a very *lonely* time because I wasn't able to tell anybody or talk to anybody and...and the depression had another big stigma hanging over my head.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So, I suppose taking the tablets helped me to sleep. I was getting back to a normal life...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and then I was let out of the hospital. A few times I tried to commit suicide. I don't...I don't tell my children that...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...a few times I was like...I nearly died. But...they were very dark times in my life.

SP *Yeah.*

MB But...I've managed to come out of it...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...I managed to come out of it, and most of all, I'm still with my children...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know they are the only...and my anima...of course my animals...

SP *Uh huh.*

MB ...keep me going now, it's like a...another fulfilment...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, my animals inside. It's like...they give you real love, they're the little ones that give you real love.

SP *Yeah.*

MB They accept your love...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...they give you real love. Means...that's a lot to me.

SP *Yeah. Well I was going to say, like, of all your accomplishments what are you most proud of? Of all your accomplishments what are you most proud of?*

MB I'm most proud of is...is being, I bought my...I managed to buy a home for myself. It was hard and sluggish and what...but it's all paid for and done with. So I have...I am the proud owner of a house in London...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and I'll be able to leave that to my children when I pass away and the most...thing I learned since I moved into the house was the love of animals, and that is a great thing because I'm able to give out love. I'm able to...I'm more fulfilled as far as love is concerned...

SP *Hmm, yeah.*

MB ...and...and...and they give me so much love and I give it back in return.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So, I think...and...and...and also I'll be able...I'll be able to...where I...I struggled in life with everything.

SP *Hmm.*

MB I struggled and struggled and struggled, I'll be able to give a little bit back to my children.

SP *Yeah.*

MB You know, I think that...that's all I can do...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know.

SP *And tell me something, did you ever want to go back to Ireland?*

MB *No, not...*

SP *Can you tell me why?*

MB No, Ireland has a very *bleak*...you see all the memories will come back.

SP *Hmm.*

MB Nobody wants to remember the bad times.

SP *Yeah.*

MB And as much as I love...there's only one part of Ireland I want to go back to and that is back to [location removed], where...the last place I had been with my mother...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...to walk in my mother's footsteps. Yes, I think it's [location removed] Road or [location removed] Street, and that is the place I remem...m...I remember my mother and my brothers and sisters going over that bridge and that's where I want to walk...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...that was the last place I remember my mother.

SP *Hmm.*

MB And that's...an...anything else other than that I'm not interested.

SP *Yeah. And was it a good decision to come to England? Was it a good decision to come to England?*

MB Oh it was...it was...it was [a] very good decision to come to England. I didn't know what to expect, I was young, as I said before I wanted to go to America, I wanted to get away from Ireland. The most important thing was to get away from Ireland.

SP *Hmm.*

MB I didn't have any money and I didn't have any connections in America. So, I settled for England and you know the rest of the story.

SP *Yeah.*

MB And...so, yes I won't say it was a bad thing coming to England, I say it was good because I think England has helped me a lot. I think it has given me work for all the years and they've looked after me. So, I can't...I can't condemn England.

SP *Yeah. And just the last few questions here. So you applied to...to the Redress Board for the Industrial School and you've also done the McAleese [Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries]...you gave testimony...*

MB *Yeah.*

SP ...can you tell me a bit about the two processes, were you happy with it?

MB I think the...the first one we were going...going down in the Ryan's Report [Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse] is it? I found...very traumatic, *very, very, very* traumatic. When I...I s...when I seen the solicitors...actually I seen it first in the papers, the local papers...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and I couldn't handle it, I couldn't...could not handle it. And they had...I remember...I don't know did I see a bit on the tel...I saw something, I don't know what it was...oh it w...was it on the radio or something or was it on the papers, I can't remember...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...but they had a telephone number (*coughs*) to ring. I think there might have been something on...on the television I don't know, but I remember sitting here in this very house...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...because it all started here and I got up and I went into the kitchen and I made this phone call because they said if you have any problems...numb...ring this number or whatever. And I ring this number and *you couldn't...not for the life of me* it was always engaged and engaged.

SP *Hmm.*

MB Tried the next day and it was always engaged, engaged. And then...then there was an answering machine or something and it said, 'if you would like to talk...if you would like to talk about your experience,' it wasn't a human voice but was what you call it...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...then I suddenly said, you know, I...I sc...I almost screamed down the phone, do you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...that...you know, they were...you know, I almost screamed down the phone saying...saying to them they weren't holy people, you know. And...and it was like getting the frustration out of me.

SP *Yeah.*

MB But anyways, that passed and...I...I seen something in the pa...local papers and I wasn't ready, in here I wasn't ready yet, and I think it was a year or so went by and I saw it again, and I think mentally I was a little bit stronger and I seen it again, and I did not know whether I should or not because it's...it's the haunting memories, they were going to open up. And I took the chance anyways and I rang this group of solicitors, and...they're in Camden and she had made an appointment for me to go down and discuss things with her. And that was...then, when the solicitor said to me, 'you know there's a...there's an office [support group] up in [location removed], they're very nice people and all very nice and in the same situation as yourself, would you like to go up and see them?' Like she was talking about Emily [pseudonym]...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and the office up there. And I...I don't know what it was, I told Emily this story one day and I said...I don't know what it was, but I had this vision...I had this vision in my head of being in the pub and they'd all be sitting around and crying or talking about their old days and I didn't...I didn't want that...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...I didn't want that. But anyhow I managed to pluck...pluck up a bit of courage and I rang up and I spoke to a man who was like Emily's...working with Emily, and he said to me, 'oh come down,' he

said, 'it'll be very ni...it'll be very good for you'. A...and I said, 'but will there be drinking and all that there?' And he said, 'no, no, no, no there'll be only tea and biscuits and things like that, and you'll meet a lot of people from...maybe...you know, you may not know them but they're from different schools, things like that'. So I...I said, 'okay then,' and I went along there and I seen all those women and when I went in first, the first question they asked me where did you...where...wh...I said to them that my solicitor had asked me to come along and she said...Emily wa...said...and the girls said, 'which school?' And I said, 'Lenaboy you know, in Galway'. And there was two or three people who were already in Lenaboy that was in the room, and they said, 'ah ah,' you know [inaudible]...at different times mind you...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...at different times.

SP *Yeah.*

MB But then...that was...that was that. But then when the court case came up I had so much on my chest that I...I said to my solicitor, 'I want to be there, I want to speak for myself, I want to be there'. So she said, 'you don't have to I can do it for you if you want'. And I said 'no, I want to be...I want to have my five minutes'. So, she said, 'okay, so'. And I had...I didn't have five minutes I had five and a half hours, *five and a half hours*. And they...I didn't find the judge very...in the end I found him sympathetic but I didn't find him very...I think...he had all my notes up like that, and there was a table and there was a psychiatrist on their side and there was a a...a lawyer on their side and...there was one, two...and the judge...it would be four, five and there was a police man there even though he was half asleep in the chair – hah! And there was my solicitor, I think there was a doctor there if I'm not mistaken, I think there was a doctor there and...I didn't mind that, I didn't mind that. I just wanted to have my say...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. And so, my solicitor said...told me now, not to lose the head or anything, stay calm and all that and I said, 'fair enough fair enough'. But when he came into the room we all had to stand up so, I don't know...we stood up. I think it was the swearing on the Bible...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...I think it was swear...I said I didn't believe in the Bible, you know, I think something was written out or something like that, but I did say I didn't want to swear on the Bible because I didn't believe in it.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So anyways, when it all settled down anyways, he threw the notes on the table like that and he said something like...he said...like he...he...like h...I don't know what he thought but to me he was saying, 'I don't believe in all this rubbish,' you know, that's the in...

SP *That's the impression.*

MB ...terpretation...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...the eyes, he...he had the notes like that...

SP *The body language.*

MB And he threw them...his body language...that's [inaudible]. And he says, 'what have we got *here*,' he said, like that. And so, he said, 'have we got a person with some kind of...dual personality,' or something like this, what was he saying.

SP *Schizophrenic?*

MB No, he didn't use the word schizophrenic, he used another word – split personality.

SP *Oh yeah, yeah.*

MB Split personality, something to that effect. And anyways, he wasn't, he wasn't ans...looking to me for answers because my solicitor told me to only answer what he says, you know. So, he was talking in general like before he even sat down. And so I thought, 'I'm up against it again,' like you know. So, I had to tell myself...and keep myself *calm* because you know, my solicitor told me about him. And I had to keep it in my head that he was no better than me nor I no better than him...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...you know. So, that kept me going and when he sat there...and then he started going through my notes. And he went, went, went, went and he...every time he went through the notes, he was asking me and I had to give him an answer...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...an answer, an *answer*, right. So, then when he had gone *all through* my notes, *then* he was catching me out in...he only caught me out in the one, and when he had gone through all my notes, then he came back to question me again on this one note and that was, how long...when did I come up to [location of interviewee's home removed], would you believe it? When I...

SP *Wow.*

MB ...what year was it when I came up to [location of interviewee's home removed] because you know when...when...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you're in the solicitors they'll say, 'what year did you come up to [location of interviewee's home removed]?'

SP *Yeah.*

MB And I said, 'well it's such a long time ago I can't remember' but she said, 'you have to, you know put down a date anyway'...

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

MB ...you know what I mean. It's part of the procedure to put something down anyways. So I did, but I gave the...the...I gave the incorrect time in years...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...from when I came up to [location of interviewee's home removed]...up...I mean from [location of interviewee's previous home removed] up to [location of interviewee's home removed]. So then, he said to me, 'according to my records, my *medical records*,' and everything else, it was...he has it all in here, (*laughs*) he said, 'you didn't...what...what year did you come up to [location of interviewee's home removed]? You...you *said* 19...1999 or whatever it was...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...is that correct?' And I had to stop and think, and then I said...I felt like saying no I wasn't sure...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...but I didn't because I'd already sworn...I mean, I already given it on my notes that I had come up on such a date so I...I couldn't go back on it.

SP *Yeah.*

MB And then I s...and then he said to me and then I said, 'yeah that's right,' and I know full well I wasn't very sure and he said, 'no you didn't come on that date, you came up on such and such a date, you know, you came...you were up in [location of interviewee's home removed] in such and such a year'.

SP *Okay.*

MB Not so much the date but the year, and...and he knew this by all my medical records because we had to sign on with doctors and what not, and he got all my medical notes as well from...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, from [location of interviewee's previous home removed]. And then he said...and...that was the only thing he caught me out in and towards the end anyways he went on and it was...as I say the file was that thick and he went through it and he said to me, he said...he apologised and he apol...I think he apologised at the beginning because the...the Minister that was in...was in Ireland at the time had apologised anyway, so he was more or less apologising on his behalf. But at the end then when he got to the end of all...he said to me that he was sorry that I had gone through so much and that was the only thing he didn't believe me...that years, those years. And...and he said to me...at the time, I didn't think nothing much...I didn't know what to think, he said to me, 'if there's anything that you want to say before you leave the...you know, you can'. And...and I couldn't think of nothing and yet I wanted to go back to him and say, 'I know I gave you the wrong date, I felt ashamed for leaving my marriage and coming up and leaving my family at such a time'. And that was...that was the answer but I didn't get to tell him, because I was too *ashamed* again, to ashamed...

SP *I see, yeah.*

MB ...and that was it. But I did feel that as he kept me for five and a half hours, half an hour for a cup of tea and...and I have proof of that because my friend came...Alice [pseudonym] came over with me...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and she was waiting on the outside.

[Unidentified third party enters]

[Irrelevant conversation removed]

MB And she...she...she was there and she was worried and she was ringing her friend and she says...well I came out that room and I didn't know where I was...I don't know where I wa...where I was...I was...I was like...I kind...I didn't know who was talking to me to be quite honest...I didn't know who...if you spoke to me I didn't know what my reaction was, I was *stunned*. I was completely stunned because I didn't...the solicitor said it only be about an hour, an hour and a half...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...I was *five and a half hours*.

SP *Yeah.*

MB Could you believe it? And anyways, that was a very bad experience. It was good that I was there...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and...to have my say...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...but I do find that they had so much *power* over me...

SP *Okay.*

MB ...even though I tried...I stood my ground...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...I stood my ground and...and I was proud *I did do that*, I was proud I did do that. And so, I did think that they were very, very powerful and I...I didn't like his attitude in the beginning but I think towards the end he had a softer apology...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and I think...because he said he did believe me only for those dates. (*Laughs*) So...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...that was that, so I came out of there...I think I got drunk that night with my friend you know, in Dublin...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...because we were stopping overnight in a hotel and then I had to come back and...it leaves a terrible affect because...because it...it...the wounds are opened up...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and you begin to feel that...you know, *you wish you could have gone in stronger* and you wish you could...you know, if you had a solicitor on your side, because I felt my solicitor was very weak.

SP *Okay.*

MB You know, I felt she was very, very weak because...for the simple reason why I found my solicitor very w...very weak, there was something in it...oh yeah, I know what it was, I had said to my solicitor all along, 'the dates I put in here are more or less approximately,' do you know, they're...a lot of them weren't very correct but they're...you know, it was so long ago...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...I could never remember the actual, some of the dates...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...may not be correct. So, I had said to her...and she said to me, 'don't worry, don't worry about it because,' she said, 'it's such a long time ago they wouldn't expect you to remember'.

SP *Yeah, exactly.*

MB And I felt when the judge was saying that to me about those...I felt like turning to her...

SP *(Laughs)*

MB ...and saying to her, 'well it was my solicitor who told me the dates weren't that important!'

SP *Yeah.*

MB But I didn't, I felt sorry for her! *(Laughs)*

SP *(Laughs) Ah!*

MB Never mind, it was an experience...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know.

SP *And what was the McAleese testimony like? When you gave testimony to the McAleese...?*

MB Oh, the McAleese! That was...is that now...is that...

SP *For the Magdalene Laundries.*

MB Yeah, that's the Magdalene Laundries now because I had met him once...I think I met him twice...

SP *Hmm.*

MB I did it twice...

SP *Okay.*

MB I think...the first time when we all told our story...that's right it was twice. And then we were in a group down in a hotel down in...in Kings Cross and we all told...we couldn't tell the whole story because he didn't have that kind of time.

SP *Yeah.*

MB But we had to kind of give him a bit of a picture and he went around the room.

SP *Yeah.*

MB And then...so then the next time we seen him was in...in...where was it now...was it the same hotel...no, where...oh no it was in...not the Irish Centre, it was in...Embassy, the Irish Embassy...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...the Irish Embassy...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...before Christmas last year [2012] it was. And so, we all...we all had lunch there...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and then w...individual...we went up and we all went in one by one...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...to speak and tell of our experience. Now, I liked McAleese, I thought he was a nice man but I hoped that he would be strong enough because he was up against the tough...because of the government...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and it turned out he was very good, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...so I'm pleased I have met him, I'm pleased I have spoken to him, I'm pleased I told my story to him.

SP *Yeah. And what would you like from the compensation...or the redress...redress of the Magdalene Laundries?*

MB Well I wouldn't get a pension for a start because the pension age starts at eighteen...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...so I would...that would rule me out. And...but, what I would have liked to have seen...because you can't really ever compensate...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...that kind of thing, what I would like to see...as my health is very poorly and...and there's times, you know, I can't even Hoover the house or do much for myself nowadays...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...I would like something...kind of...someb...an aid to come and do my shopping for me etc. until the day I die. You know, it's...it's...it's...I can't get it from...I can't get it from...I come under the Borough of [location removed] and I can't get it because I have a small little pension. And if I did I'd have to turn to the agencies and the agencies would cost me a lot of money per hour.

SP *Yeah.*

MB So therefore I have to go on buses and do my shopping, but I mean there's special buses for disabled people...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...where they will take you to the store, but then there's lots of things I can't do around the house...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and I have very bad arthritis in every part of my body, in my hands and all, that's why I've got to wear my gloves all the time.

SP *Hmm.*

MB So, you know, there's lots of things I...I find it's hard and...it's hard coping in life with my ailments and I would like some help...financial help, and also some medical help so that...because there's lots of things...like say now, in the National Health now today they have so many cutbacks that, you know you can't go and...where you might have stood a chance years ago, it's like for physio and therapeutics...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and things like that, things like that. As I say again, you'll never wash away, you can never wash away what went...went on...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...but then in...in comp...if they were to compensate me that would...would be the way, financially that way, and help me emotionally and...and to know that they're there and Emily is very important in my life and so is Jane [pseudonym]...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and I'm very thankful to the young solicitor [Maeve O'Rourke²] that came here too because she's very good...

SP *Yeah.*

² See note on cover sheet

MB ...and...and Mr McAleesh [McAleese].

SP *Yeah.*

MB I think they were very...four very important people in this road...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...that helped us to get through all of this, you know.

SP *How did you feel after you heard the apology?*

MB Oh the first time I watched it on the telly I thought it was sheepish you know, I...I didn't think it was strong enough.³ But I didn't then reali...you know, I wasn't too happy but I didn't say nothing until the papers came out and [I] realised that it wasn't just me that felt that way, everyone felt that way and that there was a stronger apology if you were going to get the people to...to...you know, to take us seriously. And when he came to see us,⁴ I was...I was delighted he came to see us because I think you have to see the victims...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...face to face.

SP *How many of you were there?*

MB I was there.

³ Interviewee is referring to Taoiseach Enda Kenny's statement on 5th February 2013, following the publication of the McAleese Report. The formal State apology followed on 19th February 2013.

⁴ Taoiseach Enda Kenny's meeting with some UK-based survivors in the Irish embassy on 16th February 2013.

SP *No, how many...*

MB *Oh, sorry...*

SP *...how many of you? Sorry...*

MB *...there was about...I'd say there was about...tw...maybe 12 about...*

SP *Yeah.*

MB *...about 11 or 12 of us around.*

SP *Hmm.*

MB *But we all...but I think by seeing us, and by talking to us...he...I d...there was a lot of emotion going on in the room, there was a lot of crying from the heart, it's a lot of...because there was a lot of things brought out, feelings, don't forget, from way back and most of those women...some are younger than me, there might be a few older than me. So, it brought back some awful memories so there was a lot of crying...*

SP *Hmm.*

MB *...and talking of stories and talking of what...so, it was a very, very emotional time there...*

SP *Yeah.*

MB *...and I'm glad he got to see that because I think when you put a piece of paper under somebody...*

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and you say, 'look into that and...blah, blah, blah,' and you hear other people's opinion...but I think when you meet the victim, you get a stronger hold of the story. You...it's only...only then...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you can begin to feel...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know. And so I think when he...when he did come and he spoke to us, I think when he went away then you know, I think...whatever he came with I don't know...

SP *Heh!*

MB ...but he went out of that room a much sadder man...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know.

SP *Okay.*

MB So, I don't know what he had expected coming because...but his mind was made up when he left the room. But also, I'll tell you who I thought was...Alan Sherak [former Minister for Justice, Alan Shatter] is it the Defense Secretary, is he...Minister, he was there and he was sitting...not next to me because my hearing is very bad so...Alan...Alan was sitting...say the Minister was sitting there, Alan was sitting here...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and then I think the Minister's secretary, Mary...what...what's her name, a young lady? Nuala?
[Nuala Ní Muircheartaigh, legal adviser to the Inter-Departmental Committee]

SP *Nuala, yeah.*

MB Nuala. Nuala was here beside me and she was very nice, and very warm very down to earth
Nuala. And the other g...lady Kathleen...she's an M...she's a Minister as well...

SP *Kathleen Lynch.*

MB Kathleen Lynch [former Minister for Equality and Older People] and she...I met Kathleen Lynch
before when she came over to see us in a group...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...but as she came around and shook hands with us and talked with us, and when she was leaving,
before she left she shook hands with me and told me...asked me...said to me to take care of
myself and, any...I don't know what she said to me, she says...something like, 'you've been
through a rou...a very hard time'...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...or something to that effect. So, I said...I said, 'you will never...you'll...you'll never...you'll never
understand,' I said, 'you have to walk in my shoes'. And she said, 'yes,' she says. And then she
said, 'but we can walk shoulder to shoulder'. And when she said that I knew the outcome was
going to be good, you know, she couldn't walk in our shoes...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...she couldn't ever *imagine*...so she was going...so when she said, 'shoulder to shoulder,' I
thought, 'she's on our side'...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...you know, so, it was a good outcome...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and then of course when we went downstairs the press were waiting for us...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...you know, so...so I did think, you know, the first apology was nothing...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...just a...a slap on the wrist...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...and the second one was very good and very emotional too, I thought [inaudible] but it was very emotional.

SP *Hmm, yeah.*

MB And I think then it's...it's when the people of Ireland would see that...

SP *Hmm.*

MB ...that they would...maybe find some of the emotion from *him* that he has experienced when he was with us.

SP *Hmm.*

MB So, and...and maybe the *older* generation...the *older* generation will turn around and say, 'well there must have been something in it'...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...because it was...because they must have realised years gone by there was something very secretive about those kind of places...

SP *Exactly.*

MB ...and this was what all the big secrets were about...

SP *Yeah.*

MB ...and where people disappeared to.

SP *Exactly. Well listen I'm conscious I've kept you talking for so long...*

MB *(Laughs)*

SP *...so I want to thank you so much for sharing with...with me and the tape, your story and I hope that future generations will listen and understand...*

MB Uh huh.

SP *...and try to understand, although as you say, you have to be in your shoes but maybe they can try and understand from listening to your life.*

MB Yes, yeah.

SP *So, thank you very much.*

MB You're welcome.

[Interview ends]