



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



<b>Reference Code:</b>	MAGOHP/12/ANON
<b>Oral History of:</b>	Bernadette
<b>Pseudonym?</b>	Yes
<b>Status:</b>	Survivor
<b>Keywords:</b>	Good Shepherd Mother and Baby Home, Belfast; Nazareth House, Fahan, Co. Donegal; adoption; class differences; Factories Acts/health and safety issues; difficulties with obtaining adoption information.
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<b>Transcript:</b>	107 pages
<b>Number/Format of Audio Files:</b>	One .wma file
<b>Interviewer:</b>	Dr Sinead Pembroke
<b>Records/Papers included:</b>	None
<b>Access Conditions:</b>	Anonymised interviews are freely available to the public. Immediate release of transcript and anonymised audio; interviewee's identity will be revealed after 30 years.
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## Notes on Redaction and Transcription Process

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Interviewee Initials: B  
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
- The names of some locations have been removed and/or assigned pseudonyms
- Other identifying details have also been removed to protect the interviewee's identity

### List of Pseudonyms

Pseudonym	Status/Relationship to Interviewee
Bernadette	Interviewee/survivor
Aislingstown	Interviewee's home town/location of laundry
Jim Murphy	Relative of religious sister who was a hurler
Sr Regina	Consecrated Magdalene
Sr Kieran	Consecrated Magdalene
Mother Ignatius	Third party religious
Mother Adrian	Third party religious
Mother Ita	Third party religious

### Basic Data from Interview

Name/Pseudonym	Bernadette
When Born	1944
Born outside marriage?	No
Raised by	Family
Education	Second-level
Emigrated?	No
Physical ailments?	No
Of Note	Was sent to Northern Ireland and then transferred to the Republic of Ireland; interviewee treated differently because she is middle-class; interviewee recalls member of Cumann na mBan confined in Belfast laundry.

<b><i>Mother and Baby Home</i></b>	
Order	Good Shepherds
Location	Belfast
From	Circa 1966
To	Circa 1966
Duration of stay	9-10 months

<b>Age on entry</b>	Twenty-two
<b>Entered Via</b>	Family
<b>House Name/No</b>	No
<b>Haircutting/punishment?</b>	No
<b>Circumstances of Departure</b>	Transferred to Magdalene Laundry

<b><i>Magdalene Laundry</i></b>	Name/location not stated for confidentiality reasons
<b>From</b>	Late 1966
<b>To</b>	Early 1967
<b>Duration of stay</b>	Approximately three months
<b>Age on entry</b>	Twenty-two
<b>Entered Via</b>	Mother and Baby Home
<b>House Name/No</b>	No
<b>Haircutting/punishment?</b>	No
<b>Circumstances of Departure</b>	Sent to work in a hospital

[Interview begins]

[Unidentified background noise throughout interview]

SP *Okay so, thank you very much Bernadette, for joining us today and I just wanna...before we start the interview, I would like to ask you to confirm that you agree to participate in this interview...*

B Yes.

SP *...voluntarily and that you are familiar with the information and consent forms that I provided?*

B Yes.

SP *Okay thank you very much. We will start off by asking you, could you tell me something about yourself?*

B Okay. I was born in Aislingstown [pseudonym] Co. [name of interviewee's home county removed]. My parents were hoteliers...I went to school in Aislingstown until I was thirteen, and then I went to boarding school in Dublin. Then later I went to...I worked in Dublin for a short period of time then I went to London. No, I beg your pardon I went to Devon first, I went to Devon to do nursing training, and didn't like it. Left nursing but stayed on in Devon for a while and got pregnant, in Devon. My father died when I was about three months pregnant, and I came home and told my mother and I was sent to a Mother and Baby Home in Belfast run by the Good Shepherd nuns. I had my son in March of [inaudible] '66 when I was twenty-two, and he was...I brought him to a Mother and Ba...to a Baby Home in Fahan Co. Donegal [Nazareth House] from where he was going to be...adopted. I came back to Belfast the same day and that evening I was told to pack my bags and I did, and was told to leave the room at a particular doorway and I did. And then a nun came and brought me down the corridor I hadn't been [in] before, into a building I hadn't been in before and this was the laundry and I assume it was on my mother's instructions, and I remained there for about nine to ten months...nine months, actually. And then the same procedure happened, I was told to pack my bags and, I can't remember how I got from Belfast to Aislingstown. I'm pretty certain it wasn't a family member so it may have been an employee of the convent...

SP *Hmm.*

B ... but I have no recollection of how I got to Aislingstown. But I was there for Christmas. My son had been born in March. I was in Aislingstown for Christmas because my brother came and took me out for the day and then brought me back again that evening and then a short time later I would think a matter of weeks later I was taken out, and brought home. But very, very little memory of any of that. Just the fact it was Christmas day tells me...you know, what time of year it was but other than that I have no recollection.

SP *Okay. Okay, thank you very much. So, can you sort of just go in to a little bit about your life prior to the...prior to the laundry? I know we talked about it there but maybe your school days?*

B Hmm...pretty normal, boarding school was...was...well, a big help for me later because the...the...the laundry wasn't that...very different from boarding school...

SP *Hmm*

B ...you were told what time to get up, you were told what to wear, you were told what to eat, you were told what to do all day, you were told what to do all evening and then you went to bed and then you started the next morning doing exactly the same thing. So in a way I was almost conditioned, so I didn't find the laundries that difficult to deal with...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...I had been out in the world I had been working...living on my own...having boyfriends obviously, but...I don't remember...because for me the shock was being pregnant...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...so...having dealt with that, the rest was all, just a...a follow through...

SP *Hmm.*

B There was no...I...I...I wasn't...you know, like the unfortunate orphans whose parents died and they were told they were going in to this place...I...I...for me my shock was...was the pregnancy and the...the giving up for adoption of my son...so...as I say my life was...

SP *Yeah...*

B ...your average twenty-one year old...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...life...you know...having great fun and no responsibilities and thinking it was going to go on like that forever.

SP *Yeah, Yeah. And sorry, just to ask about the boarding school, was it run also by the religious... nuns...*

B Yes, yes...

SP *...the religious orders...*

B ...yes, yes...

SP *...as well?*

B The [name of order removed] were the order...

SP *Okay.*

B ...in Aislingstown and...

SP *Okay, so you stayed in...*

B ...and I stayed with the [name of order removed] when I went to Dublin, yes...

SP *Okay...*

B *...yes...*

SP *...very good...*

B *Yeah...*

SP *...No I was just... yeah I just like to get a good background.*

B *Yes, yes.*

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

B *Oh I knew of them because there was a Magdalene Laundry in Aislingstown...*

SP *Hmm.*

B *...and my parents would have used it...and I knew it had an orphanage. I didn't go to the local school...so I didn't see the orphans...as my friends did, but the...I knew that the orphans were segregated from the rest of the...the children in the school, they weren't allowed to talk to the ordinary children in the school. My best friend went to music classes after school in the convent but again they had their classes separate from the...the...[name of order removed]...*

SP *Hmm.*

B *...orchestra. They only played together for concerts but they...they...they had their lessons separately, they didn't know any of the girls in the orchestra with them, they...were never allowed in to the room that the...other children were in, there was total segregation. I knew all this. So they were rather like grey figures in my background who had always been there, who always would be there and I didn't question them. I just knew they were there but they were nothing to do with me.*

SP *Okay. And had your family talked about the Magdalene Laundries...*

B Never...

SP *...or...? Never been brought...?*

B Never.

SP It was...

B Never.

SP *Okay. So just to go in to the...laundry...part of your life can you just...explain...sorry I'm...I'm going to ask you to repeat again...*

B Hmm, sure.

SP *...but...what...laundries you were sent to and what year and how old you were?*

B In nineteen sixty...five I got pregnant and I was twenty-one. I would have been twenty-two...my birthday's in February and my son was born in March...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...so I was twenty-two when he was born in 1966, and that was when I went to the Good Shepherd Convent in the Ormeau Road in Belfast. And I was there until the following December...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...still 1962, [sic] so I spent Christmas in Aislingstown...and then was allowed out early in 1963 [sic].

SP *And can you tell me, why were you sent to the laundry in...in Belfast?*



B Oh to get away as far as possible from the neighbours so that nobody would know about my pregnancy...

SP *Okay.*

B ...It was to shelter me, to hide me, to protect me, to protect my...my brothers and sisters from the...the shame, of the scandal...

SP *Okay.*

B ...and I would imagine then the laundry to punish me, to make sure that I learned...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...a lesson that...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...this was unacceptable behaviour...

SP *Okay, no...*

B ...except of course that it doesn't teach you that at all, it teaches you...lots of other things but not that.

SP *Yeah, of course...no I was just curious 'cause yeah...Belfast, like, why not Galway, there was a laundry in...*

B Right.

SP *...you know that...*

B Right.

SP ...*that's why I was asking...*

B Right, yeah...

SP ...*yeah, so...*

B I don't know what discussions went on...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...in the background I would imagine my mother contacted the convent and said...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...'who has a vacancy quickly?'

SP *Okay.*

B And if they'd said Timbuktu she would've said fine...

SP *Right.*

B ...but they said Belfast and she said fine...I would imagine.

SP *Yeah.*

B I don't know, because we never discussed it.

SP *Okay. So...just to explain that aspect of...when you were sent...so you said that it happened...you got pregnant in Devon, and you went back home when you found...pretty much when you found out...and yeah how was the decision...was the decision made to send you to a Mother and Baby Home and then to a laundry, did you have any say?*

B I had no say.

SP *Okay.*

B I had no say. I don't know if it was discussed within the family...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...more than likely the Mother and Baby Home was discussed within the family...because the family were certainly told I was pregnant. The decision to go in to the laundry would not have been discussed with the family and when they were told about it they objected. They thought this was too harsh.

SP *Hmm.*

B They thought it was...not going to...provide the solution that my mother wanted...but my mother overruled everybody's objections and...and...and she overruled all of our objections no matter what the...the decision she was going to make in our lives...at all times, so when...when she overruled...their objections that was it...

SP *Hmm. Yeah.*

B Her word was law.

SP *Okay. And actually I forgot to ask but was your family then very religious?*

B Not at all.

SP *Not at all?*

B Not at all.

SP *Okay.*

B No. But the scandal at the...at the time...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...my mother actually said to me that if the neighbours found out my sister would probably never marry because she would be tainted with this brush of...of this scandal. Now I don't know...know whether or not she was right. But she was right to not take the chance.

SP *Okay...and sorry how many brothers and sisters...?*

B Oh I have altogether six...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...there was only one younger than me and the rest were older.

SP *Okay so that was your youngest sister?*

B No, my, my, my...

SP *Oh.*

B ...my...she's...my immediately...

SP *Sorry...*

B ...older sister...

SP *Okay.*

B ...my brother is younger than me.

SP *Okay. Very good...yeah, no I just find that interesting...sort of the fear of scandal...*

B Hmm.

SP *...that was...that sort of...*

B Yes.

SP *...went behind that.*

B Yes.

SP *Okay. And...were you given any information like the length of time...?*

B Hmm. No. That is one of the things that I found very, very difficult to cope with was...that...in boarding school was not unlike prison except that you knew when term was going to end and you knew when your education was going to end. In prison you...you know when your term is going to end.

SP *Hmm.*

B There was no end to our incarceration... Nobody had an end term. I...I hear a lot of talk now since the McAleese Report about people only being in for three months. I saw one person leave in the year I was in there...I...so I find this three month thing very, very, very strange, but nobody had a release date...

SP *Okay.*

B ...until the people who put them in decided. Because, if you have *no* money, you have no power. I could have probably walked out the door at any given time...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...but not a penny in my pocket to make a phone call to say, 'please come and help me.'

SP *Hmm.*

B Not a penny in my pocket to get me from outside that door to my next destination.

SP *Yeah.*

B Not a penny in my pocket to feed me, to put a roof over my head in the meantime, to do anything. I...I was totally...we all were...totally...*handcuffed*...

SP *Hmm, yeah.*

B With a...with an invisible handcuff because we had *no money*. We didn't have a postage stamp to say...to write to somebody to say, 'please can you help me?'

SP *Hmm.*

B And our letters were censored, so...

SP *Hmm, yeah, yeah. And...I...yeah I wanted to ask actually just to go back a little bit...so you said the biggest shock for you was when you found out...*

B Yes.

SP *...you were pregnant.*

B Yes.

SP *Could you sort of...could you go in to that just a little bit more?*

B *(Pause)* I...I...I find it hard to...to remember what I was like as a...a young adult. I was...terribly...I wasn't stupid!

SP *Hmm.*

B Stupidity is...is not something that you grow out of and I'm not stupid now so I can't have been stupid then. I was totally self-centred. And, I lived in the belief that bad things wouldn't happen

to me because I was...me! So bad things wouldn't happen to me because, they didn't happen to people like me! So I could do whatever I wanted, and bad things weren't going to happen! *(Laughs)*. And...and then that...that...that...that...that was how I lived my life, every...every aspect of my life. So to find out that I was pregnant...I told the father of my child...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...you wouldn't even see the dust he ran so fast! *(Laughs)* Which sort of surprised me because I thought we had a relationship.

SP *Hmm.*

B But also as I said my father had died...

SP *Okay.*

B ...and...and I'd come back to Ireland and it was then I realised that I was pregnant, I was actually back in Ireland when I realised I was pregnant.

SP *Okay.*

B So *(pause)* what did I think? I...I...I thought...shock, and I thought, 'who can I blame for this?' because I...I...I don't accept blame...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...you know, 'it's not my fault!'

SP *Yeah.*

B *(Laughs)* And...then when my mother took over there was a certain element of 'Phewff!' Now I don't have to think anymore, you know, my thinking has been done for me as it always had been and...and...

SP *Yeah.*

B *...off we go again!*

SP *Okay. And sorry explain to me, so you... yeah you were in Devon then...*

B *Yes.*

SP *...working.*

B *Yes.*

SP *So...until...how long did you spend in Devon?*

B *Two years.*

SP *Two years, okay. Okay perfect, sorry just getting...*

B *Yes.*

SP *...the...the ground sort of. But yeah...so then yeah, this feeling of, 'okay so now my mum will take charge'...*

B *Yes, yes.*

SP *...and that's how...*

B *Yes. A terribly domineering woman...*

SP *Okay.*

B *...who had never allowed us make decisions for ourselves...*

SP *Hmm.*



B ...and never taught us how to make decisions for ourselves. So, when...you know...she was back in my life again and she was making decisions for me, you know, I just sat back and...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...let it all happen.

SP *And tell me did this happen to any of your siblings...*

B No.

SP *...any of your other siblings?*

B No. No. Now...that's not true because I do know that one of my older brothers had a child.

SP *Hmm.*

B But he doesn't know that we know.

SP *Okay.*

B ...he's my half-brother...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and...I'm of the second family, when...when it happened my half-sister wrote and told my father, her...their...their step-father.

SP *Yeah.*

B And he decided not to tell my mother. So nobody ever knew, but we found the letter...

SP *Okay.*

B ...some years ago and we've never said it to him or to anybody so, in theory it almost didn't happen.

SP *Yeah. No I understand, yeah.*

B You know it was...it was never something that was experienced by my family.

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

B If you know what I mean.

SP *No, I understand...*

B So...

SP *Yeah.*

B It happened but it didn't happen.

SP *Hmm, yeah, yeah.*

B He was better at covering up than I was...he didn't have to carry the baby.

SP *Yes, yes, and that does show...*

B Yes.

SP *...the sort of...the difference between the women and the men.*

B That's right, yeah, that's right yeah. He could walk away...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and he did.

SP *Yeah...and...so did you...so...can you remember how you felt when you were sent... well, first you were sent to the Mother and Baby Home and then...*

B Just scared.

SP *Yeah.*

B Just scared and not an...an idea of what was going to happen. This had never been an option that was discussed among my friends even. This just was not going to happen...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...to any of us. So, you know, we'd talk as teenagers would talk...'if and when we marry we would like to do A, B and C. If and when we get jobs we would like to do A, B and C'. But *never* this.

SP *Yeah.*

B This was never going to happen. So I had no preparation for it.

SP *Hmm.*

B And very, very scared... But, the nuns and the women were very, very nice, very, very pleasant...very, very gentle. They were...the nuns were old-fashioned, but nuns have always been old-fashioned...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...because life stopped for them when they entered the convents. So...you know. But as I say boarding school had prepared me because...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...you worked all day, at school you went to...to class all day, you had your evening meal...you listened to the radio, you listened to the radio!

SP *Yeah.*

B If you went to bed at nine o'clock then you went to bed at nine o'clock!

SP *Yeah.*

B Okay...I was older, but I'd experienced this life before so I...I slotted in to it...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...quite comfortably.

SP *Actually what was...do you know the reason behind why you were sent to a boarding school?*

B Ah yes I was wild.

SP *Okay.*

B And they thought that, you know I would have to knuckle down if I were at boarding school. And as I said my parents were hoteliers...they didn't really have the...the time to give to me that I...I needed at that time.

SP *Yeah, okay. [Inaudible].*

B Yeah.

SP *Very good. Okay. And... so just going into the laundry regime...actually...be...before we go...because you were in a Mother and Baby Home I just want to ask you very quickly, like, what...what was that like? What did you have to do in the...mo...when you were there?*

B We did nothing.

SP *Yeah.*

B We sat around and knitted...

SP *Okay.*

B ...all day long...I don't remember who cooked our meals, we did keep our rooms clean and we made our bed and...but really we just sat around and knitted...

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

B ...all day long.

SP *Yeah.*

B And, we listened to pirate radio stations....and to this day I hate pirate radio stations or Radio 2 or...I really hate them...they...they...they bring all the memories back that I can't drag up any other way.

SP *Yeah. Okay. And then so then you went into the laundry and...*

B Yes.

SP *...I know that you said that some of your memory is vague, but...*

B Hmm.

SP *...so anything that you can't remember just tell me but if we can start, can you remember your first day?*

B No. No.

SP *Okay.*

B I worked all the time in the room where the clean laundry was packed. And we had a lot of hotels and restaurant laundry. So we packed the table linen and the bed linen into...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...big baskets for the various hotels and...and this was a lovely clean job and I know it was a...a...a preferred job because it was so nice and clean and easy. And I know I was given it because I was being given (*pause*) when...when...when...when Sean Quinn went into prison recently he was probably given a job in the library...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...because it would have been a nice, clean, easy job. I was given that job, a nice clean easy job because I was seen as more middle-class...

SP *Right.*

B ...than the poorer women around me...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...or the women who were from poorer backgrounds around me... The nun whose name I can't remember...who...with whom I worked was a sister-in-law of Jim Murphy [pseudonym] who was a Cork hurler; a very famous Cork hurler. And one of my sisters is the sister-in-law of a [name of interviewee's home county removed] hurler, so we had this in common and she was very kind to me...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...she was very good. But I had a comparatively easy life because I had...I would go into the laundry...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...for various things and I would see the...the conditions there and they were not nice.

SP *Yeah.*

B Women worked in wellington boots all day long because of the water on the floor...or women worked in the ironing room with big rollers, rolling the sheets, rolling the tablecloths and the steam from them was what they...they...they...they inhaled all of the time. I had a very cushy time in comparison.

SP *Hmm. Yeah. And how...so we know how your...they chose your role, how do you...do you know how that decision was made for all the other women?*

B No. No.

SP *There was no kind of scheme or system in place?*

B No. No.

SP *Okay.*

B There was no rota that said you can get out of this place to work in another part...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...should you so wish. Decision making came into *no* part in our lives.

SP *Okay.*

B Decision making was frowned upon, that gave you notions above your station...

SP *Hmm.*

B You were told what time to get up in the morning, you were told what to put on, you were told what to eat, you were told what to do. Every...every decision was made for you.

SP *Yeah. Okay.*

B One of the things that I remember was that you were discouraged from having friends...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...because friendships bred...problems for the nuns. I've always felt there's only one sin in Ireland and that's sex. And although I did...I never saw any lesbianism, if you had a friend it could progress into a lesbian relationship and they weren't going to have that so you didn't have friends. You...you...your free time...well all your time...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...was...was...was supervised.

SP *Yeah.*

B And if they saw you being too friendly with one particular person they...they parted you and...and... you...you had to move away from them and have less contact with them.

SP *Right.*

B That's one of the few downsides...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...that I...I do...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...remember.



SP *And so I presume that then you...did you make any friends?*

B No.

SP *No.*

B No.

SP *Okay. And how was the routine...was the routine done in silence or...?*

B Yes.

SP *Okay.*

B Yes. Yes. Yes.

SP *And can you give...describe daily routine at all?*

B Not really. I know that we would have had Mass in the convent...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...every morning before breakfast and then we would have had breakfast and then we would have gone to our chores, you know, make our beds...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...or whatever our chore was...well everybody had to make their own bed anyway but some would have stayed back to...to clean the dormitory while others would have run...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...straight to work. I would have went straight to work, and we worked until probably half-past-five, six o'clock in the evening. We had dinner at lunchtime, an evening meal...and then we sat around

SP *Hmm.*

B ...knitting...or...I don't remember a library of any sort; I don't remember books of any sort so I'm pretty certain we didn't have any. There was *nothing* in the form of education...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...of any sort. The whole thing was *numbingly bland* and it was deliberately so, because if it were in any way exciting it would get you thinking.

SP *Hmm.*

B By being mind-numbingly bland you just went from day to day to day and in that way you went through twenty and thirty and forty years, and you coped with it because it was so bland...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...it was so grey.

SP *Hmm. And can you tell me a bit about the living condition...like...or sort of the building and the way that you lived there?*

B We were very segregated. There was...there was a number of categories of...of...of people. There were the nuns of course and I don't know what way they...they...they were layered. There were women who wore a uniform not unlike a nun and they were called 'The Magdalenes'.

SP *Hmm.*

B And I think we referred to them as 'Sister' – Sr Regina, Sister Kieran, [pseudonyms] whatever, and the nuns as 'Mother' – Mother Ignatius, Mother Adrian, Mother Ita. [Pseudonyms] These women had gone in probably as...as...as penitents, possibly orphans who decided to stay...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...goodness knows where...how...how they got in there because we were never allowed ask and they weren't allowed tell.

SP *Yeah.*

B They, once a year, had the right to apply to leave the convent if they wished. And you got up on...I think it was Easter Sunday morning, and you found that Sister so-and-so was missing and that was the only way you knew that she was going to leave and she was gone and you weren't allowed talk about her ever again. And this was quite hard on some people who had been very fond of that particular person. Having said...we weren't allowed to have relationships we still *had* relationships of sorts. That was the only...they were the only people who were allowed leave and that's the one person...one person I remember leaving while I was there...left in that way and was never seen again, or heard from again by...by the rest of us. So...so there were...there was that there and then there was us and even as I said among us, the rest of us, I was in a semi-privileged...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...job. Others had bloody awful jobs. But outside of our job everything was exactly the same for everybody.

SP *Yeah.*

B So we...we all ate the same food, we eat...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...same room, we had the same boring... [Inaudible]

SP *Yeah.*

B ...lives and...

SP *And do you remember your living conditions, as in the heat aspect?*

B I remember the dormitory...just that we slept in a dormitory. I don't remember being extremely cold; during the day we wouldn't have been cold anyway because the laundry creates heat. I would imagine that we had hot water pipes that went through the dormitories, because I don't remember extremely...I don't remember chilblains...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...I don't remember...I remember the diet was also very bland, fruit didn't exist...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...sweets didn't exist, soft drinks didn't exist...but we were fed. I do remember that weight was a problem for a lot of us because you'd nothing else to do so you ate what you were given but also it was...it was bland food and there was probably too much carbohydrate, because...and...and...and there was no such thing as exercise. Exercise didn't...didn't exist...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...either at any time...not even crocodile two-by-two walks as...as we'd had in boarding school, 'cause we didn't...we didn't leave the convent, and we didn't even go for walks around the garden...

SP *Okay.*

B ...in the summer we...you know...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...we didn't go out and spend half an hour tending the garden. It was just so grey and so bland.

SP *Yeah. And did you have many possessions?*

B No.

SP *Nothing.*

B No. No.

SP *Okay.*

B I had my own clothes but I just had two changes of...of outer clothes and I'd a Sunday dress and an everyday...

SP *Okay.*

B ...dress and that was it. One of the things that I did find *really* shocking when I went there was sanitary towels.

SP *Hmm.*

B They were pieces of cloth that were washed and reused. I found that *awfully* shocking because the idea of using a sanitary towel that had been used by somebody else was a step too far...

SP Yes.

B ...that I had to learn how to live with and *never* learned to live with it...it...it...it was something that bothered me *all* the time that I was there. But...a lot of...you see, I...I thought up to...up to a couple of days ago that the Magdalenes would have come as a result of the old workhouses...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...but they actually didn't.

SP *Hmm.*

B They came about a hundred years earlier from penal institutions. That was their origin. So, given that, they really weren't awfully bad. They didn't move with the times, but nuns don't because they're...they're stuck in this isolated...castle. So, really the food wasn't too bad, the heating wasn't too bad, we wore our own clothes as much as I can remember. I don't remember anybody getting new clothes.

SP *Hmm.*

B But they must have.

SP *Sorry while you're on clothes, do you mean that when you came, you brought your own...*

B No. I mean...

SP *...or...or they gave you?*

B No, I mean, there was an orderly...

SP Yeah.

B ...in the convent who did the shopping...

SP *Okay.*

B ...for the nuns and, where necessary, did the shopping for everybody. We had no money to do any shopping...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...so we had to go to the nuns and say, 'I would like to have'.

SP *Yeah.*

B Now if I had said I would like to have a...a portable radio...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...a transistor, no way. *Maybe* if I needed a new watch a cheap one would have been bought for me. Certainly if I needed a battery for my watch it would have been bought for me. If I needed a new pair of shoes I'm sure they would have been bought for me, and so the women who were there for a long, long time had to have had things bought for them, but I never saw this...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...happening. But there was a lady who did the shopping for everybody, a trusted lady. And on one occasion I wanted to assert my individuality or whatever, or my...I might even have just been showing off...I don't know what made me do it but I asked her to buy for me some black pepper and she had to ask the nuns if this was okay and she got the okay and she bought me my black pepper, and it was brilliant because it came in a little mill, so I had my...my...my black pepper every day. But everybody '*oohed and aahed*' over this when I got it because nobody had heard of black pepper before and...I was...I was just being a little bit of a show off I think, I really was. But you could...you could, you know, do this sort of thing occasionally but you wouldn't get away with it too often and...and most of the time, I think so many of our needs were actually catered for, on a very basic basis but they were catered for so we didn't...we didn't think of asking...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...for...for things that we weren't going to get.

SP *Hmm. And how often actually did you...were you allowed to ask someone, was this allowed to happen?*

B I don't know.

SP *Okay.*

B I only remember doing it once.

SP *Yeah. Okay. Okay. Very good.*

B And I don't think there was a...a, 'you asked for something last month so you can't ask this month,'...I think it was an...on a need basis that you asked.

SP *Yeah.*

B But you had to prove a need.

SP *Hmm.*

B 'Cause they weren't going to spend *my* hard earned money...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...on luxuries for me! (*Laughs*)

SP *Yeah.*

B Now, there is something else that I must say and maybe this is not the...the...the time in the interview to say it, but...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...I...I do want to say it because I want to ask you for help on this one. At one stage the same trusted lady was told to bring me to probably the Royal Victoria Hospital where I believe I got electric shock treatment.



SP     *Okay.*

B       She brought me for about six visits. Again, it was never discussed with me; I never knew what the result was. I w...I was brought in to the hospital, I was put onto a trolley, I was given an injection that knocked me out, I woke up some time later on a bed in a...a room not...

SP     *Yeah.*

B       ...where I'd started out and I didn't just wake up, I woke up *slowly*. I woke up, but I found I couldn't move for a while and then gradually I would be able to start moving and eventually I would be able to sit up and then...after some time I would put my legs down at the side of the bed and...and stand. And then I would come out and this trustee wa...was there waiting for me and we would go back. And this happened as I say about six times. I don't ever remember speaking to a doctor; I know it was a doctor who gave me the injection to knock me out. I was on my own when I came to. *Many* years later, speaking to a friend of mine and I told her that this had happened and she said, 'oh yes, I knew about that'. And I asked her how did she know and she said, 'well your mother got the result and the result said that there was nothing wrong with you but your mother needed psychiatric treatment!' (*Laughs*) And I thought this was very funny but my mother was dead and...I...I...I think now, I want to find out more about...

SP     *Yeah.*

B       ...that episode. Did the nuns...put me through that simply because my mother had said I...I should have it? Like, who c...who certified me to need this shocking treatment?

SP     *Yeah.*

B       And was it electric shock treatment or was it something else but I'm pretty certain...

SP     *Yeah.*

B       ...again from talking to other people who had electric shock treatment at that time in the '60s that this is...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...what they experienced. But...I do want to know more about that one.

SP *Yeah...no...we'll talk about it afterwards...*

B Yes. Yes.

SP *...but... just tell me, were you actually...when you were taken to this hospital, like were you told what was going to happen?*

B No! Because the trustee didn't know what was going to happen!

SP *Okay so the trustee just brought you...*

B Yes.

SP *...to the hospital...*

B Yes.

SP *... and nothing was ever said, or...*

B Nothing that I can remember. If they said something to me...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...I can't remember it.

SP *Okay.*

B They probably did, I probably even signed papers saying, 'yeah I agree to this,' because I hadn't got a clue.

SP *Yeah, yeah you didn't know what was happening.*

B No, no.

SP *Okay.*

B And if a doctor says 'you need an injection,' you say, 'okay I need an injection!'

SP *Yeah. Okay.*

B I still do...I...

SP *Wow.*

B ...I still wouldn't...wouldn't...wouldn't query it.

SP *And this happened in Belfast?*

B And this happened in Belfast.

SP *Okay...*

B Yes. Yes.

SP *...we...no, we'll talk about it afterwards...*

B Yeah. Yeah.

SP *...but yeah that's very...*

B Yeah, well that was...that was...that was one that, you know, I remember...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...very clearly.

SP *Six times?*

B About six times, yes, yes. And they were about a fortnight apart.

SP *And like what was, like...then were you taken back, like the same day and...?*

B Yes, we...we went on the bus and we came back on the bus. And, it came like boarding school it was a little bit like a day out.

SP *Yeah.*

B You know, it was...I was... I was going to see people, see the world and see sky and...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...buses and cars and...you know... *(Pause)*

SP *Yes, it was...a...a sort of like a day out?*

B You're twenty-two!

SP *Yeah.*

B You know you're locked up in this prison...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...with...with no end date and this is a day out!

SP *And that was like..a...'cause I was going to ask about if you got to get out...*

B     *Hmm.*

SP    *...so that was one of the times when you...*

B     That was the only time, yes.

SP    *...you were taken to a hospital...*

B     Yes. Yes. Yeah, jeez.

SP    *And how did you feel when you came back to the...?*

B     I...I...I think I felt a little bit groggy...

SP    *Yeah.*

B     ...but not very groggy, as groggy as you'd feel if you had a small headache...

SP    *Hmm. Yeah.*

B     ...you know... Once...once I came to, having woken up, my memory tells me it took me about fifteen minutes...

SP    *Yeah.*

B     ...to actually get my feet on the ground.

SP    *Hmm.*

B     But you know when you're going through something and it could be...it could be one minute but it feels fifteen?

SP    Yes.

B But it wasn't like when you wake up in the morning and say, 'okay I'm awake, now I get up'.

SP *Hmm.*

B It wasn't like that.

SP *Okay.*

B It was a very, very slow awakening.

SP *Jeez...and...did you lose your memory from it?*

B No.

SP *No. Okay.*

B But...I...feel now that...my memory is not as good as it should be, but then I'll be seventy next year...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...I don't know exactly what a seventy-year-old is supposed to remember but I do sometimes feel...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...my memory is slipping and I don't know if it has to do with that or now, or just because...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...you know, because memory shifts!

SP *Yeah, and yeah...no, definitely we'll...we'll talk about that...*

B     *Hmm.*

SP    *...more about getting the information...*

B     Yes.

SP    *...but that's really interesting...gosh.*

B     Yeah. *(Laughs)*

SP    *And...so I'm just gonna go back to kind of the actual building itself.*

B     Right.

SP    *Can you describe to me what the building was like in terms of say, were the doors locked, the windows?*

B     I don't remember the windows. We certainly wouldn't have opened and closed them without going to a nun to ask for permission. The outer doors were certainly locked because on the Christmas morning that I was allowed home a nun brought me to the front door and she unlocked it for me and when I came back that evening, we had to phone her before we arrived and she had to come and unlock the door to let me back in, so yes the doors were locked.

SP    *Hmm.*

B     Internally the doors were not locked but you didn't go from place to place. You stayed at your point of work. The rooms were very, very big. All of the rooms were very, very big, because they held a lot of people all of the time. The room that I worked in would be as long as the room we're in at the moment and I have no idea how long this is and it would have been wider...

SP    *Yeah.*

B     ...than this room. This room would hold three or four hundred people?

SP *Yeah.*

B Yeah. Now our room was big because it had tables...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...for the folding of the laundry and for the baskets and for all the other stuff...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...but the...the... all the rooms were big. And you would occasionally be sent...I was occasionally sent to the laundry for messages...there was something missing from Mrs Somebody's laundry, so I would go down to see if it was still in...in the...the washroom. I didn't have to unlock doors; I did have to open doors.

SP *Yeah.*

B And I didn't have to have somebody come with me because they *knew* there was no place we could go to if we did get out.

SP *Yeah.*

B You know, I've heard stories recently of people smuggling themselves into laundry vans and things. But, once they got to...the...the stop...the first stop in the laundry van...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...they were discovered; they had no money, they couldn't go anyplace else. All they could do was give themselves up to the Gardaí and come back.

SP *Hmm. Yeah. And actually, do you remember anyone running away?*

B No, but I remember stories of people running away...



SP *Okay.*

B ...in Aislingstown, I heard of...of stories of people...of...of people running and the...and the Gardaí coming...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and...and bringing them back.

SP *Okay.*

B My...my sister lives just a couple of doors away from the local... what was the laundry...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and her neighbours have spoken of people who ran away and were brought back.

SP *Hmm. Okay. And were you given a house name or a number?*

B No. I wasn't...

SP *Okay. Or a uniform?*

B No.

SP *Okay.*

B I wasn't, everybody else was given a house name.

SP *Okay.*

B I wasn't...

SP *How...do you know why?*

B I don't, I wondered about that.

SP *Yeah.*

B I wondered if it was because there wasn't going to be two Bernadettes [interviewee's real name replaced with pseudonym] in the house? So...

SP *Don't worry it'll be... [Explaining that interviewee's name will be removed from transcript]*

B Yeah, there...there wasn't two of my name but...but the nuns always claimed it was so that when we met outside we couldn't identify each other, so that we could pretend we hadn't been in there. Yet, when I returned to Aislingstown...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...it was my *hometown*, I was still given my...called by my given name...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...even though when...when...once they were out they were going to...to know my...my birth name.

SP *Yeah.*

B So I don't know why they didn't, but they didn't.

SP *Okay.*

B But like everything else we didn't query it.

SP *Yeah.*

B You know, we just didn't query anything.

SP *Okay. And were you paid or given pocket money?*

B Never. Never. No.

SP *And how many days and hours did you work?*

B We worked six days a week. Saturday I think was a half day.

SP *Hmm.*

B We definitely did not work on Sundays, Sunday was for prayer.

SP Okay. So it was just prayer...like...in silence?

B Yes. Yes. It was a...a longer Mass in the morning, it was silence 'til...'til lunchtime, you know, you talked, but you whispered, you...you...you made noise at lunchtime and then you were silent again for the afternoon. I...I think Sunday afternoons were the longest day of the week because you wished you were back at work because as I say we had radio, but it was very limited radio, and we would have had periods of prayer and...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and whatever, and then rosaries and...

SP *Yeah. Yeah.*

B ...goodness...Holy Sacrament...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...I can't remember half the rest of the...the rituals...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...you know, in the evening.

SP *Do you remember actually in terms of the food a difference in foods when it was sort of special events or holidays or...?*

B Yes we got buns.

SP *Okay. Yeah.*

B Cupcake type things.

SP *Hmm.*

B Sometimes a...an apple tart...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...or something like that. But there was a lot of the...the rice pudding type food. We did get...we did...food w...w...tended to be...if it was Monday it was roast beef, if it was Tuesday it was shepherd's pie. If it was Wednesday it was...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...so there were seven menus and that was it.

SP *Yeah. Yeah. And do you...did you ever see what the nuns were getting?*

B No. No.

SP *No.*

B No. No.

SP *And they never ate with you?*

B No. No. No, nor did the Magdalenes who wore the uniform.

SP *Okay.*

B They were all separate from us.

SP *Right. Okay. And how...how would you guy...how would you like sit in...the...your meals like?*

B Very, very long tables...

SP *Okay.*

B ...with stools.

SP *Yeah. And did...was there someone in charge of groups, or was it...*

B Yes....

SP *...just?*

B ...there was somebody in charge of the whole dining room; there was one nun...

SP *Oh okay.*

B ...who supervised the...the dining room and would tell us to stop shouting...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and...and...you know, keep the noise down to a reasonable level.

SP *Hmm. And how many...you may not know this, but do you know roughly how many people were in...or how many women worked there?*

B I would certainly say in the hundreds – sorry, to go back to the dining room for just a moment – I've just remembered, a nun read from a religious book every day at lunchtime. When we were finished our main course, she finished reading, we were allowed talk then...

SP *Hmm.*

B *(Coughs)*...didn't talk throughout the whole meal, we...we spoke when she was finished reading, sorry, I'd almost forgotten that. Yes, I...I...I would definitely think there was...there was a good one hundred of us.

SP *Yeah. And can you describe any of the food that you were...?*

B No. No.

SP *No. Just that it was bland.*

B It was bland.

SP *Yeah.*

B But then I was coming from a...a...a restaurant situation, so food...you know it was...I w...I was going to be more...more...used to a...a...a menu...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...than a lot of other people.

SP *Yeah. Okay. And just to confirm, we kind of mentioned this earlier but were you given any opportunities for recreation or exercise?*

B None for exercise, yes for recreation but we did nothing with it. Because we didn't have special friends and we didn't have books, we didn't have any s...form of stimulation...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...of course there was no television. So there was nothing for us to...to talk about if we did want to talk to each other...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...you know; 'what sort of day did you have today?' (*Laughs*)

SP *Yeah.*

B You know? (*Laughs*)

SP *Yeah. Yeah.*

B 'Did you see anybody that you didn't see yesterday or won't see tomorrow?'

SP *Yeah.*

B That didn't happen, so there was...

SP *Yeah. What did you do f...with your recreation?*

B I don't remember.

SP *Okay.*

B I'm sure I knitted because I still knit and I would have knitted in the Mother and Baby Home so I – (*gasps*) I do! I remember...I knitted a green fisherman's rib sweater, because I remember bringing that home with me. So yes, I knitted.

SP *Okay. Very good. And were you given any opportunities to receive an education?*

B No, no.

SP *Okay. And how did religion play a part during your time there?*

B I found religion a big part of my life there because it wasn't a big part of my life outside...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...so, I found it a very...kind of...I found it very intrusive...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...there. My parents weren't churchgoers so, you know... at home it didn't intrude at all. Here it intruded in every part of our lives. And...it intruded in every part of a lot of my friends' lives outside...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and sex was the big sin and we...I...we had committed that big sin...I had committed that big sin and I felt in the convent that...you know, religion was being forced down my neck quite a bit to atone for my big sin.

SP *Yeah. Yeah. And actually just in terms of... 'cause you were in two laundries, was there any difference between Belfast and Aislingstown?*

B Yes. I remember thinking Aislingstown was more backward...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...when I came. Was that because I had expectations because it was Aislingstown and my hometown it was going to be better? Possibly. But I don't think so. But I...I think Aislingstown was...was more backward...

SP *Okay.*



B ...than Belfast. And I think that might have been because Northern Ireland was a wealthier place at the time than Southern Ireland. So the people coming in to it would have come from a more stimulated...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...society than in Aislingstown.

SP *Okay. Do you remember any...any...anything different that Aislingstown did or...?*

B No I don't. It was...it was just the atmosphere...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...of the place. The expectations...the little bit of conversation that the women had was more...rural, more...lacking in...in...in...in depth.

SP *Hmm. Yeah. And were you given the same job?*

B I must have been because I don't remember.

SP *Yeah.*

B I may not have been because I would have known the laundry of the people coming in.

SP *Hmm.*

B But I do remember being in the laundry room one day...the laundry room for me was not the room of the...with laundry...the laundry room was where the laundry was...was put into its...its...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...bags and cases and whatever. I do remember seeing the van driver and he recognising me and I recognising him and thinking, 'oh my God, now I've done it!' and I tried very, very

quickly...walked away very quickly but the poor man never said anything to anybody, it was his job at...at stake and you know but in all fairness he didn't. So I...I...I think I must have been in the same area.

SP *Okay. And can you remember any accidents in the laundry?*

B No.

SP *No. Okay. In...sorry when I say the laundry I mean the...*

B You mean the...the...the...the washing...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...area, yes, the machinery area.

SP *Yeah.*

B Yes.

SP *And were you ever ill while you were in either laundry?*

B No. No.

SP *Okay...and can you recall what happened to anyone who was ill?*

B No...no.

SP *No, okay. Can you tell me how...how you and the other women who worked were disciplined or punished?*

B There was no physical punishment. There was a lot of *psychological* punishment.

SP *Hmm.*

B There was a lot of...putting down. 'God you're stupid, can you not do anything right?' 'How often do I have to tell you?' *(Pause)* 'No wonder you're in here, you'll never get a job in the real world'... You had comments like that. But we spoke to each other like that...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...that was the...that was the way of our world and...and we accepted it as...as...and...and we continued it.

SP *Yeah. So this includes sort of like comments about the fact that you had had a baby outs...?*

B No.

SP *No.*

B No. Personal things were never discussed...

SP *Okay.*

B They would have known that I was there...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and they would have guessed it was because I had had a baby. They would have known I wasn't sent in by the courts for example.

SP *Yeah.*

B They would have...I...I...I made the mistake myself of...of talking about the fact that I was from Aislingstown when I was in Aislingstown, not when I was in Belfast because they wouldn't have known where Aislingstown was.

SP *Yeah.*

B B...I don't remember...I don't remember knowing why anybody in Belfast was there...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...except one lady. I don't know why she was there but I do know she had been a member of Cumann na mBan...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and she was terribly proud of it and she talked about it a lot. And, she had created for herself – which was very clever and I'm sure she didn't do it deliberately – an aura, that meant that everybody acc...said, you know, 'if she says it's black, it's black, even though I know it's white, she says it's black so it's black,' because of her time in Cumann na mBan.

SP *Hmm.*

B She was elderly...

SP *Okay.*

B ...when I knew her... she would have had to have been of course. But other than her, I didn't know if anybody had been there from when they were an orphan or whether the courts had put them there or whether their families had put them...I...I knew nothing about any of them.

SP *Hmm. Okay...so...how did you feel towards...you know the sort of the psychological put downs etc?*

B I wasn't at the receiving end very often.

SP *Hmm.*

B I didn't like it when it happened, I...I...in the beginning it did happen of course...I didn't like it. But again because of boarding school, I accepted it and...and because that was the way life was in the sixties...

SP *Okay.*

B ...had been in the fifties, was in the sixties. As a child at school, if a nun punished me for something, I didn't tell my parents because the attitude would have been, 'you must have deserved it so here's another one'.

SP *Okay.*

B So I had grown up...you know, if a nun told you to jump, you said, 'how high?' So when the nuns told me to jump I said, 'how high?' I never queried anything that...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...the...the...they said or did. As I say in the beginning they would have you know had to...had to...to...to regulate my behaviour a bit and I would have resented it, but I would have gotten on with it, I would have done what they said because they were nuns and because I was in this position where they had all the power and I had none.

SP *Okay. So can you tell me anything positive about your time in the institut...in the laundries?*

B No. Nothing.

SP *And what was the worst thing?*

B Sanitary towels.

SP *Yeah.*

B And...not...not having an end date.

SP *Hmm.*

B *(Pause)* And...not thinking. *(Pause)* Not being able to make a *single* decision for yourself above putting the black pepper on your dinner. *(Pause)*

SP *And...sorry I had another question there and it's gone out of my head, I'm so sorry, I suddenly...that's it, yeah, to do with your hair, did you have to...like was there a certain way you had to have your hair or did you have freedom over it?*

B You had to keep it tidy...

SP *Okay.*

B ...so the women in...with the machinery wore caps.

SP *Hmm. Yeah.*

B But that was for health and safety reasons as much as anything else, that the machine...hair...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...could get caught in machinery. I didn't have to but I would have to put it up in a ponytail or something to...to just keep it tidy because you don't want...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...hair in your...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...table napkin or...

SP *Did you have long hair?*

B I would have had because...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...there was no barbers or anything to...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...hairdressers to...we didn't go to hairdressers. Some of them would have cut each other's hair but I would have let mine grow long.

SP *Hmm. Yeah. Great. I'm just going on to a section...are you okay to carry on?*

B Oh yeah, yeah!

SP *Interacting with others, so just to go...so we've already talked a little bit about that...do you recall any women dying while you were there?*

B No.

SP *No, okay. Do you remember anyone, friends or relatives or anyone at all visiting you?*

B No.

SP *Do remember any...anyone else getting any visits?*

B No.

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

B I think nuns from other convents but still [name of order removed] nuns...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...visited...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and were shown around occasionally...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and I'm sure the Bishop came at least once. But he wouldn't have gone into the...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...the laundry itself, he would have come to the dining room or someplace...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...like that. But there's something that is sort of relevant again to the McAleese thing; the health and safety. As a child my father had a...a...a great big poster up on the wall, 'Factory Rules and Regulations', and that was not on the wall of either laundry, nor was any other form of health and safety notice of *any* sort, nor did anybody ever check on health and safety. But I don't ever remember, I...I...I...I've a funny feeling that a machine broke down once and that everybody had to clear out of the laundry while the men came...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...to...to repair it because they couldn't be seen nor could we be seen...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and...and then once it was repaired, it was back to...to work as usual. But there was the...health and safety wasn't...

SP *Hmm.*



B ...an issue at all...

SP *Okay.*

B ...even though they were working with very hot irons, very hot water, machine...very heavy industrial machinery...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...it wasn't an issue.

SP *Okay. And do you remember an inspector ever?*

B Never.

SP *Never.*

B Never.

SP *Okay. Yeah actually...yeah... or, were there any doctors or Gardaí visiting or...*

B Not Gardaí...

SP *...or government officials?*

B ...I'm sure there were doctors but I...no, no, no nothing like that. I'm sure there...there....there were doctors but I don't ever remember them.

SP *Yeah.*

B I don't ever remember anybody being sick.

SP *Yeah. Okay.*

B Which must have happened but I just...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...don't remember it, I...it didn't happen to...to me...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...so I don't remember it.

SP *No, I...I understand. And was it possible to tell where the items of clothing which were being laundered or repaired came from?*

B In Aislingstown...yes, because I would have known our own laundry mark. They changed the laundry mark at some stage because we had an old one, which r...related to our name, and then they changed it to a new one which had *no* relation to our name. So it was more difficult when you had...saw the new laundry mark. The old laundry mark you...you could guess...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...some of the names, because it was going to be the wealthier people of the town who were using...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...the laundry...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...so you...you could. But once they brought in the new system, you couldn't.

SP *Okay. And do you know mainly who the contracts went out? Was it...?*

B In...in...in Belfast in the section I worked in it was the hotels and restaurants.

SP *Yeah.*

B So it was tablecloths...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and sheets and napkins. In Aislingstown, it was local families mainly but it would also have been the...the local boys' college, the local...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...girls' school...because there weren't enough...industrial work...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...you know, to...to keep a laundry going so it was a lot of small...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...smaller ...

SP *And by any chance actually, this is just related...but when you were in boarding school do you know where your laundry was...?*

B I don't but I'm pretty certain it would have been...

SP *Yeah*

B ...a similar laundry.

SP *Okay...I'll explain to you afterwards why I asked you that. How...how were you treated by the...by the nuns, by the Sisters?*

B The one that I worked with was very kind. The others...*ah!* There was one who was *gorgeous*, she was...and she was really young. She was probably the same age as myself and she came from [name of interviewee's home county removed], came from [name of town removed], and she was *gorgeous*. And she's probably still alive. But the rest of them were just faceless, personality-less; they were not cruel, they were not malicious, they were not to be avoided, they were just there, like the wallpaper...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...a...and I don't remember them.

SP *Okay. Yeah.*

B And I'd almost forgotten this one who was lovely.

SP *Okay.*

B Lovely because she was young!

SP *Yeah. And did you have much interaction with her or...?*

B I shouldn't have had but I...I sought her out all the time.

SP *Hmm. Okay.*

B She would try to stop me from seeking her out because she knew that that was against the rules but I...

SP *Okay.*

B ...I...I would look for her when...when I was feeling down or homesick or something and I just...

SP *Yeah.*

B ... needed a...a friendly face.

SP *Was this in Belfast?*

B In Belfast.

SP Yes.

B Yes. Yeah.

SP *Okay. And actually what made a Sister good or bad?*

B Good was being warm, bad was being cold....and there weren't very many who were cold, they were just indifferent.

SP *Yeah.*

B Which was at times worse than being cold...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...but they weren't...they weren't horrible.

SP *Yeah. And you described for example in Aislingstown there was someone who would come and take the laundry like...*

B Hmm.

SP *...did you have much interaction with those people, the drivers?*

B No. No, as a general rule we stacked the...the baskets up beside the door...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and then we moved back and the nuns would then take over and say...

SP *I see...*

B ...'Paddy that one is for...for Mary and this one is for Johnny and'...but we didn't...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...we didn't speak to them; they were men and we weren't allowed to speak to men. It was part of the lack of stimulation thing...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...that there...you know, that you did...you didn't even s...speak to a man. On...on business terms you just...mental safety...God almighty, am I going [to] rape him or something you know? But it might... it might encourage him to help you if you wanted to run away...

SP *Yes. Yeah.*

B ...he might build up a rel...a bond with you and want to help you and they couldn't have that, so...

SP *Okay. Okay. I'm just going on now to ask you about your individual experience, did you have any fears or anxieties while you were there?*

B Yes, the not knowing when I was going to get out.

SP *Hmm.*

B Was I going to be there for the rest of my life? If so how would I cope? I would cope on a day to day basis, but on a long term basis? That was very scary...and totally helpless; could do nothing about it if that was what my mother had decided...totally helpless...did not know that my brothers and sisters...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...objected to me being there and were doing everything that they could to...to get her to...to...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...take me back out again. So yes that was...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...but...but within the four walls of the place, no nothing scared me...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...no...there was no nun who was going to...to abuse me in any way, no woman, fellow inmate who was going to abuse me...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...in any way...nothing scary like that, and never saw any sexual anything.

SP *Yeah. Okay. And actually just in terms of your mother; how do you feel towards your mother...n...you know...or then how did you feel about being...?*

B I was very afraid of her...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...always. She's dead forty years and I'm still afraid of her. We had a very, very bad start because when I was six weeks old she had a row with my father and she walked out. Now she went to her sister-in-law, my father's sister, in Dublin. She left me with a lady who was to look after me who was only sixteen and that lady was, *gentle*, ah gosh, she was gorgeous, and I had her to myself until I was three-and-a-half, when she got TB. My mother only left for six weeks but this lady had reared me until I was three-and-a-half and she got TB and she had to

leave us. And then she went and she married and went on to have her own family. My mother gave up the hotel when I was four...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and...but she bought a shop so she was still working.

SP *Yeah.*

B But I was given from this gentle, kind, loving lady to this rather...cold...not very friendly woman who was busy...and who was also on the town council as I said earlier, and had fingers in lots of pies and I wasn't one of those pies, and we never bonded.

SP *Okay.*

B So, long before anything ever happened...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...I was afraid of her and I remained afraid of her.

SP *Okay. And yeah, you didn't know that your brothers and sisters were against the move?*

B No I didn't...they wouldn't have told me because they were helpless...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and it would only be building up my hopes and they didn't know what was going to happen next any more than...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...I did, until she eventually relented and said okay.



SP *Okay. And what about your hopes and dreams when you were in...in the laundry?*

B Didn't have any!

SP *Didn't have any.*

B If I had any it was to get out.

SP *Yeah.*

B But I didn't go *past* getting out; what would I do?

SP *Hmm.*

B What, would I look for a job? Would I go back to education? Back to education was never an option.

SP *Okay.*

B We were reared to get our Leaving Cert which I hadn't got and be either a nun, a nurse or a teacher. There were no other options ever discussed by anybody. I would have *loved* to have been a librarian, I would have given my right arm to be a social worker. But those three options were...were the...were the three, and in fact when I went to Devon it was to be the nurse because they were the only three options. So getting out of there and getting a job...but any sort of a job I would have, you know, worked in a shop or would have worked...I'd secretarial skills, I would have worked in an office, I would've swept floors...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...but it was just to get out.

SP *Okay. And can you tell me about any surviv...I call them survival techniques, I'm not sure if that's the right term to use...*

B Hmm.

SP *...survival techniques that you developed during your time in the laundries?*

B Yes, you just shut down. In...in fact when I said if I had an ambition it was to get out...I didn't even have an ambition to get out because that was assuming that there was an end date...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...but there wasn't an end date so I couldn't afford to assume that I would get out. So survival technique was shut down. Don't think, don't rock the boat, don't have any expectations, because if they happen, *great!* If they don't happen you're not meant to be disappointed so you're going to protect yourself from hurt so you just shut down.

SP *Okay. And so how would you describe...did you fit in or rebel against the system?*

B No, I didn't rebel.

SP *Hmm.*

B I didn't...I wouldn't have rebelled against my mother and for...for me...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...she was...she was the person who had put me in there. The nuns were just doing their job. They weren't cruel so there was nothing...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...to rebel against with them...

SP *Okay.*

B ...and I wouldn't dare rebel against my mother...

SP *So you never went against...*

B *...not openly anyway...*

SP *...any orders or...?*

B *No.*

SP *No.*

B *No.*

SP *Okay.*

B *No.*

SP *And...d...so you didn't try to leave at all?*

B *No.*

SP *Yeah, okay. Can you tell me one word or phrase that best describes your time there?*

B *Grey.*

SP *And now we're going on to the leaving part. So when were you told you were leaving?*

B *The day I left was the day I would have been told, there would have been no build up, there would be no...no 'I'm going home tomorrow' thing.*

SP *Yeah.*

B I would have been told, 'you go upstairs right now, pack your bags and then come down this ex...this different corridor so that you don't see anybody to tell them that you're leaving,' you just get out...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and go. And I know that would have happened but I don't remember it happening.

SP *Okay...*

B And I...

SP *So there was, like, no ceremony about it?*

B No, no, no, no...

SP *No-one...*

B No, no, no.

SP *...it was to make sure no-one knew.*

B No, no...

SP *Yeah. Okay.*

B ...no...and I would imagine my brother collected me although I don't remember...

SP *Hmm. Yeah.*

B ...and...but he had the car and...and...and he...he would have collected me.

SP *Okay. And can you describe what happened the day you were leaving and where...where you went?*

B No.

SP *No.*

B No.

SP *Okay.*

B No memory.

SP *No memory, it just happened, okay. How did you find it being outside the laundry?*

B I don't remember.

SP *Yeah.*

B I don't even remember how long I stayed at home before I went and got a job.

SP *Okay. Yeah.*

B I have no recollection of it at all.

SP *Okay. Wow. That's interesting. And what did you do, like, after the laundry...you know as in what followed?*

B My sister had worked in The Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin...no, sorry, the...n...probably the nuns got me a job in Galway. *Gosh*, I wonder did I not go home? Did I go straight to Galway? I don't know. Because I have no recollection of going home, I probably *didn't* go home! Because definitely *they* would have been the ones who got me a job in...in a hospital in Galway as a cook.

SP *Right.*

B And it was a live-in job.

SP *Yeah.*

B So I probably didn't go home!

SP *Yeah. So you went to work...*

B Goodness!

SP *...in Galway?*

B Yes, I...I...I must check up with some of my friends; one...I have one friend in particular who...who would...who...who knew where I was, knew everything that was happening...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and she's the one who told me about my mother and the report from the psychiatrist. But...I...I...I think now that I actually was put on a train for Galway.

SP *Wow. Okay.*

B I went to work in Portiuncula Hospital and then as I said, my sister worked in The Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin and...I probably worked in...in the hospital for about six months.

SP *Oh you worked in the hospital, yes, sorry.*

B In...in the...as a cook. Yes.

SP *Yeah.*

B And then I...I got myself an interview in The Shelbourne, and on the strength of my sister's...working there, I got a job there, and then I went on to work in a couple of hotels in Dublin before...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...going to London and then...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...getting married and...and that.

SP *Okay, very good. Actually can you describe to me why did you go to London actually?*

B I had a friend who worked with me in The Gresham Hotel. And she had left it to go to London...work in London. And she and I had been very good friends and I went over to her for a weekend; I'd never been in London before, and she suggested...she wanted to come back to Ireland to work in Butlins Holiday Camp [Mosney] in...north of Dublin? I can't remember; it's a...it's a..hostel now for...for refugees and asylum seekers. She wanted to work there for the summer, but she wanted to keep her flat in London so she asked me would I come and work in London for six months and hang on to her flat for her and then at the end of the summer I would come back to Ireland. And I agreed. And I fell in love with London, like I'd never loved Dublin. And when she came back I stayed on. And I stayed for ten years.

SP *Okay.*

B Married in London...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and only came back because I was pregnant.

SP *Okay. And tell me, why did you never love Dublin?*

B I don't know, I never settled in Dublin.

SP *Okay.*

B It wasn't the size of the city because London was so much bigger...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and...and faster and...everything. I think there was a little bit of me that still saw my mother over every shoulder because you kept meeting people that you knew.

SP *Yeah.*

B And so everything I did could be and would be reported back because that was the times we lived in, and I went to London and *nobody* knew my mother and I could...I remember saying to somebody, 'I could walk in to a bar, order a pint, sit on the bar stool, smoke my cigarette and nobody was going to tell my mother'.

SP *Yeah.*

B And I couldn't do that in Dublin. And the person I said it to said, 'do you want to do that?' And I said 'no I don't, but I *can* do it!' (*Laughs*)

SP *Yeah, yeah. I understand what you're saying. Yeah. And what did you do when you were in London?*

B I worked in offices.

SP *Okay.*

B I worked in offices for the rest of my life.

SP *Yeah. And actually just 'cause...yeah...no, the r...the reason...the reason why I was asking what you did in Dublin, is because for a woman of what...what you've become now...*

B Yes.



SP ...I know what you do, and very...you're very educated, I just wondered did you feel...I mean did you feel happy doing those...sort of hotel jobs?

B Hated it.

SP Yeah.

B Hated it.

SP And why do you think that you were doing hotel jobs?

B Partly because I had come from that sort of background...

SP Hmm.

B ...so I...

SP Okay.

B ...knew the job... P...mainly because they were *live-in*.

SP Yes.

B So your...your wages were your pocket money.

SP Hmm.

B Your bills were all paid for...

SP Yeah.

B ...your food was there for you. If you blew your wages you still had food for the rest of the week.

SP *Yeah.*

B You still had your rent paid for you for the rest of the week, your ESB [electricity bill] paid for you.

SP *Yeah.*

B So, it was...sort of a secure way of living.

SP *Okay.*

B But what I actually *needed* was to stand on my own two feet and when I went to London I *had* to. That was a great growing up experience.

SP *Yeah.*

B You know, there was...there was no safety net...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...there was nobody there who knew me, who was going to run and say, 'ah you know, come on, I'll take you in, I'll look after you'.

SP *Yeah. And can you tell me...so I'm sort of talking more about your time after, did...how did that sort of affect you, did it affect you psychologically?*

B *Big time. Big time!* I was dirty, I was second-hand goods, only a flawed person would want me, so I went looking for flawed people.

SP *Hmm.*

B My husband was...more flawed than I so he was perfect for me, and I for him because he saw himself in the same light although I didn't know it at the time, hadn't analysed it. And...behaved

appallingly, slept around, drank like a fish, went from job to job, went from friend to friend. My husband was part...still part of that scene.

SP *Hmm.*

B When we split up, my son was a year old...our son was a year old...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...as I said he's Down Syndrome, I had to grow up again. And this little thing – *oh, the tears – (voice cracking)* this little thing was [number of years removed] years ago now...who gave me unconditional love, a love I couldn't love myself.

SP *Yeah.*

B Which, I had never done. *(Crying)*

SP *Oh.*

B And as I say he's...he's great. My marriage lasted two years, my son was a year old when...when we split and I came back to Aislingstown because I needed the security of the family, and stayed there ever since. And...my husband died fifteen years ago...

SP *Okay.*

B ...and I became a terribly respectable widow, mother of a mentally handicapped son whom everybody adores and I'm known as his mother *(laughs)*...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...rather than as myself half the time, 'cause he's the one that everybody knows and loves.

SP *Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's lovely.*

B He's great...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...he's really great. On the night of his twenty-first birthday we had a party arranged, and I'd ordered three bunches of flowers, two...one for my sister...for him to give to my sister, one for a friend of ours who's been so good to him all his life and one for him to give me. And...he had actually gone and arranged my sister that...not knowing that...that he would have a bunch of flowers to give me.

SP *Aw.*

B ...but, he...came to give me the flowers and he...he asked for somebody to bring out a seat, the seat was put out in the middle of the room, I was very embarrassed and I was made sit on it, and...and he had never been to a twenty-first birthday party so he hadn't seen this any place else, but he came over with the flowers and he got down on one knee, 'cause he had obviously seen this in a film or something, somebody proposing...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and he started to tell me that I was the best cook, and I was the best washer, and I was the best ironer...because what he wanted to say was that I was a good mother...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and he didn't have the words, so he started saying this, well I'm not joking you (*laughs, cries*) my heart was bigger than...than the world! It really was because he's great, *oh gee I really am going to start crying!* Ah he is...he's great.

SP *Yeah.*

B He's terrific, he's a caring, loving person...

SP *It's great to have a son like that.*

B Oh he's incredible and he's equally caring to other people.

SP *Yeah.*

B I have seen him caring for some of the...the young men that he...he lives with who are more handicapped than he is...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and the way he cares for them is...is terrific. And the couple who are in charge of his house have grandchildren, and he is *brilliant* with them and they're only small they're five to two...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...they've three grandchildren and...and he...he's great...he's been great...he gave me...he gave me what I had been missing...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...all along. He made me a complete person.

[Loud unidentified noise in background]

SP *That's great, you should take credit for such a wonderful son as well.*

B I take credit for a bit of it but a lot of it is just...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...him, it has nothing to do with me or his father, it's just *him*.

SP *Hmm. Yeah.*

B He deserves the credit for being the person *he* is. He's good.

SP *Good, well you're very lucky.*

B I am, yeah I am (*laughs*). Yeah, well my eldest half-brother has since died but he said to him one day some years and years ago the circle had...had completed itself for me, and, again, it...it did.

SP *Hmm.*

B Yeah, it did.

SP *Lovely.*

B Yeah...I would love my other son to...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...to make contact...the...the law still won't allow *me* to...to get as much information...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...as I would like...but...

SP *Actually do you mind just telling a...a bit about what happened there?*

B Ah yeah...goodness, I'd say...ten, fifteen years ago I contacted the adoption agency that I had used and I think its name...it...it's either gone, 'cause it was probably a...a convent...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...it's gone and has been taken over by state social service...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...or something but a social worker wrote back to me and said that they couldn't help me, and I wrote back and I said, 'well you...you *can* if you really wanted to you know, and...I know you're not *supposed* to...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...but it's happening all over the place'. And they wrote back and said 'okay then.' This was a couple of months...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...'okay then, we...we'll try for you'. And then they wrote back and said they had contacted my son's father, and that he had said that my son didn't want to have anything to do with me but that he was well and happy. And I wrote back...I...I accepted that for a while, maybe two or three years and then I wrote back again...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and I said, 'no I'm not happy with this... if my son says to you that he is well and happy and that he doesn't want to contact me I'll accept it, but I would think that if I were in his father's position I would not tell my son that...his mother is looking for him, I would...I would try to protect him from the woman who gave him away'...and the social worker said, 'well we'll see what we can do,' and...and...nothing.

SP *I see.*

B Nothing.

SP *So how many years ago... or when did you...?*

B Oh, the last time I wrote I would say was about five years ago.

SP *Yeah.*

B But over a ten year period...

SP *This was over ten years...*

B ... it started fifteen years ago and I've been writing every couple of years.

SP *Yeah. What made you want to trace...or want to get in touch with your son?*

B I would...from his point of view I would like him to know my medical history.

SP *Yeah.*

B From his point of view I would like to tell him as much as I think he would...should know about his parentage.

SP *Yeah.*

B I would *love* to have a relationship with him but if he doesn't want to, I would have to accept that.

SP *Hmm.*

B I'd love to see him (*pause*) (*crying*) sorry, now I'm off again I'm worse than a tap; I'd love...I'd love to tell him that I love him, which sounds strange given that I had given him away but I had done it because I didn't have very many options and I was scared of the options, and I wouldn't have had family support and there was very little state support...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and I w...I really wouldn't have had him because I would have had to go out to work, I would have had a pretty menial job because I had no qualifications...

SP *Yeah.*



B ...and he would have been with a childminder and I would be working just to pay the child minder.

SP *Hmm.*

B Alternatively I would have had to live on the dole and he would have had an even worse life. And I thought at the time that adoption was a good answer, I now don't think so at all.

B *Hmm.*

SP But I...I did think at the time that it was and I'd like to tell him all this.

SP *Yes. And tell me was...was the dole even an option at that time?*

B I don't think so because my father died as I say at that time and my mother got [the] Widow's Pension...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and it was £3, 17/6d. Now I don't know what the cost of living was at that time, but I know that when I was sixteen I got a job for the summer holidays and I was earning £5. So 10 years later £3, 17/6d was a lot less than five pounds.

SP *Yeah.*

B I...I...I very much doubt it was an option.

SP *Hmm. Yeah. And perhaps you might...if you want to pretend that your son were hearing this...what was it like giving him up?*

B Bloody awful...because I was cutting...a piece of me...off of me. Not necessarily my heart, not necessarily my right arm but a piece. And there was no way I could tell him...the things I wanted to say to him, the things that I was saying to him...he was a couple days old, he had no

idea what I was doing or saying. Not to justify myself, but to inform him so that *he* could make decisions...based on that information but I couldn't give it to him...or...because I knew other mothers who had written letters to their children and brought them to the adoption agencies with them but I also know now that they didn't...the children didn't get them.

SP *Yeah.*

B So, I didn't know then that he wouldn't get it but (*pause*) I just...I...I don't want to say I'm sorry; I don't regret having him....

SP *Hmm.*

B ...I regret the circumstances in which I had him, and I regret that he has not known me. Because I think now I am a good person...

SP *Yeah. You are.*

B If that answers your question.

SP *Yes, no definitely...*

B I am long-winded! (*Laughs*)

SP *Yes. Not at all, not at all, no that's perfect. And I just wanted to ask, how...how soon after you gave birth did you...did you have to...?*

B Oh days...

SP *It was after days. Okay.*

B I...I've a funny feeling it was twelve days...

B Yes.

B ...but I'm not certain.

SP *Okay.*

B I don't know why I...I've always thought it was twelve days.

SP *Yeah. Yeah. Okay.*

B But I...I had to bring him...and some other woman with her baby came with me and we both went to Donegal...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...to this F-A-H-A-N, which I think is pronounced Fahan, but might not be...

SP *Okay.*

B ...it could be 'Fawn' as in the colour, but we brought them there.

SP *Was...was there a reason why Donegal? Is it because it was nearer to Belfast?*

B It was *probably* the south of Ireland...

SP *Okay. Yes. Yeah.*

B ...you know, in...in the Republic of Ireland...

SP *Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.*

B ...because I was from the Republic...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and so the baby probably had to be returned or kept in the Republic.

SP *Yeah. Okay.*

B But it could also have been vacancies...

SP Yes.

B ...you went where the vacancy was, I... I don't know.

SP *Okay.*

B I don't know.

SP *Okay. And just to go back to you, did it...did your time have...at the laundries, did it have any long lasting health effects?*

B No.

SP *No. Okay.*

B Except as I said the...the electric shock treatment.

SP Yes. Yes.

B The laundry didn't have any bad effect because my self-esteem was non-existent and it remained non-existent.

SP *Okay.*

B It was just something I went through, I went through the motions, I didn't get involved, I didn't rock the boat and...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...I came out...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...same as I'd gone in.

SP *And the reason why I was even asking that is physically even, I know that there's other women that might, but you weren't in the actual laundry itself...*

B No. No.

SP *...were you?*

B No, no.

SP *Yes. Okay. And how did this...this affect your attitude towards religion...the church or your faith?*

B It didn't really. I never had much...and from quite an early age I could never understand inequality.

SP *Hmm.*

B There was a family living near us and the father was a rip-roaring alcoholic, and they had six children I think and my mother fed them with the leftovers of the restaurant.

SP *Yeah.*

B And I knew this because I would occasionally have to...to bring the food to them. And I knew that they were badly dressed and, hair unwashed and...you know, generally unkempt. And although as I said, my school was slightly outside of the town, I didn't go to school in the town...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...they did, and...and I knew that they would have had a hard time. And I would've known this from quite a young age. I would have known from quite a young age that we were more comfortably off than a number of my friends, and I would've...you know, I would have known that my toys at Christmas were nicer than their toys at Christmas. You know, it was...it was...a euro looking down on ninety-nine cent...but...but still there was that one cent difference. And the inequality of it bothered me.

SP *Yeah.*

B I didn't see myself as privileged but I did see them as underprivileged.

SP *Yeah.*

B So...the...the...the...what was the question?

SP *How did it affect your religion?*

B How did it affect my...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...religion, yeah, it didn't because the religious orders were the ones who showed me most how the inequality system worked, and I didn't like it.

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and I didn't like a God who could bring children into the world to this alcoholic...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...man to be beaten and abused and starved and neglected, that...that...that didn't fit in with any religion that...that I heard in school, so I...I tended from an early age to reject the whole thing.

SP *Very, very interesting. And are there any other ways that your time in the laundry affected you that you haven't covered?*

B Only that I never spoke about it. I haven't spoken about it to my own family. Yesterday I rang my brother for something completely different, and I said, 'by the way do you remember that I had electric shock treatment when I was in Belfast?' And he said, 'yes'. And I said, 'I think...I'm not interested in going for conversation, I've never contacted any of the organisations because I didn't feel that it was their fault I was there, it was my mother's fault and my...my...'

SP *Hmm.*

B ...anger was with her'. I said, 'I am going to look for more information on...on...on that one'...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and he said, 'okay'. As in, 'you must do what you must do,' rather than...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...'I approve or I disapprove,' because he wouldn't make such a...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...a judgement, he j...he just said, you know, 'I...I hear what you're saying'.

SP *Yes. Yeah.*

B And as I say he's my younger brother; I haven't spoken to any of the others. When I was pregnant with my...my son that I've got at home...talking to my sister one day, and I said something about...I don't know what...it was something about morning sickness and she said, 'is it bad?' And I said, 'I don't know, I've nothing to compare it to', that I've never been pregnant before; because I wasn't able to say...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...I had been pregnant before, to my sister who...*who wrote to me for the whole period, didn't know anything about it!* Who came to...to...who came to...to see me, you know, when...when it was all over and...and I had come back home and you know...who fought to get me out...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...to her I h...I said, 'I don't know I haven't been pregnant before so I have nothing to compare it to'...because of the silence my mother...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...imposed on us.

SP *Actually sorry this is completely...this is going back again, but to do with the letters...so you received letters from...from your...*

B Yes.

SP *...family, did you?*

B Yes, yes. I received letters from my father, but my mother never wrote to any of us ever. When I was in boarding school my father wrote, not my mother. My father wrote to my half-sisters and brothers when they were in...in boarding school, not my mother. So that wasn't unusual in our family, it was my father wrote my...but my brother and my sister wrote...

SP *When you were in...*

B ...to me back when I was in Belfast, yes. Yeah.

SP *Okay.*

B Yeah.



SP *Very good. And you said that the letters were censored?*

B Yes, yes.

SP *Yeah.*

B Yes.

SP *Okay. And...yeah actually I wanted to ask how...this actually isn't here but I meant...how...how did...do you know how it affected the way that you...you dealt with authority...figures of authority...did it have any..?*

B It...it wouldn't have had because my mother would have done that job...

SP *Right.*

B ...for me...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...they were...they were...they were almost incidental. The reason why I went to school out of town was because, when she was pregnant with me...and I was her sixth child and she was on the town council...the local [name of order removed] Convent because they were in the town, wanted to block off an alleyway that they had to cross to get from the convent to the school and she objected and so to this day they...they haven't been able to, but they then expelled my half-sister and my sister from school. My sister was four and they expelled her.

SP *Okay.*

B So...and...as I say my mother was pregnant with me; I went straight to the school out of town. My mother had...she'd been in boarding school herself. She had a lot of respect for the *education* the nuns gave but not a lot of respect for women who went into convents...

SP *Okay.*

B ...and not a lot of respect for formal religion. So I would have absorbed some of that so I wouldn't have necessarily seen nuns as people in authority to be respected.

SP *Even before...?*

B Even before...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...yes.

SP *Okay.*

B Yes. You obeyed them...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...simply because they had the authority, and...and...and you didn't.

SP *Hmm.*

B They had the power, but you didn't necessarily respect them.

SP *Yeah. Very interesting. Was that the same for priests as well?*

B Oh yes.

SP *Yeah.*

B Yes.

SP *And just going back to...so, like, your life now, like, how have you coped with the effects of the laundry...or...?*

B I just block them...they d...they don't exist until...until this week, I had never spoken to anybody...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...about the fact that I was there...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...*absolutely anybody*. Like I told my husband...when he asked me to marry him, I...I told him about myself but I didn't talk about the laundry...

SP *Yeah. Okay.*

B ...I just said you know, I've got to tell you I...I've got a...a child...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...and he just said, 'okay,' and that was the end of it.

SP *Right.*

B We carried on.

SP *And why do you think he never said...talked about it?*

B It wasn't important. Nothing happened it was...it was grey, it was bland it wasn't...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...of any interest...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...it wasn't. Yes it was something to be ashamed of, because my own mother had done this to me. As in, if my father had ever beaten me I would have been ashamed of it. He never did. But, nothing happened there so why talk about it?

SP *Yeah. Okay.*

B You know...nothing m...ever much happened in school so I don't talk about it, you know?

SP *Yeah.*

B It...it...it just was a non...non-event...

SP *Yeah. Okay.*

B ...but a non-event to be a bit ashamed of.

SP *Yeah.*

B And nobody else was talking about it...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...so I didn't either.

SP *Right. And...do you think that who you are today is different to the person you were when you were in the laundry?*

B Yes, but not because of the laundry.

SP *No. Okay.*

B *Nothing* to do with the laundry...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...totally to do with...the birth of my...well, the...the love of myself.

SP *Yeah.*

B *Yeah.*

SP *So in what ways have you changed?*

B I've matured, I've become self-sufficient, I've become somebody that I like, as opposed to somebody whom I *really* disliked. I have become a person to whom others come for help which is *gorgeous*. *(Pause)* I've become somebody that I can live with. I couldn't live with the person I was then.

SP *And...what...what...what are the most memorable events in your life?*

B Start...started when I was twenty-five...when I was twenty-five is when I went to London. I started to discover who I was. The memorable events of course that happened before that but, they...they didn't impinge on who I am very much. So yes, becoming pregnant was obviously an event...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...but it was...and not an...not a good event.

SP *Yeah.*

B Going to London was a good event. Having ten years of...not living nicely, not living well, but growing up...I...yeah I'm glad I went to London, I'm glad I had that ten years there, I enjoyed it very much, I made lasting friendships like my Portuguese friends.

SP *Hmm.*

B Then my marriage, and then having my son...the breakdown of my marriage...buying my first house, which was a little two up two down...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...on...on the income of a single parent because I wasn't working, I started working when my son was nine...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...that was brilliant, that was the next...set up centre for unemployed people. Then my husband died, but that was a non-event for me because we didn't part so well...then getting elected onto the town council and [identifying details removed] and...and becoming a...a grand-aunt...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...as well... (*Laughs*)

SP *Yeah.*

B Yeah everything started when I was twenty-five even though I was twenty-two when I had my son.

SP *Yeah.*

B Everything started when I was twenty-five.

SP *Interesting. And actually I do find that interesting; [identifying details removed] you need to have a lot of confidence it seems...*

B *Yes.*

SP *...to do...to go in to politics...*

B Yes.

SP ...so that certainly shows a change.

B Absolutely. Absolutely.

SP Yeah.

B Well getting the job was...was...was...brilliant, because...as I say, my son was nine, I hadn't worked...

SP Hmm.

B ...since he was born, and I did a...a training course, I never seen a computer...

SP Yeah.

B ...and I was going to work in an office, and I was in the job about six weeks and I was out of the office one day and I...gosh I've a pain in my shoulders – very sore! Then I was...I know why, *I'm walking upright! I'm walking erect! My shoulders are back!* I had been slouching for years...

SP Right.

B ...*absolute years*, and my shoulders were back and my chin was up, and I've never heard anybody else have that experience but *that was mind-blowingly brilliant!*

SP Yeah.

B That was great, and the job...*gosh the job*...helping people, and people telling you that you're great and you know you're great because you've helped them and it's...

SP Yeah.

B ...terrific and it's...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...you know! And even though all you've done was, you know, help get them something that they were entitled to...to have...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...but they wouldn't have been able get it without your help...that's terrific, absolutely terrific.

SP *And what made you go into that?*

B I didn't! It was just the job came up.

SP *Right. Okay.*

B The...the...the...the Trade Union Movement were setting up...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...these centres around the place...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and I heard about it and...they...they...they actually set one up in Aislingstown two years...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...before I got the job but they had nobody running it; there was a lady from [name of interviewee's home county removed] who commute...

SP *Yeah.*



B ...commuted but tried to run her own one in [name of interviewee's home county removed] as well and then they decided they would get somebody to run the Aislingstown one. And I went for it and got it.

SP *Yeah...well you could have gone for any job, what made you go for...?*

B Oh I had been trying for other jobs...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and hadn't got them.

SP *Okay. Okay so it was purely...?*

B It was...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...purely chance yeah.

SP *Okay.*

B Yeah.

SP *Very good.*

B I really wanted it.

SP *Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.*

B I...you know, I'd helped them set it up two years before when...

SP *Okay.*

B ...they were looking for offices and when they were look...looking for office equipment and whatever, I had...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...I had done all that for them and I was doing some voluntary work for them...

SP *Very good.*

B ...because I *really* wanted that job...

SP *Very good.*

B ...but, as...but I was also looking for other jobs...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...and...and...and hadn't...hadn't succeeded.

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

B My son! My...

SP *I just had a feeling!*

B ...son, that I've got...my Down Syndrome son.

SP *Yeah.*

B Yeah. Yeah.

SP *Yeah, very good.*

B Yeah.

SP *And...so how would you describe...just kind of your interaction with others...and we've kind of talked a lot about what's here, but I just want to ask how would you describe your experiences...relationships with...in terms of friendships?*

B I have probably five friends. If I start counting I would...I would have difficulty differentiating the friend from the acquaintance because some of my acquaintances are...are really close but they're not *quite friends*. My sister and my brother would be top of my list of friends. Not because they're my sister and my brother but because they're my friends, because I have other sisters and brothers. But the two closest to me in age are so much my friends.

SP *Yeah.*

B My best friend outside of my family is my Portuguese friend in London and the girl that I went to school with who...who knew about the pregnancy and who...who...who was with me the whole way through. And...and I have two other very good women friends. I had another male friend who was *totally* my friend and he was killed in a car crash.

SP *Oh.*

B And...and I haven't replaced him...I had other male friends, who were acquaintances; I've had *no* lovers since my husband...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...died, since my husband and I split up! God, not since he died...but my friends are so much my friends...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...they are *literally* the people who'd...who would practically lay down their lives for me. You know, they...they...they are the people who make me comfortable about...comfortable about dying because I know my son will be looked after by them. You know there is no doubt about that at all...

SP *I see.*

B ...they are that sort of friend.

SP *Yeah. Very close.*

B Yes.

SP *Yeah.*

B Very, very, very...

SP *Very...*

B ...genuine.

SP *...long-term friends.*

B Very genuine.

SP *Yeah.*

B Yes. Yeah.

SP *Yeah. Okay. The reason why I ask is 'cause I just wondered do you have any sort of trust...do you trust people easily, or...?*

B Yes. Yes I do...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...I take them at face value.

SP *Okay.*

B I don't always like them...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...bitch about them...

SP *(Laughs)*

B ...but yes, yes...I do. I tend to trust first and...and...and be disappointed afterwards...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...because I *want* to trust people.

SP *Yeah.*

B I *want* people to be nice. I...I don't...I don't want to see the...the...the other side of them until I have to.

SP *Yeah.*

B And then when I have to, I deal with it then.

SP *Yeah. That's understandable.*

B *Yeah.*

SP *And...I was...there's a question, are you in touch with anyone from the laundry...?*

B From the...?

SP *From the laundry?*

B No, no, not at all no.

SP *Yeah. That...that was it when you left...*

B Yes.

SP *...was it?*

B Yes.

SP *Yeah.*

B Yeah.

SP *Actually what I meant to ask about the leaving part...how were you rec...well it turns out you probably went to Galway...*

B Hmm.

SP *...but how do you feel that you were received in Ireland...like, while you were there? Or I guess it was a secret no one would have...*

B Yeah, that's right.

SP *...known. Yeah.*

B That's right.

SP *Yeah. Yeah.*

B Only my...

SP *So there was never...*

B ...my...my one friend...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...knew.

SP *So there was never any differentiation...the way you were treated or anything?*

B No, no... I no, I...and my family totally absorbed me back in to the family...

SP *Right. Okay.*

B ...as much as they had before I...I went...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...you know. One of my half-brothers and I had...it's like...you know, he was...he's a bastard!  
*(Laughs)*

SP *Yeah.*

B He...he's the one who had the...the...the...the...the child in...in England many years...but he's...he's *not* a nice person, I never liked him, I still don't like him...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...but he was spoiled rotten and to a large extent so was I, and we resented each other's...place in...in...in...in the...the...the family order. And he was not nice to me ever so he wasn't nice to me when I came back home...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...but then that's the way he had always been, yeah and...you know. But the...the rest of the family were as if nothing had happened.

SP *Actually I was just curious...maybe you don't know this but say there was a neighbour...asking about you did they have a story?*

B Yes...and I can't remember what it was. Yes I...I...I had gone away to work someplace and I was writing letters and I was phoning home and I had boyfriends and girlfriends and yes...there was...

SP *Okay.*

B ...I can't remember what it was but I do remember being asked by...by people when I came home from Galway for holidays...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...you know, 'why did you move from...' wherever I was supposed to have been – I can't remember – and I would have to think up and hope that I was telling the same story that they had told.

SP *Okay.*

B But very often I...I was caught out in lies and...and I just put it down to, 'ah sure you know me I'm a bit of an exaggerator'.

SP *Yeah.*

B Yeah.

SP *Yeah.*

B They've caught me out in another lie, you...you know and...and...



SP *Yeah.*

B ...that's it.

SP *Okay.*

B But I don't think anybody would have guessed because it was such a taboo thing to have...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...happened that people just didn't *think* of it...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...as a possibility...

SP *Yeah. Yeah.*

B ...I think.

SP *Yeah. No...I understand. And how do you think your time in the laundries and everything that's happened to you in fact, how do you think...how...how has it affected your feelings towards the Irish State or the Irish society in general?*

B I think the role of the church and its 'one sin' – sex – has been...has impregnated every blade of grass and every ounce...ounce of oxygen and every...everything that we...we did. 'Cause when...it's losing its grip a little bit. So the...I...at the time society would not have acted any differently than it did, and my mother couldn't act any differently than she did, and I wouldn't have acted any differently than I did....

SP *Hmm.*

B ...I regret that we were so under the thumb of the...of the church, that we were so bigoted and narrow minded...that so many people were hurt...and damaged and they in turn have damaged

the next generation because they didn't know any better in many cases, and I think that that's awfully sad, but...it's over, things have got better. Women are no longer being locked up...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...for such stupid reasons as, you know, the...the two-and-a-half year old I heard the other day who was...who was put into a convent because she was caught stealing, at two-and-a-half she was stealing because she was hungry...she was put into a...she didn't get out until she was *thirty-three*? How savage can you get? I don't think that that would happen today.

SP *Hmm.*

B And people are not thrown in to institutions because they're poor. They're not well looked after...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...society's making an awful lot of mistakes for an awful lot of people still. They are not...we are not looking after our poor, we are not educating our poor, which is the only way out of poverty.

SP *Hmm.*

B But, I don't think that harping too much on the past is good for the present. I think we should harp on the present and try and make sure that we don't revert to our past.

SP *Yeah. Yeah, I agree. And I just actually...one of the things that has come out...I just wondered did you experience nightmares?*

B Never.

SP *No, okay. Also just wondered, sort of, in your old age of course there may come a time when you might have to go to a home, would you have any issues about...about that?*

B I would prefer not to be with nuns.

SP *Yeah. Yeah.*

B If I can go to one that's run by lay people...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...I would do so.

SP *Okay....I'll...I'll explain again the reason why I've asked that question but it's to do with the idea of being institutionalised again or...*

B I wouldn't find being institutionalised *awfully* scary because it's lovely to relax and let somebody else take over the problems of the world...

SP *Hmm. Yeah.*

B ...and you just sit there and...go grey and bland again. It's rather like – for me – it's rather like being a member of a religion. You can hand your problems over to somebody else and let them worry about it for you. So bless me father for I have sinned and then you can go off and commit the sin again because you can go back...that sort of thing. So [being] institutionalised doesn't bother me an awful lot. But just being institutionalised with women who have chosen to wear this black or brown gown and...head gear and have religion stuffed down your throat every five minutes, no, no.

SP *Yeah. And we're just coming up to the last bit you'll be happy to know...thank you very much....*

B When I read all these questions there wasn't *nearly* as many questions on that list! (*Laughs*)

SP (*Laughs*) *Thank you, I have to say in advance, thank you...*

B No problem.

SP *...for...it's really valuable...but I think...yes, we've gone through some of these, were you ever in any survivor groups?*

B No.

SP *No. Have you ever complained to anyone such as the nuns or the Gardaí?*

B No.

SP *No. Did you apply for your state record? Your records?*

B No. Not yet.

SP *No. Okay...and you've never...did you...you didn't appl...go to McAleese...*

B No.

SP *...with?*

B No.

SP *Okay. Who do you feel is responsible for what happened?*

B Oh my mother.

SP *Okay. And what would you like the church or the State to do in terms of redress?*

B I would like the State to be more aware of its responsibilities. The role of the church is simply to inform us of the rules of the church. The role of the State is very, very different and it should not pawn off its responsibilities on *any* church, but it should be there to look after those who are not able to look after themselves and it should do so with love and caring and not duty and responsibility. And it should be there for preventative purposes, not for cure purposes. So it should be doing more to educate young women about birth control and less about providing for them...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...as single parents.

SP *And what would you like them to do in terms of redress for your time in the...?*

B For me I...I don't want anything because *they* didn't put me there.

SP *Okay.*

B My mother and I put me there. For those who were put there by the State, *definitely* apology is the *very least*...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...that I expect of...of the State, and recompense I expect of the State. And...greater involvement in institutions that have replaced those institutions...

SP *Yeah.*

B ...so that we know that such...

SP *Hmm.*

B ...behaviour is *not* happening now, and that includes juvenile prisons, maybe all prisons but certainly juvenile prisons.

SP *Yeah.*

B That there isn't enough State involvement in the care and rehabilitation of young prisoners who have a...an end date for the...their incarceration, but don't have the training and education that they will require to keep them on the straight and narrow when they come out.

SP *Okay...if...I have no more questions but do you have anything else to add?*

B Not for the tape.

SP *No.*

B *No! (Laughs)*

SP *Okay.*

B Thank you. But yes for...for you for the...for...the...the...

SP *Yes.*

B ...records...medical records business.

SP *Yes. Well thank you very much for everything. It's really wonderful. Thank you.*

[Interview ends]