



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



<b>Reference Code:</b>	MAGOHP/20/ANON
<b>Oral History of:</b>	Frances Walsh
<b>Pseudonym?</b>	Yes
<b>Status:</b>	Survivor
<b>Keywords:</b>	Sisters of Mercy Mount Carmel Industrial School, Moate, Co Westmeath; Residential Institutions Redress Board; self-education; Sisters of Mercy Magdalene Laundry, Dun Laoghaire; rebelliousness (in industrial school); Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB); Section 28 (6) of Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002; name changing in Industrial School; St Michael's Hospital, Dun Laoghaire; death and burial practices at Magdalene Laundries; separation from family due to Industrial School and Magdalene Laundry system; stigma of illegitimacy; interaction between laundry and hospital on same campus; positive experiences with religious sisters; religiosity; improvements in laundry conditions in later years; shame and stigma.
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<b>Interviewer:</b>	Dr Sinéad Pembroke
<b>Records/Papers included:</b>	No
<b>Access Conditions:</b>	Anonymised interviews are freely available to the public. Immediate release of transcript; audio file destroyed on request; interviewee's identity will be revealed in 30 years.
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## Notes on Redaction and Transcription Process

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Interviewee Initials: FW

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
- Dates have been accurately transcribed
- A number of sections have been removed to protect the privacy of third parties
- Some locations have been removed to protect the privacy of the interviewee and third parties

### List of Pseudonyms

Pseudonym	Status/Relationship to Interviewee
Frances Walsh/Dunne	Interviewee/survivor
Sr Benignus Maguire	Third Party Religious
Mr O'Neill	Industrial School Inspector
Mr Dunne	Industrial School Inspector
Sr Carol	Third Party Religious
Sr Bridget	Third Party Religious
Sr Borgia Maguire	Third Party Religious
Sr Concepta	Third Party Religious
Sr Veronica	Third Party Religious
Bishop Kennedy	Third Party Clergy
Fidelma Reddin	Child in Industrial School who took her own life as an adult
Sheila Reddin	Child in Industrial School
Mairéad Reddin	Child in Industrial School
Lily Fitzgerald	Child in Industrial School
Olive Dunleavy	Child in Industrial School
Brenda Coleman	Child in Industrial School
Patricia Nolan	Child in Industrial School
Nancy Nolan	Child in Industrial School
Lucy Nolan	Child in Industrial School
Purcell family	Children in Industrial School
Patrick/Paddy Bennett	Man who lived near and worked in the laundry
Elizabeth	Interviewee's aunt (mother's twin)
Brian	Interviewee's solicitor
Dan	Interviewee's uncle
Sr Paul	Third Party Religious
O'Brien family	Interviewee's cousins

Deirdre O'Brien	Interviewee's cousin
Eileen O'Brien	Interviewee's cousin
Breda O'Brien	Interviewee's cousin
Dorothy O'Brien	Interviewee's cousin
Sr Aidan	Third Party Religious
Colm	Unclear
Mrs Doyle	Shop owner in interviewee's home town
Sr Jarlath	Third Party Religious
Máire	Interviewee's aunt
Eithne	Interviewee's aunt
Nora Lynch	Interviewee's sister
Oonagh Lynch	Interviewee's aunt
Oliver Lynch	Interviewee's uncle
Murray family	Unclear
Quinn family	Unclear
Mr Thompson	Boiler man in laundry
Liam Walsh	Interviewee's uncle
Aideen	Interviewee's aunt (Liam's wife)
Sophia	Interviewee's aunt
Donal Walsh	Interviewee's brother
Stephen Walsh	Interviewee's brother
Fergus	Interviewee's brother-in-law
Emma	Interviewee's cousin
Niall	Interviewee's cousin
Jack	Interviewee's uncle
James/Jimmy	Interviewee's son
Kim	Interviewee's daughter
Conor	Interviewee's son
Rosie	Interviewee's daughter
Eugene	Interviewee's son
George	Interviewee's son
Isabelle/Izzy	Interviewee's daughter
Betty	Interviewee's sister-in-law
Ian Dunne	Interviewee's husband
Dr Morgan Healy	Interviewee's doctor
Winnie O'Callaghan	Interviewee's neighbour
Robert Foley	Interviewee's brother-in-law
Martin O'Callaghan	Interviewee's neighbour
Colette McKenna	Child in Industrial School
Nicola/Nicky	Interviewee's friend
Thelma Burke	Interviewee's cousin (Sophia's daughter)
Sid	Interviewee's partner

**Basic Data from Interview**

<b>Name/Pseudonym</b>	Frances Walsh
<b>When Born</b>	1943
<b>Born outside marriage?</b>	Yes
<b>Raised by</b>	Industrial School
<b>Education</b>	Industrial School
<b>Order</b>	Sisters of Mercy
<b>Laundry</b>	Dun Laoghaire
<b>From</b>	At some point between 1957-1959
<b>To</b>	Unclear
<b>Duration of stay</b>	1.5 years
<b>Age on entry</b>	Between fourteen and sixteen
<b>Entered Via</b>	Industrial School
<b>House Name/No</b>	Not in laundry, however interviewee was assigned a number in lieu of her name at the Industrial School.
<b>Haircutting/punishment?</b>	No
<b>Circumstances of Departure</b>	Collected by family who had come over from England
<b>Emigrated?</b>	No
<b>Physical ailments?</b>	Didn't say
<b>Of Note</b>	Interviewee was put into Industrial School by her natural mother because she was her first daughter and her mother did not want her to also have children outside of marriage.

[Interview begins]

SP *Thank you Frances, for taking part today.*

FW *That's grand.*

SP *So I just...before we start want to ask that you confirm that you agree to participate in this interview voluntarily and that you are familiar with the Information and Consent Forms?*

FW *Yes, yes.*

SP *Thank you very much.*

FW *That's grand.*

SP *So the first thing I want to ask you is could you tell me something about yourself?*

FW *Well, me name is Frances, I'm married, seven children all grown up, load of grandchildren, load of great-grandchildren and they're all great, now!*

SP *Thank you, thank you very much.*

FW *That's it!*

SP *Can you tell me about your life prior to the Magdalene Laundry?*

FW *I was put into an orphanage at...after birth, about a month old, and I was there until I was sixteen...a very, very hard life from I'd say the age of...six up to sixteen. Then, brought to the laundry and that's where I ended up for a year and a half.*

SP *Yeah. And...*

FW *And life was very, very harder...*

SP *Hmm, maybe you could...*

FW But I've done that all before with the...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...with the other thing [Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB)] I was telling you, if you know what I mean?

SP *Yeah. Maybe could you just tell us a little bit about what life was like in the orphanage?*

FW It was very, very, very hard. We'd...say from about...the beatings we got was unbelievable, the food we got was disgraceful, the life we had was absolutely...[dia]bolic if you excuse the language. The nuns were the cruellest you could ever meet, especially Sister Benignus [pseudonym], she was over the orphanage.

SP *And where was the orphanage?*

FW Mount Carmel Orphanage School...Mount Carmel Industrial School, Moate, County Westmeath.

SP *And they were the Sisters of Mercy...*

FW Sis...Sisters of Mercy, I needn't tell ya. And then...from about six years of age we all...that's when it all started on us, having to do this that and the other, you know, weed the gardens and do up the cemetery. Then as we got older it was out to do the farms, the laundries, scrubbing the floors, everything. We were just treated like slaves and if we didn't do it we'd get bet [beaten] to pulps and put to bed without anything to eat. And...life was just disastrous for us...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...disastrous, there was name.

SP *And during this time, had you visits from your family?*

FW I don't know because you never knew who w...who was there, it could have been the Pope for all you know, but you didn't know who they were. You were never told who they were, but I know they did come in but I don't ever remember it.

SP *Okay and what...can you describe a visit?*

FW No.

SP *No.*

FW Alls I remember is sitting in a corner and not opening your mouth while there was somebody sitting there. And there'd be a nun...maybe two nuns sitting there. And that was just the way the visitors were. We didn't know who they were, sure I didn't even know I had a mother. I thought I was just an only child and nobody knew me.

SP *And did an inspector come and visit while you were...*

FW Yes, oh the inspector came in, Mr O...O'Neill and Mr Dunne [pseudonyms].

SP *And what...what happened when...when the inspector came in?*

FW Oh st...stand up around them and they'd be all over you, and the minute they were gone maybe bet [beaten] to another pulp and they were gone, just brought...just put in this clothes and then the minute they were gone, straight back into your rags.

SP *Okay oh...*

FW Hmm.

SP *...so there was like a big show?*

FW Yeah a show, exactly, a show yeah.

SP *Okay.*

FW Show, yeah, show.

SP *Okay, and were you ever given a chance to tell the inspector?*

FW No, oh you couldn't open your mouth...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...oh no! Couldn't whisp...you couldn't even...nearly...sneeze because they were all watching you.

SP *Hmm.*

FW You often felt like doing it like when I got older I did.

SP *Yeah.*

FW When you got older you often felt like saying, 'now here she bet [beat] the hell out of me last night,' but you couldn't because well...the minute they were gone you got a beating so you put your foot back into that trap again, you were going to be bet [beaten] stupid again.

SP *Yeah.*

FW You know what I mean?

SP *And how would you...do you think that you rebelled or conformed?*

FW Rebelled.

SP *And can you tell me how you rebelled?*

FW *(Pause)* It's just an explanation I just can't give you, would you believe that?

SP *Well you know what I think you can start with, that story that you were telling me.*

FW Which one?

SP *The one about the...the ruler...the little...*

FW Oh yeah, I'll tell you that story. I was about fourteen...say around f...nearly fifteen and I went down to the Recreation Room to do something, I don't know what it was, I can't remember. And whatever I did, there was a little girl and her name...I can't give her name...

SP *Yeah, yeah that's fine.*

FW ...and she was only about five, between five and six, and this nun was...which I told you her name already...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...*beating* the hell out of her. And there were a few of the girls with me and they stood there and I said, s...s...she won't do it again I'm going over, I don't care. And the girls said, 'don't Frances,' [pseudonym] or the numbers like thirty-two or sixteen, we never knew our own names.

SP *Hmm.*

FW And they said, 'don't...don't Fourteen, don't,' and I said, 'I don't care, I'm going over'. So, I tipped her and I said, 'if you hit her once more again, I'll hit you'. And she went to hit me, but whatever...the grip I got, I got the stick and I *walloped* her across the face twice. 'Now,' I said, 'how do *you* feel?' And she sat down crying and all and she d...now of course the nuns all ran to help her. I got beaten up after but I didn't care...

SP *Hmm.*

FW I stood me ground and she could've bet [beaten] me stupid I didn't care, I got to her. But from that day then I never seen that child...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...and I've *always* got the suspicious [suspicion] that that child died from the beating. It's *always* on the back of my mind that something happened that child, because the way she was beating her was across the legs and arms and head and all, and I can still see her in front of me and she *screaming*. And then all of a sudden she'd go and flop to the ground and I can still...I could actually see the red blood in the child's hair and her hair was red.

SP *Hmm.*

FW And I told that to the other solicitors, [at the RIRB] I could still...and I told it to the heads I said, you'd want to be there to really see what happened. You'd want to be standing beside the child to see what happened.

SP *Yeah.*

FW And from this day to [to]day I've *never* heard from that...seen or heard of that child. *Never, never, never* heard from it...seen what happened. I always swear that child died in the beatings.

SP *Yeah. And did you try to run away or anything?*

FW No, you couldn't r...*ah hah*, you couldn't run away from there th...jeez the walls were...the walls were ten feet...*oh my God!* And the gates were like the big...Mountjoy Prison...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...well I was never in Mountjoy in my life, but I often see it on the telly, these right...prison gates and there's a big e...the big electric...what you call them electric things...those nails and glass on the top of the...

SP *Yeah.*

FW *...oh yeah, oh yeah...*

SP *Barbed wire?*

FW *...oh yeah oh yeah, oh yeah. You couldn't get out of there.*

SP *Hmm.*

FW If you tried to run away, you couldn't run away. No, no you couldn't run away from that school. And the only day of the year we got out was on the...it was always either the 1<sup>st</sup> or the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, and we were brought to Coosan in Count...in Athlone, County Westmeath for a day's outing. And I can still see us standing there with the Miwadi orange juice and biscuits, a little Marietta [plain biscuit] and that was our day's outing, (*pause*) that was the day we got out.

SP *Okay.*

FW And Christmas, we didn't even know what it was. We got an egg on Chrism...we got an egg on Easter Sun...or Easter Sunday, you were lucky to see the egg, we didn't even know what an egg was. And you got a rasher and sausage on Christmas day, you thought it was your birthday.

SP *And what kind of education did you receive there?*

FW None, I educated myself.

SP *Okay.*

FW We were never...we were just...we weren't even allowed...we were in the same class...now, say if we were with the outdoor child[ren]<sup>1</sup>...we were all in the one school now, the...the outdoor pupils came to the same school class...school as us, the primary [inaudible] the

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<sup>1</sup> Children who came to the primary school but did not live at the Industrial School

national school. But the orphanage children were never allowed to sit with the...or speak to the outdoor p...children, *oh no, no!* And we thought it was great, we used to think it was great, the best day of our lives was to be brought out to the farms because we had no homework. I left school as thick as two left feet and I educated myself and now I read and I do everything, I can do anything, thanks be to God I educated myself.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Thank God.

SP *Did they...so what kind of work did you ha...did they have you do?*

FW In the mornings we were called [at] seven o'clock...half six, seven o'clock. We got up, washed our hands and face – of course clean underwear that was a miracle, you'd never see, maybe once a week you'd get clean underwear, clean clothes. Then you had the other babies and washed them, bring them down, feed them, you mightn't even get a chance to have your own breakfast and that was like porridge like paste...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...and black cocoa, *ugh!* Even the *thoughts* of porridge and cocoa makes my stomach *heave!* Even to look at...I wouldn't even look at it in the shoppers [shops]. I've never made porridge for my children, I've never gave them cocoa and I wouldn't even...*oh* makes me stomach get into...in...in...crumbs. That was our breakfast, then into Mass – the two-faced fucks, praying, they hadn't even fucking...they didn't know what prayers were – but anyway, prayers, then out and then up to school at nine o'clock, home at lunch hour – supposed to be soup, it'd be like water – then back up to school and home then, and you'd get your dinner at one o'clock, no, one o'clock sorry, is your dinner. Dinner? You'd be lucky to see a bit of meat, the stew you'd see, it would be all vegetable stew, that's all you ever saw, and...and potatoes and all, it'd be like muck. Then our tea was bread and jam at four o'clock, and that was the last until the following morning, then bed at seven o'clock.

SP *Okay.*

FW And if you wet your bed you were made stand all night in the room under...and the windows were *huge*. The windows were about the size of that now...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...and there was more breaks in them and cracks in them, because they were real old windows, you had to stand underneath that with the wet sheet over your head. That was the nuns...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...*they were the cruellest, oh, I hate nuns and I hate priests! (Laughs)* Sorry now, I'm sorry!

SP *It's okay.*

FW *I hate priests! I hate them!*

SP *Yeah.*

FW I'm sorry to say to you, it's an awful thing to say, but I hate nuns and priests. I wouldn't *trust* them! *No, no, no, no* – especially nuns.

SP *And what made a nun...was there...were there any good nuns?*

FW Sister Carol [pseudonym], *ah* she was a pet.

SP *What made the nun...*

FW She...she was a lay Sister...

SP *Yeah. Okay, a lay Sister.*

FW Do you know what I mean, she was treated like a slave, she done the farm...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...God help her, and she was an old pet. She was from Carlow.

SP *And what made a Sister good or bad?*

FW Sister Carol used to take up for us now, God love her she used to...the m...do you know...you wouldn't un...you wouldn't un...you wouldn't understand this, now in...years ago we had the farm right, the farm, a big farm and they had this furnace, like a furnace...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...and you'd throw wood in it and God love her she often used to get the potatoes for us and stick them on it and cook them for us you know, she did! *Ah* she was an old pet and she'd often say, 'come on girls I'll get you something'. And she'd get the apples and all and say, 'come on down get them, go down the back there and eat them'. She was lovely, but the others? Sister Bridget [pseudonym] was alright to now, Sister Bridget was nice she was from...she was from [location removed] County Offaly, she was nice. But there was other ones there, *my God!*

SP *And what made them bad?*

FW They were all related. Sister Borgia, Sister Concepta, Sister Veronica, Sister Benignus [pseudonyms]. I think they were all in the...I know...I know Maguire [pseudonym] was Benignus's [sur]name and Sister Borgia's [sur]name was Maguire. I don't know whether they were an...an aunt and a niece or two sisters but they were the same...now that's *my* opinion from the way I knew them. They were the same kind of height and big bold looks and big hands and big feet and *uh!* Big m...*oh!* – Half man as I used to say to them. Very alike, they could have been sisters now or it could have been an aunt but their uncle was the Archbishop of [locations removed] then.

SP *Okay.*

FW Bishop Kennedy [pseudonym]. He was the Bishop of [identifying information removed] and I think he was related to them because I think she was from up around that direction...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...because they were very alike, like now when you t...think back, you know.

SP *And how did you get on with all the other girls?*

FW Oh I got on great with the girls at school, *oh God great!* But all...we all clung together like. There was...Jesus I could tell you every one of the girls in my class. You often wonder...I know one of them committed suicide, she drowned herself in [location removed] and she left a letter written why she took her life and she blamed Sister Benignus.

SP *Yeah, okay.*

FW Now that was read...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...that was in...that was in the *Herald* [newspaper] going back...no, the Herald wasn't out then sorry I'm a liar. It was in the...in the *Evening Press* and I remember picking it up, I was married and all, well married. Oh, I was, I was well married, was I living in [location removed] then? No, I was in the flats. I remember getting the paper and reading all about it and I seen Moate and I read the whole lot, and that's where wh...she wrote a letter, said it was over Sister Benignus that she done that.

SP *Okay.*

FW Yeah. Her name was Fidelma Reddin [pseudonym]...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...can still see her. There was Sheila, Fidelma and Mairéad, three sisters. Then there was me, Lily Fitzgerald, Olive Dunleavy, Brenda Coleman, Patricia Nolan, Nancy and Lucy Nolan [pseudonyms] [identifying information removed].

SP *So there was no bullying between...*

FW No, not the girls, we all took up for each other.

SP *Great.*

FW Oh no we were...we were real...I can still see now, Patricia, myself, Brenda...Brenda Coleman, Olive Dunleavy, Lily Fitzgerald myself, the Purcells [pseudonym], they were actually related to [name of musical family removed], there's two girls belonging to [name of musical family removed], [name of musical family removed]...]

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...you might have heard of them, do you know the [name of musical family removed] you hear on...the telly...on the radio, the singers.

SP *Oh yes, I think...*

FW They were s...I think...relations of theirs...could be their sisters for all I know. I don't know but they were in [location removed].

SP *And did you girls hear of the Magdalene Laundries while you were...*

FW *No...*

SP *No.*

FW *...no! That's what...that's...I was the only one that was put into it!*

SP *Okay.*

FW Now, the others could've been...I done...was put into Dun Laoghaire but the others could have been put into Cavan or Roscommon, for all I know...

SP *Hmm.*

FW *...Sligo (coughs).*

SP *Yeah.*

FW You just...the day you were ready to go the nuns just put you in a car and you were gone...

SP *Okay.*

FW *...(coughs) and nobody would know where you were going.*

SP *And can you tell me then how you...like...*

M *(Coughs)*

SP *...can you tell me about the day you went to the laundry?*

FW It's...it's kind of...in a vague memory to me. I remember coming up and I remember these...this big fellah, which I got to know him very well after, [identifying information removed] Bennett...Patrick Bennett [pseudonym], got to know him *very well* after and his family, actually I'm very good friends with the Bennetts. I remember the man opening the gate, the big green gate and we're driving up there...used to have the farm, the garden all in the front, it's all posh now, but there was a garden and I remember driving up around and going in the big brown door and a nun welcomed me in, and all of a sudden I was upstairs, that's all I remember!

SP *In the laundry?*

FW *Hmm!*

SP *So yeah...so the actual...yeah, so you had no clue where you were going?*

FW I had no cl...all I could see was the big building, and I said, 'this is not Moate!'

SP *Hmm.*

FW That's what I said to the nuns, 'this is not the school!' Never said another word to me, no. Just, 'go on in there,' that's all.

SP *So you came with two of the nuns then?*

FW *(Coughs)* Yeah that's right, she said, 'go in there', that's all she said.

SP *And what year was this?*

FW 1950...I was born '43, I was ten in '53, I was six[teen] [in] '59, would that be right?

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

FW No, I think I was there before that, I think I was there when I was fourteen – I was!

SP *When you were fourteen?*

FW I was fourteen I think [when] I was in the laundry. I know I wasn't sixt...I can't remember *(coughs)* wait now, hold on, *(coughs)* I can't remember now. I know I went home...Jesus it's a pity now, none of me family are now alive to...to...w...similar age, that were there. Jesus now, do you know, it's terrible to bring back your memory isn't it? Well we'll say between fourteen and sixteen because I can't remember.

SP *Yeah, no problem, yeah.*

FW Me brain. I know I was very young when I went home...it was the summer. I remember wearing the shorts and the t-shirts and I went out to me ma's [mother's] twin sister Elizabeth [pseudonym], yeah, Elizabeth. *(Pause)* Now I'd say...I'd say it was...it was shortly after I hittin' Sister Benignus in the face.

SP *Okay...*

FW ...that I...that I...

SP ...so you were fourteen then?

FW ...left that school, when I was fourteen, so I think I was longer in that laundry, love. Jesus, it's terrible now...I'd love to get m...actually I got me...I got records before from that laundry for the other school. I paid seventy-five euro for the whole thing. I wonder would they still have them?

SP *Well if you paid for them then you...you should...you should still have them.*

FW Yeah I paid seventy-five euro for them. I'll tell you what, hold on this is not going on for another long time, sure it's not?

SP *No.*

FW Well the next time I've an appointment with me solicitor I'll ask Brian [pseudonym] will he forward on a copy of that laundry thing for me.

SP *Perf...yeah, great thank you.*

FW That's what I'll do, I'll ask Brian.

SP *Yeah.*

FW I'll say, 'Brian, you wouldn't give me that thing about the laundry?' I won't say I'm going in for...in...because I can't because it's in with the orphanage thing [Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB)] – the orphanage thing has gone through now. Now I hope they're not...they...that's what I meant to ask you, I hope there's nothing connected to the orphanage thing?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 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.*

[Interview paused to discuss interviewee's concerns]

SP *So, yeah, so we were just talking about you being sent...how old you were and all of that.*

FW Yeah.

SP *So we're going to say between fourteen and sixteen.*

FW I'd say between fourteen and sixteen yeah...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...I'd say...to the orphanage, yeah, I'd say so now...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...I can't...can't remember.

SP *And so you arrived at the laundry...*

FW Yeah...

SP *...and...*

FW ...the big brown gate...

SP *...yeah.*

FW ...door opened and a nun walked in...just handed in...suitcase and all, and...I know that someone came out I think it was a...was...a nun came down and just said to me, 'go into the room there Frances, and take off your clothes and get into that'. Next minute I was in a green dress, a navy apron, shoes and socks on me, and up to the laundry. And I stood there like a gobshite looking at everybody. Didn't know where I was.

SP *And did you even know it was a laundry?*

FW *No!*

SP *No? Okay.*

FW *No! I didn't even know the name of it until I left it! All I was told is that we're going...Dun Laoghaire, laundry – that's all we ever knew about it, nothing else.*

SP *Okay.*

FW *We never knew it was a Magdalene Asylum as they call them.*

SP *Yeah.*

FW *No we didn't!*

SP *Yeah.*

FW *It wasn't until I went home I was told that...*

SP *Okay...*

FW *...it was my uncle Dan [pseudonym] told me, if I can remember. He said, 'you know you were in an asylum?' I said, 'what? It wasn't a fucking asylum!' And with that, that's how I heard it.*

SP *And were you given any information, like length of time?*

FW *No, no...*

SP *Your rights?*

FW *...no, no.*

SP *Nothing?*

FW No, not even goodbye...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...the nun, not even goodbye or good luck...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...no. I can still see her in front of me, that big...I won't say...in front of me and handed me over to Sister...Sister Paul [pseudonym].

SP *Okay. And can you remember how you felt as you were being...*

FW I was roaring! *Oh* I was sobbing me heart...sobbing me heart out for...I think I didn't sleep for a week. I sobbed...I was sick and everything, *oh* I couldn't believe it. Alls I kept saying to the nuns, 'I want to go back to Moate...to the school,' we didn't even know Moate...it was a school...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...we used to call it.

SP *Yeah.*

FW And then when they started calling me Frances I didn't know who the hell...who the...I couldn't even answer them. I said, 'no, my name is Fourteen,' and they just looked at me. I said, 'that's me name, Fourteen,' and the nuns just said to me, 'Fourteen?' I said, 'yeah that's me name!'

SP *Did they change your name when you were in the laundry?*

FW No, me...n...oh no, I got me full title Frances Walsh [pseudonym].

SP *Okay, so they...*

FW No I knew me name was Frances Walsh...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...because I got older, but y...in the school you were never ans...allowed to answer your name...to Frances Walsh and to make matters worse was, it wasn't until I went home to [location removed] I realised me own first cousins were in the school with me, the O'Brien's [pseudonym].

SP *Oh.*

FW Four girls Deirdre, Eileen, Breda and Dorothy [pseudonyms] and they're me m...me ma's...me granny's brother's children...grandchildren, went to school with me. It wasn't until I went home I was told. Now, that will tell ya. How thick those nuns were, God forgive me. How mean they were to tell you things like that. You were I...living with your own first cousins and you didn't even know they were in school with you. Which is the truth!

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

FW I can still see the whole lot of them straight in front of me, the O'Briens. You know!

SP *Can you remember your first day at the laundry?*

FW Yes, standing at the...standing at the thing and breaking me heart crying, yeah.

SP *And what happened...*

FW And banging to get out.

SP *...yeah, actually was all the...were all the doors locked?*

FW *No, no.*<sup>3</sup>

SP *No?*

FW No, well I wouldn't remember that now. I remember...I remember going up the stairs...the brown stairs and going in a big room and it was the laundry and I stood there and *banged* the door out...to get out. Banged and banged on the door to get out. And I think it was Sister Aidan [pseudonym] was there and she said, 'listen love,' she said, 'they'll come for you'. Of course, I didn't know.

SP *And...*

FW And after that...

SP *...were you ever given an explanation...*

FW *No...*

SP *...as to why...*

FW *...no...*

SP *...you went to the laundry?*

FW *...no, no never!* And I asked her when I went into St Michael's Hospital<sup>4</sup> to work, I asked Sister Paul several times...

SP *Hmm.*

FW I asked Sister Aidan and she said, 'Frances, that's very confidential, I can't tell you'.

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<sup>3</sup> Please see page 38 for clarification from interviewee on whether women and girls were free to leave.

<sup>4</sup> St Michael's Hospital, Dun Laoghaire was located on the same campus as the Magdalene Laundry.

SP *Okay, so they never told...*

FW I can see Sister Aidan saying that to me, 'that's very confidential I can't tell you, that's very private'.

SP *Was it ever written on your files?*

FW No, we had no...what files?

SP *Sorry I mean the ones that you got, that you said your solicitor got.*

FW I didn't s...read them.

SP *Oh you haven't read them, okay.*

FW He got them.

SP *Okay.*

FW I never read them.

SP *Okay.*

FW I've never read them.

SP *Okay.*

FW That's why I said to you I don't know what's written on them...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...and when you said, 'what date,' I said, 'I don't know,' alls I know is they got the files, the length I worked at Michael's and all, how long I was in Michael's, the whole story.

SP *Yeah.*

FW So, I couldn't tell you that now.

SP *Okay.*

FW I wish I could, but I don't know that.

SP *Okay.*

FW No, I didn't read in the files, he got them. I just got a letter to say that...seventy-five euro for the files from St Michael's Hospital and I had to pay it...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...and the woman's name in the hospital. Now, that's all I know. Colm [pseudonym] will tell you that, sure Colm saw that letter.

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

FW Now.

SP *And can you tell me then...so...so that first day, did you go to work or...?*

FW *Yeah!*

SP *They put you straight to work?*

FW *Oh yeah, straight to [the] laundry! Yeah, yeah.*

SP *Can you tell me about it?*

FW I remember...I remember I was folding up the pillow cases, I can still see them. And you had to make sure they were perfect...well anyway I knew the laundry because I was doing the laundry

in Moate since we were knee high. So, you knew how to do them and helping them fold sheets, you know, two at each end, yeah. And putting them back in through and through *I can still see the big machine going around, the big...*

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...presser yeah, yeah. I can see every single thing! I can actually see the colour of the...the floor, the floor was grey, not tiles, grey...ordinary grey...like tile...you know, I can still see the floor.

SP *And did anyone explain to you anything...*

FW No...

SP *...about what you had to do or...*

FW ...no, no.

SP *...did they just give you an order like?*

FW No. Like you see, you didn't know anybody so you couldn't...you didn't know who you were.

SP *No, but I mean when you went into the laundry like...*

FW No Sis...

SP *...how did you know that you had to do that?*

FW ...Sister Aidan told me.

SP *Okay.*

FW Sister Paul.

SP *Yeah, and is that what you had to do, was that your job or did you do other things?*

FW Oh, other things, we did everything like...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...we did linen, we did the scrubbing the floors and we did the...the...like...doing the dre...the...the...the...what was it...ref...whatever you...not the...refectory...oh what you call it, used to call it...refectory...refectory...refectory...

SP *Refectory?*

FW ...the refectory, refectory.

SP *Yeah.*

FW That'd be the dining room...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...as we'd call it now, or *(spoken in posh accent) the parlour (laughs)*. The...things like that, you know, and...you know, polishing and...oh no we never got away with nothing, you d...did all your dusting, all...cleaning of the windows and all, oh you'd do everything!

SP *But I mean when you were in the laundry...*

FW *In the laundry.*

SP *...did you...did you do anything else other than the pillows...*

FW Oh no, no...

SP *...or was that your...was that your job?*

FW ...oh no, you learned how to iron the shirts and everything.

SP *Okay...*

FW Oh no...

SP *...so you did different things?*

FW ...oh yeah, that...you c...that...long...that was the first day, but we learned how to iron shirts and press trousers and all, ah no you learned everything, Jesus that's one thing...that's one thing I am, a good ironer! (*Laughs*) That's one thing...that's one thing I was good at is ironing anyway, stitching and knitting...oh we used to do knitting and stitching and all now. We used to knit and all, and stitch, and mend clothes, oh yeah, oh yeah. Oh it wasn't all in the laundry, oh no, you had to...like if something came in torn...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...or in...you had to mend them.

SP *Okay.*

FW Oh yeah, oh no you didn't get away with jam.

SP *Yeah.*

FW You got away with...you had to do your work.

SP *And do you remember sort of...how long...or what your working hours were?*

FW We started work at nine o'clock and we finished at a...a quarter past five to half five.

SP *Okay and was that...how many days a week?*

FW That was five days a week.

SP *Days...okay, and what did you do on the two days that you weren't working?*

FW Cleaning.

SP *Okay.*

FW Sunday we didn't work.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Sunday we had a bit of entertainment, as...maybe...gobshites come into entertain the poor refugees (*laughs*), not that I was interested in them anyway. You know, coming into entertain and things like that and the nuns come up to you and all, you know the usual...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...crap. (*Laughs*)

SP *And what was your living...your living conditions like?*

FW We had bedrooms.

SP *Okay and how many...*

FW And there were...if I can remember...I think there were ten beds in each...each dormitory. Yeah, I think it was ten, and we had a little thing around them.

SP *Oh like those hospital curtains?*

FW Yeah, exactly yeah.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Now a lot smaller than the hospital ones, but that was what it was yeah, and a little locker.

SP *Okay*

FW You know.

SP *...and how...was it warm, was it...what was the water like, you know...?*

FW Ah alright now, alright...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...because I mean there was always hot water because...on account of the laundry like you know you always had...h...oh no, the baths and all were there like, you know...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...big big bath...they weren't...the...I'm not talking about the old baths that you...the real baths. Ah no, if you had a chance you'd get a bath, you could go in there and get one, you know what I mean?

SP *Yeah.*

FW Ah no, now, I have to say to you I haven't much to give out about the laundry now, I haven't, I can honestly say to you. The only thing was that the nun put me in there for no reason at all, to work in a laundry, where I could have gone out and got a job...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...and earned a living...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...I never got paid.

SP *Yeah.*

FW That's the only thing, work was hard...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...but I have to say it to you, it was one hell of a difference from Moate Orphanage, and we were only babies then...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...think it over.

SP *Yeah. And I was just curious actually, you know with things like toothpaste and...now, this is me presuming...*

FW We didn't have toothpaste.

SP ...you didn't have...yeah...well there was me p...

FW We had a bar of soap...we'd a bar of soap, yeah.

SP *...well things like that...*

FW No we never had toothpaste [toothbrush] or toothpaste.

SP *Okay. So all the other kind of...*

FW That's why I lost my teeth so young.

SP *...really?*

FW I've false teeth since I was thirty-five. Sure we lost all our t...we lost every...

SP *So they never...you never...*

FW *...no...*

SP *...had tooth...*

FW *...no...*

SP *...toothpaste...*

FW *...no...*

SP *...or anything?*

FW *No, you just got your hair cut in there and God only knows what way it was cut, but it was cut.*

SP *Yeah.*

FW *No we'd no...we'd no hairdresser or anything like that. *Not at all*, are you joking me?*

SP *And so was there like...soap or anything like that?*

FW *Oh there was plenty of soap because I mean there was the...the...th...the...sure we used to use the soap on the shirts, the collars of the shirts, so we could rob one or something if you wanted one! *(Laughs)**

SP *Okay, so...but would they give you any money towards buying...*

FW *No, no...*

SP *...something or...?*

FW *...no sure we never seen...sure there was no shop there.*

SP *Okay.*

FW We never seen outside...we didn't...I'm telling you I didn't even know there was even such thing as a shop because I went straight from an orphanage into a laundry.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Sure I didn't know where a shop...I didn't even know what it was like to buy a bag...bag of sweets...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...until I went to [interviewee's home town removed].

SP *Yeah.*

FW I nearly died when I walked into...the first time I went into Mrs Doyle's [pseudonym] house and shop and I asked her, 'what are they?' She looked at me and says she, 'are you alright?' I said, 'what are they?' I had to ask her for the name...what were the sweets for. I swear to God, me cousin was with me! I can still see the two of us walking in together, she said, 'shut up you,' says she, 'they're sweets'. Now me own first cousin...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...had to tell me they were sweets. You didn't even know...w...we didn't even know what oranges and apples were! Well we knew apples because...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...of [the] tree, but oranges, pears, bananas, you didn't even know, they'd even existed.

SP *And what was your working...*

FW You know?

SP *...working conditions like? What...can you describe the laundry for me?*

FW It was hard, very, very hard because I mean the laundry were coming in, we were...we...we had the Carysfort Convent laundry, we had the Dominican Convent across the road, we had the hospital, we had the Christian Brothers, Jesus, we'd laundry from everywhere, but they had to be done, and they...them baskets would have to be full and ready to be brought out that evening.

SP *Okay.*

FW I mean you could get up to 400 sheets...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...to be done...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...pillow case[s], shirts and the Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, the Crofton Hotel Dun Laoghaire...the...oh, what was it...the one down there on the sea front? All the hotel work would all come into there.

SP *So all the hotels would have their...*

FW *Everything, yeah and the laundries...*

SP *So...*

FW ...the laundry one day the convents would be another day, the Christian Brothers would be another day, the hotels would be another day. *(Coughs)* And you were often called at night to get them t...tablecloths ready if there was weddings or anything...or...things.

SP *So would you say that the laundry was servicing all the businesses in...*

FW Of the s...

SP *...around...*

FW ...of the south...here yes...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...yeah.

SP *Around the area.*

FW I'd say from...I'd say from...I'd say from Carysfort Convent...that was Blackrock, down to...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...the Lourdes Hospital as well, that was there, St Michael's Hospital, the four hotels...oh no, there was five or six hotels then...ah yeah...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...Salthill Hotel, the Crofton Hotel...wait now, hold on, Salthill, the Crofton, the Royal Marine, the two down the far end, Haddington House, the Kearney Arms. Jaysus there was a lot of hotels then...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...in those days.

SP *Yeah.*

FW And we had all them laundries and the nuns can't say they didn't get paid, well we didn't! *They* got the money, we didn't.

SP *Do you have any idea of...*

FW *(Coughs)*

SP *...how much they got paid or...?*

FW I haven't a...I...I'd say it was a good...I'd say it was a good few bob each now. I'd say definitely a good...I'd say...I'd say they were paid by the month because when I went into Michael's Hospital to work then after, we got seven pound a month. Now I was only what, seventeen then when I went back to work there. I got seven pound a month. Now, seven a month and you were fed and all. *(Pause)*

SP *Yeah.*

FW You wouldn't even work for seven pound a wee...an hour now.

SP *No.*

FW You know what I mean? We were getting that *a month*. And by the time...the time it would come you'd owe it to everybody. You didn't have two shillings to rattle in your pocket. You know what I mean, it was a *terrible, terrible* hard life...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...terrible hard life. And when you look at it, if I was there for that year and a half where is that w...where is that whole year and a half wages? I never saw them! The nuns did.

SP *Hmm.*

FW What did they do with them, we don't know. We'll *never* know.

SP *Yeah.*

FW But they were able to go on all their luxury holidays, by hell they were!

SP *And what was the laundry like as in, was it very hot...*

FW A very old building.

SP *...okay.*

FW No not very hot now, down the laundry part was...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...the bedrooms weren't that warm.

SP *Hmm.*

FW Oh no, no, no, no, no, no. You just had to sleep in your bed and enjoy yours...bed to lie on.

SP *But I mean, down in the laundry?*

FW Oh, down in the laundry it was very warm. Ah sure the sweat would be pouring off you!

SP *Yeah.*

FW Ah yeah sure th...n...n...non-stop, big, big...the washing machines now...the washing machines we have now is a b...is a button...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...there were *huge*, big, big round tin ones and the *boiling* water coming out of them all...constantly, you know what I mean...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...and then the boiler going as well, there was a *huge* boiler.

SP *So was it very noisy?*

FW Oh yeah, and then the noise of the...the roller pin going and the noise of the machines, *oh*, oh yeah, it was a *huge* laundry now, *huge*!

SP *And were you allowed to talk with everyone else?*

FW Oh yeah we spoke to each other, yeah. But I used to hate saying the rosary. *Oh*, she'd come in and she'd start the rosary, Sister J...Sister Jarlath [pseudonym] and I'd say, '*if she doesn't shut up!*' 'Are you saying the rosary down there?' 'Ah yeah, we're all saying the r...' We were...yapping.

SP *Oh so you were supposed to say the...the rosary...*

FW Answer her.

SP *...when you were...*

FW *Yeah...working, yeah!*

SP *...doing the laundry like?*

FW *Yeah, yeah, yeah!*

SP *Okay.*

FW Yeah! Three or four times, then she'd come in for the Angelus, then she'd come in for something, and you're supposed to hear her over the machines. *Gobshite!*

SP *Did you make friends when you were in there?*

FW Ah I did, now I did. I can't remember now, but I did. I was never...I was never cruel, or I...I was...I used to pity the old people because I was like...younger like, you know.

SP *Yes, you would have been...were you...*

FW There was actually some of them...

SP *...one of the youngest?*

FW I was th...I was th...I was the baby of the house.

SP *Okay.*

FW It was like being...it was like a home! I was only a little one. To me I was a baby to them. Sure the eldest when I worked there was ninety-three.

SP *Wow!*

FW Hmm. And she was still working.

SP *Jesus.*

FW Now! She was doing...I'll tell you exactly what she used to do...and I can see her in front of me, folding up the serviettes.

SP *At ninety-three.*

FW She was working there, and I can still see her. She was a tiny little woman and she was bent over. And I can still see her sitting there, but she was lovely. She hadn't got a tooth in her head and her hair was all falling out and I actually remember when she died...because we all went down to the chapel, and after that you didn't know where she was buried, sure God only knows, you know what I mean?

SP *So you never like knew...*

FW No...

SP *...what plot she was in?*

FW ...no, no, no and a good few died while I was there actually, I think a good few...I think about four...f...about six or seven died while I was there now, old people...

SP *And what was the...*

FW ...but when they were sick they were brought up to the hospital you see. *(Coughs)*

SP *...what was the ritual when they died? The rit...like what did you do...like...so you would go down to the chapel...*

FW Down to the chapel for her and then they'd be very quick, there'd be a Mass for her, and then back to the laundry and forget about it, she's gone.

SP *Okay...*

FW You know, you couldn't...you couldn't turn around and say to the nun, 'where is she gone?' You'd be told mind your own business but...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...you wouldn't be bothered asking the questions you know.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Hmm.

SP *And were you allowed out?*

FW No.

SP *No, okay.*

FW *No, no, no.*

SP *And sometimes...some people might be under the impression that...*

FW Oh we used to...

SP *...that...that you were allowed...that you could have left whenever you wanted.*

FW *Oh, no, no.*

SP *What would you say to that?*

FW *No, no, no, no, no. No, you were not. No. I had to wait until my family collected me...*

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...sure I told you that...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...they came and collected me. They came...they came...they were after coming over from England, they came up to see me on...if I c...I can't remember the day now, it...it's just blankety-blank, but they came up to see me and that's when I first found out who they were and I remember my aunty Máire and my aunty Eithne [pseudonyms] standing there, two lovely...I can still see the two of them...and saying to me, 'we'll be back for you – tomorrow'.

SP *And they'd come over from England?*

FW And I didn't understand what they were saying and when I went back in I said to Sister Paul, 'who were they?' She said, 'they're your relations, they're coming back tomorrow for you'. I

went up the stairs and I remember telling the girls, 'I'm going tomorrow'. And they all looked at me and says, 'but going where?' I said, 'I haven't got a clue. Me relations are coming'. But says I, 'I've nobody belonging to me'. And the next thing...the following day after breakfast I was brought down the stairs into the parlour, the suitcase I came out of the orphanage with me, the coat I came out of the orphanage with me, *the skirt* I came out of the orphanage with me and *the jumper*... in the middle of September. The shoes I can still see, brown lace shoes, a pair of white ankle socks, I can still see them in front of me. A little brown suitcase about that size, God knows what was in it because I never even looked and I had to wait there for about an hour until me family came. They were after staying in bed and breakfast in the town...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...after that don't ask me a question because I haven't got a clue.

SP *Okay.*

FW Into the car with me family and I went off to [location removed].

SP *Okay.*

FW And when I drove into [location removed] I didn't know where the hell I was. There was a crowd at my granny's door, Dan took me out, God rest his soul, and me aunty Máire said, 'there's your nana, your grandma,' grandma they called her. I went over and threw my arms around her and I said, 'where were you all my life?' And I walked in, went into the bedroom and broke my fucking heart crying and I sat there for about three hours and didn't come out. It took me nearly a day to realise where I was.

SP *Did she give you an answer to that?*

FW No, *never*. The only one that ever told me anything was my aunty Elizabeth, mammy's twin sister. It was her that told me that it was mammy who wanted me in the school, not to end up like her with four children and (*whispered*) *not married*, that was the story because I was her first girl.

SP *Okay, oh you were her first girl?*

FW Her first daughter and she didn't want me to end up like her with four children and no father but she hadn't got four children then, she only had two boys and me, she didn't realise she'd have another one after. But she died...Nora [pseudonym] was born on the...the 17th of January and mammy died the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, same year.

SP *And we were...*

FW Fifty.

SP *...we were saying earlier on that you were the only one who went to an orphanage.*

FW The only one in the family, yeah I was.

SP *And can you just tell us what happened to the others?*

FW Me grandmother reared the two boys, me aunty Oonagh had no children, herself and Oliver Lynch [pseudonyms] and they adopted me sister.

SP *Okay, and yes...and that left you...*

FW And she went by Nora Lynch all her life, her name was Nora Walsh.

SP *Yeah.*

FW She lives in [location removed].

SP *Okay.*

FW Now. (Coughs)

SP *Just to go back to the laundry, did...so how did religion play...what was like...did you go to Mass every day?*

FW Oh we had to go to Mass every morning and say the rosary, and say the Angelus and say this and say that and say other, oh yeah, oh yeah we did all that.

SP *Yeah.*

FW And at Christmas we used to do Christmas pantomimes for the nuns.

SP *Oh really?*

FW Oh yeah, it was a scream.

SP *What was that?*

FW Oh God only knows but I remember once getting a...I...now...I used to love...I used to...to think it was great craic, I remember one time doing The...The Croppy Boy [song]. It's a so...ah it's about a little chi[ld]...I m...I remember standing there during...who was with me doing it, I can't remember but I know I remember breaking my heart laughing in the middle of it! (*Laughs*) And then we used to do an odd aul' pantomime you know, with the Murrays [pseudonym] and the craic, because I was the youngest I could do...you know. I wasn't really...I wasn't really...treated like one of them if you understand me?

SP *Hmm.*

FW I was treated very...how will I put it...I wasn't treated like some of the old people, I was treated very, very well.<sup>5</sup>

SP *Yeah.*

FW And I did get away with a...an odd aul'...for the craic, you know what I mean? Oh I did often go down to the hospital now, don't get me wrong, but I'd go down with the Murrays, the Quinns

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<sup>5</sup> See also pages 66-67

[pseudonym] you know? If the nuns like...do a concert with the...for the patients or anything like that.

SP *Oh okay.*

FW Yeah you know things like that now.

SP *Oh you do like a little...*

FW Yeah, yeah...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...a bit of Irish...because we learned Irish dancing at school.

SP *Okay.*

FW God help...now I wouldn't. But we used to go down and maybe do a bit of Irish dancing, you know for the patients...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...at Christmas but that's all, but sure, it's only a craic...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...but back to the laundry then.

SP *Okay.*

FW But now, yeah, I...I...I was...I wasn't...I was never treated badly.

SP *Yeah.*

FW No, no I couldn't...I...I...that's one thing about the laundry...the only thing about the laundry is the hard work in the laundry and the no payment.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Why...and why the nuns put me in there, there wasn't a thing wrong with me. I got married after, I'd seven children, he walked out when they were babies and I reared them all on my own.

SP *Really?*

FW And they're all reared now and they've all got their own children, I have great grandchildren and...

SP *Wow!*

FW ...there was nothing wrong with me...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...nothing in the world wrong with me. What did they put me into a laundry for?

SP *Yeah. Did they give you an education while you were in the laundry?*

FW No, no, no I learned that myself. I learned...it was great...because I learned how to knit and I love knitting, and learned how to sew and thank God I learned how to write.

SP *So...so any form of schooling ended...*

FW In...in the laundry...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...yeah. Now I read an awful lot, I'm a devil for reading and things like that. I love a book you know? And...I love...ah...I love me old pleasant life now and I'm happy and I'm here...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...to see it all gone through.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Many memories, hard to believe but they're all gone...they're memories you'll never forget...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...never, never forget. You'll never forget your past if you had a bad past, and mine was. Now that's my story.

SP *Could you tell me a bit about some of the women...any of the women that you...*

FW I can't remember them now because...

SP *...you can't...no...*

FW ...I mean I was so young.

SP *Yeah.*

FW I really now...I swear to God...

SP *How many roughly were in there?*

FW I'd say about 90.

SP *Yeah, okay.*

FW Now, I'd say about 90 now.

SP *Was anyone ever punished or anything...*

FW No.

SP *...while you were there?*

FW Well I wouldn't have seen it like...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...you know, I would have noticed that.

SP *Yeah.*

FW No I don't think so now, I have to be straight with ya, I...I never saw a beating or anything in that laundry.

SP *Yeah.*

FW No, I *never, never, never, never, never*, and the nuns were lovely, the two nuns Sister Paul and Sr Aidan were two *lovely, lovely* nuns.

SP *Did anyone from outside come in to work?*

FW No.

SP *Like did you ever see delivery men?*

FW Oh no, sure Paddy [identifying information removed]...Paddy done all the delivery...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...in a blue van...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...Patrick Bennett, they lived in [identifying information removed], and actually I became great friends of theirs after, I'm still great friends with the sons and the daughters.

SP *And sorry...he did what?*

FW *(Coughs)*

SP *He was kind of in the hospital?*

FW He was in the laundry...no he was the laundry, he was the laundry and Mr Thompson [pseudonym] was the boiler man.

SP *Okay.*

FW That's all we ever saw.

SP *Okay.*

FW No, never, no, no that's all. He was the...the man [who] done everything you know...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...the handy man around the house. No, there was no men or anything in it no, only Patrick.

SP *Okay. Were there any accidents when you were there?*

FW I don't remember any now, would you believe that now, really?

[Sound of papers rustling]

SP *Yeah.*

FW I don't remember any accidents now really...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...not now that I can remember, no, no I don't think so. Not that I can remember...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...no, no I never saw an accident, nor a falling or a breaking or anything – could have been now love, but I wouldn't remember.

SP *Yeah. No, I understand.*

FW I wouldn't remember you know, really.

SP *Do you remember what the...any...like...how would you say...how the women were do you know like...were they happy, sad?*

FW No I think they were all very happy, we were all very jolly and all. We used to have the old radio there and an aul' craic, you know and...no, no.<sup>6</sup>

SP *Did you have recreation?*

FW Oh yeah, oh yeah we had our own little thing, and d...we used to have a little dance night and all, like...dancing and all the craic, you know? Ah yeah, and the nuns would come up from the convent. Ah yeah, ah no, we did now, I can say that, then a few maybe...singing competitions for the craic and you'd get up and sing and you wouldn't even have two notes in your head but you'd might do it for the devilment, you know. Because the Beatles was out then...

SP *Okay.*

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<sup>6</sup> See pages 66-67, where interviewee expresses the view that the laundry may have been less harsh during her time.

FW ...and like...it's...going back...I'm going back...Connie Francis and...you know...records you'd hear and...oh we used to have a film and all, oh we'd have an odd film.

SP *What...when...when like, during the weekend or...?*

FW Oh yeah, yeah we'd have an odd film oh yeah, I remember a big film...they had their own big projectors, oh yeah.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Oh yeah. Who was this who used to show us the films? It wasn't Sister Jarlath...she used to show the films anyway. Ah yeah we'd have a film and all, now, I have to say to you.

SP *And were there any other...did you have any other visitors while you were there?*

FW No, no.

SP *And were there any inspectors or...?*

FW No, no, no never saw an inspector, *never...*

SP *Okay.*

FW ...in the laundry, *never*. They could've but I didn't see them, no.

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

FW No, not really, no, no, no I couldn't, no. I have to say to you, it was a nice...it was alright to me now, the only thing was the hard work and...as I told you before...

SP *Oh that's what I mean a positive like...*

FW ...yeah.

SP *...a good thing, what was a good thing about the laundry?*

FW They were very good to us, to my eyes...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...they weren't like...they weren't like the ones in...in Donnyb...in Donnybrook, they got an awful life. No, no there was no interfering with you or nothing. Well I w...I was never, never interfered [with] by a nun...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...in that...in that laundry, *never, never, never, never.*

SP *And what was the worst thing?*

FW The worst thing was going in and being...not told th...if I'm coming out and not knowing your family were there.

SP *Yeah.*

FW [Inaudible] Walk into the...the laundry not even knowing where you were going, and then not knowing that your own family would turn up...that you were in there for your family to collect you. Now, how would you feel about that? That's the only thing...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...otherwise there wasn't a thing.

SP *Yeah.*

FW *(Coughs)*

SP *And...yeah, did you have any fears or anxieties...*

FW Hmm.

SP *...while you were there?*

FW No.

SP *No, okay.*

FW No.

SP *What about hopes and dreams?*

FW *(Pause)* Now how could you have a hope and a dream when you didn't even know from Adam who you were, for [the] first sake, you only found out your name when you went to a laundry. You didn't know you had nobody belonging to you. Alls you ever thought was you were just...they used to call them "the orphanage child". How could you have a dream?

SP *Yeah.*

FW You didn't even know what a.../I didn't even...when I left that school I didn't know the difference between the two sex[es] because we never saw a film in our lives. *How* would you have a dream that one day you'd meet a man and get married? Sure, you didn't kn...even know what you were ta...you'd be looking at yourself as if you were thick. A man, who's a man? Although the priest was on the altar, the priest was never in his trous...they were in trousers, but they were hidden with this big yoke [vestments]. How would you know the difference between a man and a woman?

SP *Yeah.*

FW Isn't that the truth!

SP *It's true, yeah.*

FW You came out as thick as you w...God forgive me, I know I went in as a baby, little infant but you came out like an infant again...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...from the orphanage.

SP *What was it like...*

FW You went up there...you went up there into the laundry and you walked straight into women again, and nuns. It was like walking from...from your baby step into your grown up...as thick as two left feet, you didn't know where you were. So that's the way it was.

SP *And what was it like meeting men for the first time?*

FW When I seen me uncle for the first time I looked as if...as if he had four heads, *I did!*

SP *Yeah.*

FW I kept saying, 'and who are you?' He said, 'Frances, I'm your ma's brother'. And I remember turning around saying, 'my name is not Frances, my name is Fourteen'. And he looked at me and he says – I remember Sister Paul – 'Fourteen? Her name is Frances Walsh. As long as I know she is, she's me...me sister's child'. I remember me aunty Máire...me aunty Máire...I remember me aunty Máire breaking her heart crying, and me aunt Eithne. And then we were going down in the car I was telling them like, the...that's why...we were called in the orph[anage]...I hardly spoke actually, but a few things I did say...I remember telling them...well I don't remember, me aunty Máire told me after – she's still alive actually, she's ninety-three – and she said to me, she said, 'I remember,' she said, 'you turning around and telling us your right name, and you asked us what we were talking [about]'. *(Pause)* And you're asking me if I've got a dream? What dream? Fourteen, a child, no one knew, no one wanted, until she turned seventeen...I mean how could you...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...you know what I mean? It's a question you can't answer.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Well I couldn't answer it anyway. Because if I tried to answer it I'd be looking for something...and I'd only make it up because I wouldn't...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...I wouldn't do that.

SP *Yeah.*

FW I'd rather tell you the straight...the truth...

SP *Exactly.*

FW ...out straight, that's the truth, I didn't know from Adam who I was. Alls I knew was I was Number Fourteen, an orphan child. Nobody belonging to me, so I thought, until all of a sudden then the...the navy and the army and everything turned up, everyone was there, you know what I mean?

SP *Yeah.*

FW So how could you say it?

SP *And can you describe the feeling, how you felt when suddenly you knew that there was this whole family and...?*

FW I was shocked! I cried for three days...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...non-stop! Every time anybody would look at me I was in tears. And I...I...I...and even when I went down...I couldn't even sit in the kitchen...I wouldn't even sit at my granny's kitchen table, they had to give it to me in the room. I wouldn't...I...I was actually...I was actually ashamed...but I didn't realise what shame was. I felt...absolutely *dumb* that they were my family and I didn't know who they were and I was standing there and I remember my uncle Liam, mammy's other brother, and my aunt Aideen coming up and bringing me down to [location removed], their house, the number seventeen actually, and...seven...and I walking in and I sat down and I remember saying to my uncle Liam, 'who are you?' Now I became *great* with him in the end, *ah*, me and Liam were great craic, and I can still see my uncle Liam) saying to me, 'I wanted you too and your mother wouldn't give it, we *all* wanted you, but your mother said, "no she's going to the orphanage". But I often say maybe she knew what she was doing, but I will never forgive her. I know she's me mother...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...but I will never forgive her. I remember saying that to my uncle Liam, my uncle Dan – they're me ma's brothers – and my aunt Elizabeth, and Sophia [pseudonym] and them all, I was saying, 'I'll never forgive her'. Why throw me in the school and let the boys be reared where they were, because Nora didn't exist then...

SP *And you never knew...*

FW ...she...she didn't again for ten years after...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...she was born 1960 and I was born '50.

SP *And you never knew who your father was?*

FW *Never knew from Adam who he was, where he was from, who he was, how he was, what he was.*

SP *Hmm.*

FW I never knew who Nora's father was, me...or me brothers Donal or Stephen's [pseudonyms] and they don't know either. And Donal is forty...and Donal is forty...forty-five or sorry seventy-five...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...and Stephen is seventy-one, and I'm going on seventy. And Nora's...Nora's going on sixty-two...three and she doesn't know...sixty-three now, and never knew who her father was and nobody ever told us, the family and there was eighteen of them and not one of them could tell one of us. Think it over, sometimes I often feel a bit...particularly annoyed with me own family as well you know, me mother's...especially me mum's twin sister, cl...again very close to Elizabeth.

SP *Hmm, yeah.*

FW You know, when you think of it, why didn't they sit us down and tell us the truth?

SP *And how do you get on with your siblings now?*

FW Ah, if I see them I see them, if I don't I don't. Ah I get...get on great...I get on great with Donal, I really do and I get on great with Stephen, but I'm not very, very keen on me sister, she can be a two-faced little bitch when you want, if you let her away with it. She lives in [location removed] and we were after having a couple...a couple of times having a few cross words over stupid little things (*coughs*) because...her and her husband...which I was very fond of Fergus [pseudonym], very fond of Fergus – Fergus committed suicide – and she got home with a s...which I'm not very fond of...Elizabeth, and I brought up something one day or something sarcastic, well it wasn't sarcastic it was a question, and she answered me smart. So, I said to her, 'here sis, don't answer me the way you think you are,' I said, 'you're my baby sister, I'm ten years older,' I said, 'don't speak to me...' So I...if I see her I see her, if I don't I don't.

SP *Okay, did...and was there any...ever any resentment of the fact that none of them had to go and you did, did you ever feel any resentment?*

FW Yes, I did, yes I did, yes *definitely, definitely, definitely*. I said it over and over again, I've been at weddings, I've been at christenings with all our family and I've always brought up that subject. *Why me? Why me?* There was plenty of you there. I said, 'Oonagh had no children, aunty Máire...aunty Eithne had only...or aunty Máire had only two chil...' she hadn't even children then, because she was well married when Emma was born...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...and Niall [pseudonyms]. There was my aunty Eithne and me uncle Jack [pseudonym], every one of them, I could have easily been put in...one more into the family. No, the gobshites throw me into the school. Me.

SP *Yeah, And given the fact that you never had a family...*

FW *(Coughs)*

SP *...how did you cope like, becoming a mother for the first time, like how did you find being a mother?*

FW Well, I'll tell you my story. I ended up working in Michael's Hospital, I married...I walked into...I walked into marriage with me eyes bli...blind. I married a fellah from [location removed], I met him in the hospital. I married him, I got pregnant, which was the biggest mistake of me life, of course then there was no such thing as the pill and this, there's everything now...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...but back then. I ended up having me eldest son James, who will be fifty now in October, then I had a daughter Kim, I had Conor...that's Conor, I had Rosie, I had Eugene, I had George and Isabelle, [pseudonyms] no I hadn't got Izzy, leave Izzy out, that's the baby that's getting married now in [location removed]...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...she's not the [first] family, the first family is six kids. I lived in the [location removed] flats...no, I got married to him, and lived in [location removed], *never, never* got on with his family because, you know me, I...I never really...because I was never in...maybe it was because I never knew what a family was like, if you understand me.

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

FW I never knew it so I kind of walked into marriage with me eyes closed and stupid. Now, I'll put it that way.

SP *Okay.*

FW Of course, then the generation came along and generation...I *hated* me father-in-law, couldn't stand the ground he walked on. Anyway, I think that's another story. I got on with one sister-in-law which I'm still very, very, very fond of and that's Betty [pseudonym], otherwise the other eleven can go to hell because I don't...I don't want nothing to do with them, nothing! And the wedding's coming up in a few weeks' time and there's not one of them will be at that wedding, only Betty. Bon voyage, good luck and see you all. And then I was living in the [location removed] flats and I was...I went into...I had George, that's the youngest lad, he was a month and four days old when one night me husband came home from work – should I tell you this story?

SP *Yeah.*

FW I came home from work...he came home from work, I was standing in the bathroom bathing the two boys and putting them to bed and the next thing about a half an hour after me neighbour across the road came over and said, 'where's Ian [pseudonym] off to?' I looked at her, I said, 'he's in the bedroom!' She said, 'no he's not Frances, he's gone out the window with his suitcase'. I said, 'say that again?' You see myself and my sister-in-laws don't get on, she's going to be...she's going to be involved in this story. I said, 'what?' Says [s]he, 'he's gone!' I said, 'he couldn't be sure, James has gone down...' James was seven now so he was able to go to the shop, because the shop was down around the corner...gone down to get razors for his daddy. 'Sure Frances he's gone now...' 'Ah,' I said, 'will you go away out of that'. So, of course...continued to wash the kids, got them all into bed...gave them their supper, put them

into bed and all. So, then I'm sitting and waiting on him to come home...thinking... So off to bed I went and the next morning no sign, and the next...no sign. So, I said to myself, 'well here now...' I said...I got me friend to come in and mind the kids. So, I borrowed me bus fare and made it into where he worked and I walked in and that was up in [location removed] in Dublin. I said to the thing, I said, 'is Ian Dunne [pseudonym] here?' And he looked at me and he says, 'Frances', I said, 'what?' He said, 'your husband has gone to Australia'. Well...now my child was only a month old, so I was still only getting over the birth of a baby, and the other lad was only thirteen months old and the other was only three, five, six and seven.

SP *Jesus.*

FW I said, 'say that again?' He said, 'I thought you were going to Australia with the children?' I looked at him and said, 'what are you fucking talking about?' So, they brought me into the head office, took out these files and I looked at them and says I, 'what the hell is that?' Here was I (*rustles papers*) and I seen me name printed at the bottom! I kept looking...says I, 'that's not my handwriting!' says I, 'I'm a script writer, I never joined writing in my life!' He said, 'are you sure Frances?' I said, 'I swear to God,' says I, '*that is not my handwriting!*' And I was crying and all, I threw me...tables...he says, 'hold on Frances'. So, another top man come down and he says, 'who's your doctor?' So, I said Dr Morgan Healy [pseudonym]. He said, 'grand,' he said, he picked up the phone and rang Dr Healy, he said, 'Dr Healy,' he says, 'I've Frances Dunne here,' he said, 'in the office,' he says. Says he, 'is Frances not gone to Australia?' The doctor's after saying the same on the phone! (*Laughs*) It's funny now when you think of it. He said, 'no she's here, she's *heartbroken*. The quare fellah's gone off and never left her a penny.' So, then it's all coming into me head says I...then I not...then I turned around and I said, 'sure Winnie O'Callaghan [pseudonym] is gone to Australia,' the woman across the road! So, he says, 'who are you talking about?' Says I, 'a neighbour across the road,' says I, 'he became very friendly with the family'. Didn't she fuck off to Australia with him! But what got me worse was...didn't...me sister ended up a week after on the doorstep, from London right, with the two boys. Says she, 'ah I just came over to help ya'. And I looked at her, says I, 'how did you know,' I said, 'he's gone to Australia because I haven't written to you? And Donal doesn't know and Stephen doesn't know, and no one in [interviewee's hometown removed] knows'. So the old cat...wasn't she after putting them up with her...

SP *So this...*

FW ...for two nights.

SP *...is your actual sister?*

FW My own sister put...

SP *Oh my God!*

FW ...her and him up for two nights that's how I've never forgiven her!

SP *Jeez.*

FW In [location removed], and drove them to London airport and put them on the flight.

SP *My God.*

FW But she denied it! So, didn't I get proof from his brother because Robert was with them, Robert Foley [pseudonym]. So, I got Robert and Robert said, 'you did Nora, tell the truth, you did put them up,' because he said, 'I'm telling you,' he said, 'the woman was really, really nervous that night when she knew you were Frances's sister'. Because you see, they were related to me because...because of me sister. So...*oh* I told her that I'd...killed her...I'd throw her out and all, says I, 'you can get back to London!' I says, 'you're not staying here!' So, she did go back but she came back a while after then and she stayed for a while with me because she was trying to be...do you know...the sympathy one, she only came back to get away from her husband because I didn't know their marriage was broke up either. But imagine your own sister...and she...

SP *Jesus.*

FW ...knew all about it. And it was the mot [Winnie] that was after signing all the papers, it wasn't my handwriting. We had to get her husband...now her husband was left on his own with the two kids and we had to get Martin O'Callaghan [pseudonym] to go down to the doctors...or go

into see...to prove that was his wr...handwri...his wife's handwriting. Now he's dead and buried as well now, God rest him, but...

SP *Jesus.*

FW So there's a story...oh yeah there were about six weeks...he was about six weeks gone I'll never forget it, I was in the kitchen I was getting the kids ready for school, a big bang comes on me hall door and there's this big man...two big men and a woman...you want to hear this...and they stood at the door, 'we're here to bring your child to the s...your children to the school'. I says, 'stand there for one minute'. So I closed the door, I had a pot of boiling water that size and I said, 'if you don't get the *fuck* away from here *now*, I'm going to scald you!' I said, 'I was reared in an orphanage and that's one place my kids will *never* end up in'.

SP *Def...oh were they going to take the kids away from you?*

FW *Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!* And from that day I never saw another one because Dr Healy was up like a shot, someone rang Dr Healy – Doctor Healy was very good to me – he said, 'what happened Frankie?' He said, 'you'll rear them the way you...better than the way you...' because he knew all about me, I told him everything. He said, 'you'll rear them and they'll be proud...' which he did, God love him, he used to always say to me, 'Jesus,' he said, 'to see those children, you reared every one of them'. I used to make all their own clothes and all, that's where...thank God I learned how to dress make, I used to make all me little girls...knit all their jumpers and knit...knit their...

SP *And how did you...*

FW ...make their skirts.

SP *...how did you learn to be a mother? Do you know like...how did you know...do you know...*

FW Because we reared the orphanage children! We were reared...we reared the children ourselves! We bathed them, we changed them, we fed them! It was us that reared the children in the orphanage, not the orphan...nun...not the nuns, are you joking me? They bet [beat] us, we reared them! We reared the kids! There was one girl actually I did rear, and I know her,

Colette [pseudonym] (*coughs*) she's married and all now, she has no children of her own but she always says, 'that was my half mammy!' Colette McKenna, 'that was my half mammy,' I reared her (*coughs*) I reared her. She lives down in [location removed] County Meath, she has her own bungalow and all now.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Hmm. Colette. I reared her; she was my little...little doll then. I think she was half me age then.

SP *And you seem like to me...like a very strong woman would you say...*

FW I got strong.

SP *...that's what I was going to ask...*

FW *Yeah.*

SP *...how did that...*

FW I...I can be...I can be very tough.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Yes, yes.

SP *Would you say that... is that as a result of what happened to you?*

FW Of what happened...my life yeah, that it taught me a lesson...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...never to...never to look back, keep going and I've done it!

SP *Yeah.*

FW Now, I'm nearly seventy now and I'm proud. I've got thirty grandchildren, I've ten great-grandchildren and I'm proud of every single one of them...

SP *Wow.*

FW ...and I love every one of them. And I've a daughter getting married now, the last...me baby, Isabelle's getting married (*coughs*) in June (*coughs*) and I'm very proud to say they're mine. And the eldest will be fifty now in October, and...and we're very close me and...the whole lot of us are...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...very close family

SP *That's very good.*

FW ...very close family.

SP *And just tell me something, how do you feel towards religion?*

FW Don't believe in it.

SP *And what about the religious orders?*

FW Fuck them. Excuse the language! (*Laughs*)

SP *I like the one-word response! (Laughs)*

FW *God forgive me!* No. No, I don't believe in priests and I don't believe in nuns.

SP *Yeah. And can you tell me...*

FW And I don't believe in the Pope either.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Not being smart with you. Now I say me own prayers, I have me own little way of praying, but I don't go to Mass. I'm not two-faced, I don't give a hoot. Now.

SP *Yeah. And can you tell me how your...these institutions, both the laundry and the orphanage, how they affected you psychologically?*

FW *Oh, at the start...oh when I was young yeah, oh God they did! And actually do you know what, they actually in one way, the laundry was a great...the laundry was a very good thing for me when I got married because I mean it was great, I know I learned how to knit in the orphanage and all and I learned how to knit there and everything, but I ended up learning how to Aran knit and how to dress and all and mend. So, from them little bits and pieces I done the cooking, I've learned how to be a mum. I always had it in me that if I ever had a child I would rear it and be proud of it, and I've done it. I've reared seven of them. And I'm proud to say I was their mother and I'm proud to say they're my children.*

SP *Yeah.*

FW And even me grandchildren, because I reared half the grandchildren as well *(laughs)* but they're there and I love each and every one of them

SP *Yeah.*

FW Hmm. Yeah, yes, yes, yes.

SP *Did...did these two institutions have any long-lasting effects on you?*

FW The orphanage.

SP *Can you tell me how?*

FW Because I c...I can't bear, I...I have seven children and I have never once...lifted my hand to one them because I couldn't, for the beatings I got. That would be bringing my whole life back if I hit one of my kids.

[Third party identifying information removed]

FW Yeah, that would bring my whole life back. Thinking...you couldn't have the hands of that big...beast had, what she done to me, I couldn't do to my children. My mouth was m...my mouth was my action. If...my mouth had to do everything I said because they'd be dead by now. *'I'll kill ya! I'll murder ya!'* But that was all mouth talk, never hand talk, thank God.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Never hand talk, no, no. I couldn't, and if I ever saw anybody hit a child I'd hit them quicker.

SP *Yeah.*

FW I would scream, you'd hear me in Kerry, 'take your hands off that child,' I would, I would. I'd end up killing them instead of...killing me...kill...I would, in temper.

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

FW *(Coughs)* The most memorable events in my life was having the birth of my first son. *(Pause)* Now.

SP *Very good.*

FW Having me first child and to say that at least I'll be a mammy to that child for the mother I never had. There's an answer...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...couldn't get it any better.

SP *No you couldn't.*

FW I reared him, you'd want to see the size of him. He's brilliant, he had...the lies of course they all say, 'oh Jim...James is mummy's best,' he's not, he's just...he was me first child, and it will always be a memory to me, that I was lying in that labour ward and I was saying to myself, 'I never thought that one day I'd have a child that I could say I'd be a mammy, for a mother I never had'. I couldn't believe it either.

SP *Yeah.*

[Third party identifying information removed]

FW I've said it to my children, I've said...every one of them...I said, 'there's not one in this world knows what's going on at the back of your mother's mind'.

SP *Hmm.*

FW Well the person...the person that's been in them laundries and them orphanages and there's nobody can tell them, only themselves what it is because the tape will always be there, the memory. And I said that to the last solicitors and the doctor looked at me and he said to me, 'my God,' he says, 'you put it right on the pin'. I said, 'how would you like to be me sitting up there and you down here, you're telling your story?'

SP *Hmm.*

FW And he looked at me and he said, 'what do you mean?' I said, 'memories are one thing, never fades a person's mind, think of that'. I was roaring when I said that, bejaysus they were all looking at me crying! No, but I had to say it.

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

FW I mean it's alright for a person... [third party identifying information removed] ...the only person that will understand is [third party identifying information removed] meself.

SP *I agree, yep.*

FW Now do you understand me?

SP *I do, I do.*

FW There's not one in this world that will ever...from the time you go into that orphanage till I left that laundry that's a tape for the rest of my life. And when I go they'll come with me, those memories.

SP *Yeah. And can you tell me...you know, who you are today, how it's...is it different to the person that you left, when you left the laundry?*

FW Yes, yes.

SP *Can you tell me how?*

FW I'm completely different. I...learnt...through mistakes in life that's gone. I learnt through hardship, through life that's gone, and I learnt to keep my spirits up and keep going, keep going, keep going because everything will be alright on the other side of the rainbow.

SP *Yeah.*

FW There you are.

SP *And we're just going into the very last bit. I just want to ask about your experience with the Redress [Board]. We don't need to go into details, I just want to ask you your opinion of it. We were kind of discussing it earlier...*

FW Yeah.

SP *...what did you think...did you think that they did the right thing?*

FW I definitely think...oh yes, yes.

SP *Th...you know for...for the orphanage bit?*

FW Oh yeah for the orphanage yes, oh that was great, but the line of the laundry, the Magdalene in Donnybrook and in that...Gloucester Street or whatever you call it, their lives seemed to have been an awful lot different from us in Dun Laoghaire. Now, that's *my* opinion from the way I've listened to it, I've watched it, I...I rang Nicola [pseudonym] one night at half ten and told her it was on the telly. I said, 'turn on TV3,' and we were talking on the phone, I watched those *women* but the way these...them women were in maybe thirty years ahead of us, that's going in...into the thirties.

SP *Yeah.*

FW So, to my eyes I think the laundries got more...softer. I mean I went into them in the fifties, that was what, twenty years before that. Seeing them people and throwing down into them thing...we were not! We were never *thrown* into a pit, coal bucket, or whatever you call it...coal hole...where they were, do you know what I mean? You seen it all didn't you...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...on the telly? [Third party identifying information removed] Now in the orphanage we didn't... we got that, we got the beatings and thrown under the stairs and all but never in the laundry. I think the laundries improved when *I* came into them.<sup>7</sup>

SP *Actually I forgot to ask you what...what food did you get there?*

FW Oh the I...food was perfect.

SP *What...what...can you just describe it to me?*

FW Oh, we got a boiled egg in the morning, you could get scrambled egg, you could get to...you could porridge if you wanted, but...ugh...*beluh...buh...buh buh*, that's enough, it makes my

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<sup>7</sup> Dun Laoghaire laundry closed in 1963, and thus the interviewee would have been there in the period just before its closure.

stomach sick! Toast, we got our soup, we got our dinner...we got a full dinner, potatoes, vegetables, everything. We got our tea, you could get...beans on toast, you could get sausages on toast, you could get bananas. Oh no, no, no...and we had a cup of tea before we went to bed at night. Oh no, no, no, no, give credit where it's due, no definitely, and I can still see...make...I can see meself in the laun...I was often down in the kitchen, cooking in the kitchen.

SP *Oh did you cook as well?*

FW Oh yeah, oh yeah and Sister and mes...self doing the potatoes and all, the vegetables, oh yeah. No, no I think the laundries improved an awful lot between the thirties and the fifties, because watching them laundries there when the poor women were talking, like there was one woman on it there and she was from Galway and she's in her eighties now.

SP *Hmm.*

FW Now you think of it, I know I'm seventy but ten years can be an awful lot of difference.

SP *Hmm, yeah.*

FW Ten years can change very quickly. Now for all we know, the inspectors could've been in the sch...in the laundries in between that for all we know, and things changed. And you see I wasn't long enough going in to really *realise* where p...some of them women were in for over twenty and thirty years. Now, do you know what I mean?

SP *Yeah.*

FW So, it was an awful, big difference from my age to their age...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...you know?

SP *Yeah.*

FW Now I have a cousin that was in one, Thelma [pseudonym], she was in one in Longford, not in Longford, in...somewhere down...Roscommon, I can't remember...one of those...she said to me...Thelma Burke, my cousin...said she was in one and she got a hard life, she's older than me Thelma, me aun...me aunty Sophia's daughter, she was in one. But I never really...

SP *In a laundry or...?*

FW She was in a laundry.

SP *Okay.*

FW But, I never really asked...I never told her I was in one. You see she knew I was in the...she knew I was in the orphanage but she never knew I was in the laundry because Thelma is an awful...'rent a mouth' I call her! She's first cousin of mine and *oh*, she'd drive me around the twist anytime I go home (*coughs*) she'd be up like a shot to me, 'have you any money Frances, cigarettes Frances, buy me a drink Frances? *Fuck off, will you Thelma!* You know that way. (*Coughs*)

SP *Did you tell anyone else...*

FW (*Coughs*)

SP *...like did you tell your children?*

FW I never told my children until I put in for that orphanage [RIRB], that I was in an orphanage.

SP *Ah okay, and why didn't you tell?*

FW Not one of my children knew until out of the blues...I sat down one night and I bursted out crying in me daughter's kitchen and she looked at me and said, 'what's wrong with you ma?' I said, 'I'm going to tell you something,' I said, 'that I should've told you years ago'. And the two of them looked at me, that was Izzy and Rosie, of course it was her that told me to tell them...

SP *Okay.*

FW ...Nicola. I said, 'do you remember all the stories I told...' I used to make up an awful lot...I did make up lies, but they weren't lies, they were actually shame. You don't tell lies...you don't tell lies to nobody, it's shame, do you understand what I mean?

SP *Yeah.*

FW You were afraid to tell the truth, so you shame yourself down to the lowest to get away with it, which I did. I told my kids and all I was born in [interviewee's hometown removed] and I was reared in [location removed] and this, that and the other, and this that and the other and...I mean the things I used to tell them God love 'em! No wonder the poor kids are unhappy now! *(Laughs)* But I turned around one day and I just said, 'listen loves I wasn't born in [interviewee's hometown removed], I was born in an orphanage, reared in an orphanage'. And then I told them about going for the orphanage thing [RIRB]. But we sat down, we talked and all, and I did, I cried me heart out now and I rang Nicky, and Nicky said, 'God bless you, once you broke the news, you've done it now, it's off of your ch[est]'. But I always had a lump there...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...it was there! *And I would not break it until that night.*

SP *Did you tell them about the laundry?*

FW I told them about the laundry, everything I told them everything.

SP *Yeah.*

FW *'Ma, don't let them away with it...g...go get...get your money back, you're due that off them.'*  
*'Yeah for you to get it!' I used to say to them, joking you know. Oh no...*

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...never told them.

SP *And speaking of getting your money back, how would you like this compensation [Magdalene Redress Scheme]...what would you like from it?*

FW I don't know darling because I tell you why...thinking of it now, there was an awful lot worse than I was, oh there was. I know I was a year and a half in it, but my God to see some of them, I mean her mother [interviewee's friend Nicola], 46 years in it. I mean...you know what I mean?

SP *Yeah.*

FW I mean I came out and then realised that I'd a family, but some of them went to their graves not even knowing who they were, like hardly knowing their own names and maybe their names weren't even their own names, when you think of it.

SP *Yeah.*

FW When you think of it, some of them people went there and they didn't know their own names, they could be nuns' names that...nuns gave them, say, 'oh your name is Biddy Milligan or you're Molly...Molly this and...Kitty this and...' and you just took your name.

SP *Yeah. And who's responsible for your...for...for you being sent to a laundry?*

FW *The fucking...Moate...the orphanage! Moate, Sister Benignus and Moate Orphanage and nobody else!*

SP *Yeah.*

FW *Sister fucking Benignus, God forgive me, if I had me hands around her now, I would...I know I hit her with a ruler once, but if I had...around...[inaudible] put a rope around her and hang her from the highest tree I could get me hand on, I would!*

SP *Yeah.*

FW I'd hang her! Or I'd crush her from here to hell and back, now God forgive me I would! And I've said that to them.

SP *Yeah. And have you ever complained to anyone about your treatment?*

FW Hmm. The only one I ever said was the...the nun...the solicitors...

SP *To the sol...yeah.*

FW ...and yourself.

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

FW Oh my partner I've told a lot to.

SP *Yeah.*

FW I've hid nothing from Sid [pseudonym], I told Sid everything .

SP *This is...partner since...*

FW Ah I'm with him 26 years for God's sake, 27, we're more like husband and wife now.

SP *Yeah.*

FW We're together years...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...but he knows everything.

SP *Okay.*

FW Sid knows everything. Do you know actually...the only one I've ever told an...anything really to. I don't tell...not...I never let my business out with people...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...no, no. I'm very private in me own little way.

SP *Do you trust people?*

FW *No...no.*

SP *Yeah.*

FW But I mean *how could you*, how could you...you couldn't even trust your own family. Well I couldn't anyway. Now, I don't mean me children...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...I'm talking about my own family. I mean there's...there's some of my aunts gone to their grave and I've never even met them. I've uncles gone to the grave and I've never met them. My granddad went to the grave, I never met him. Where was the excuse not to let me see them? To know that they even existed? I was told nothing...

SP *Hmm.*

FW ...until I was seventeen. That was seventeen and...seventeen years gone out of my life, seventeen and a half years of my life, destroyed...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...just thrown like a rag, think of it.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Where I'm after rearing all mine, they've seen the day they were born up to seventeen, they've seen all...they've got married, they're all...they've got everything. Everything they ever wa...anything they ever wanted w...if I ha...if I had I gave it to them.

SP *Yeah.*

FW I got nothing...

SP *And how did you feel...*

FW ...just hardship.

SP *...how did you feel when you came up...you know, did you have to give testimony to do with the orphanage...*

FW Oh yeah...

SP *...did you have to...*

FW ...oh yes.

SP *How was that for you?*

FW That's...*oh my God! Oh stop!* I thought I was going to have a heart attack.

SP *Yeah.*

FW The questions you were asked...but at least I told the truth...

SP *Yeah.*

FW ...because everything I told them was exactly what I told the solicitor and told the barrister everything, I hid *nothing*. Just like I'm after speaking to you, I hid *nothing*. And if I did let out a few curses and swears out I done it to them as well because it is very, very hurtful.

SP *Yeah.*

FW Very, very hurtful to think that you were reared by the number Fourteen, was your name, you hadn't got a clue who you were, who you belonged to, who your mother was, who your thirty-first uncle was...who's...you were just another...dirt, thrown there. And that's what I was, thrown like a rag.

SP *Well Frances, thank you so much...*

FW Yeah...

SP *...for being so open...*

FW ...oh very open I am.

SP *...and for...for...for spending this time on this interview.*

FW Thank you very much.

SP *If...if you've got nothing else to say I'll turn the...*

FW No, I've nothing else to say.

SP *Well thank you very much.*

FW Just that...I'm glad I met you, thank you!

SP *Thank you.*

FW Thank you.

[Interview ends]