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Marrying Out Part 1 - Not in Front of the Altar

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**HINDSIGHT: MARRYING OUT, PART ONE: 11 OCTOBER 2009 –
TRANSCRIPT**

Michelle Rayner:

Today, the first of a two-part series, *Marrying Out*. It's about the passion and the prejudice aroused when couples married across the Catholic-Protestant divide in pre-multicultural Australia. It's written and presented by Siobhan McHugh.

GAY WILSON

My mother came from a strict Methodist family and they were absolutely horrified to think that she was marrying a Catholic, because of people's perception of Catholicism in those days.

“JAMES”

We were second-class citizens. One line in the employment columns was printed in heavier black print than the remainder of the article and it read 'Catholics need not apply'.

ACTOR

Bog Irish. Lazy, drunken, dirty Irish.

DEBBIE MILLARDSHIP

It was '65 or '66 when I went to school. I'd often get spat on as I came home and that 'Catholic dog, Catholic dog' thing.

ACTOR

Catholic dog, sitting on a log, eating maggots out of a frog.

GAY WILSON:

When my mother died, her brother sent me a sympathy card and all he wrote on it was 'Dear Gay, there's one thing I remember about your mother, she married a Catholic.' And I thought, I'll never speak to you again, I ripped up the card. I thought, how dare he say that to me in my grief.

KAYE AMBROSE WEDDING SERVICE 1966 (METHODIST MINISTER):

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here together in the sight of God to join together this man and this woman...

KAYE AMBROSE

I would never have expected him to give up his Catholicism and come to my religion, nor would he have expected me to do the same for him. So that was why we felt it was really just hitting our heads against a brick wall and that's why we kept breaking up.

METHODIST MINISTER:

Therefore, if any man can show any just cause why they may not be lawfully joined together, let him now speak or else hereafter forever hold his peace.

JUDY WELLS

My husband's grandmother had very strong views about Catholics. It didn't really matter to her that I was a very lapsed Catholic or I wasn't a seriously practising Catholic, it was that I represented something that she really found hard to cope with. Catholics were 'other' in all of the ways you could be 'other'.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH (NARRATOR):

I came to Australia in 1985 as a refugee from the Catholic Church in Ireland. I had no idea I was coming to a place where ancient Irish grievances, from English colonial oppression to the Reformation, still resonated loudly.

HARRY GRIFFITHS

My father said, 'Catholic churches, you just have a look at them. All beautiful stone work, but they're always on the top of the hill - because they're going to be fortresses one day when the big battle begins.' Because he always thought there was going to be this war between the Protestants and the Catholics.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

There were other elements; the Masons, a secret Protestant organisation, that to us Catholics was like a pallid version of the Ku Klux Klan. The politics were different; here it was the Labor Party and trade unions versus squatters and conservatives, while at home almost everyone was conservative, and only your shade of nationalism counted. But I recognised the same Us and Them world.

ABC ARCHIVES

REPORTER: Here this morning in front of me there are about 40,000 excited children and they're part of a total of 120,000 who are going to see the Queen today.

JOHN HAYNES

I think in those days there was a very strongly held view that all the best things came out of England.

ARCHIVES: *Queen Elizabeth II:*

I thank you all for the wonderful and moving welcome you have given to my husband and to myself.

JOHN HAYNES

And that if England's formal national religion was Church of England, then that had to be the high point.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Samuel Beckett, that master of minimalism, put it elegantly. 'Vous êtes Anglais?' he was asked. 'Are you English?' 'Au contraire', he answered. 'On the contrary'. At home, Irishness was the opposite of Englishness. But in Australia, it got complicated.

MEG CLANCY:

Being Irish, of Irish background, and Catholic, was part and parcel of the some thing...the school I went to was a Brigidine convent so it was very Irish, Irish nuns. I certainly went along to those St Patrick's Day marches, and you felt very tribal, very proud. You know, you'd have your green ribbon on and your school uniform and you'd march. Yes, it was stirring!

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

In Australia, I discovered, religion was really code for identity. Although some 20% of Irish were Protestants, in the popular mind in Australia, Catholic meant Irish, and to an English Protestant establishment, that meant trouble.

ACTORS

Micks, tykes, stupid.

Superstitious, seditious.

Fenians, papists.

HELEN HAYNES

Some of the distrust that Protestants had for Irish...you know, the Irish were not loyal to the British empire, uppity people, different to control. The English have never been able to control Ireland, so therefore you couldn't trust them, they either wouldn't work or you couldn't rely on them.

ACTOR

Paddies. Inferior. Rockchoppers. Disorderly.

HELEN HAYNES

So I just felt that there was some sort of a backlash perhaps from The Troubles in Ireland.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Helen Haynes, a Catholic, felt the full force of that backlash when she married John Haynes, a Protestant, in 1961.

JOHN HAYNES

Neither of my parents attended. None of my family attended the wedding: not my brothers, my sisters, my parents, uncles, aunts, grandfather. And the way I think it was portrayed to me was, it didn't so much matter if I'd fallen off the rails, but it was a matter of making a commitment to bring any children up as Catholics rather than as Protestants.

Siobhan McHugh:

But how did your father make his views known to you personally?

John Haynes: If I married Helen, I would be disinherited.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Marrying across the Protestant-Catholic divide in pre-multicultural Australia was nothing short of consorting with the enemy for many families. And the bigotry was rife on both sides, as Julia O'Brien found, in Maitland in the 1920s. Julia came from a large and unusually well-off Irish Catholic family. Errol White, her beloved, was a Protestant. Their daughter, Susan Timmins, unravels the story.

SUSAN TIMMINS

He was interested in mechanics and there was only two or three cars in Maitland, and he was working on one of the cars and became the family chauffeur. He then became interested in my mother and fell in love with her.

DRAMATISED SCENE

Errol White:

Why don't we just tell them? Your father seems well disposed to me. Why else would he have hired me?

Julia O'Brien:

He hired you because you're the only one in this town who's seen the inside of a motor vehicle. I tell you, he won't have me marry a Protestant. 'We left Ireland to get out from under them,' he's always telling us. 'The English drove us off the land, left us to starve in the famine, lorded it over us long enough.' He's still so bitter.

Errol White: But I'm not English. I was born in Maitland!

Julia O'Brien: You're a Protestant - same thing in our family. You're not one of us.

CHILDREN (DRAMATISED)

Catholics, Catholics make me sick, ring the doctor quick, quick, quick. If the doctor doesn't come, kick the Catholics up the bum! (LAUGHTER)

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

When I got my son and his 13-year-old friends to re-enact the sectarian taunts of the '50s and '60s, they found it hilarious. Though they attend a mixture of Catholic, Protestant and secular state schools in Sydney, they mingle freely. Religion is simply not on the radar.

In today's multicultural Australia, a 'mixed marriage' means a Greek wedding an Italian, or a Muslim marrying a Christian. But until the mass immigration that followed World War II, non-Indigenous Australia basically consisted of Catholics and Protestants, with Protestants in a 3:1 majority.

700 years of troubled colonial history simmered in the Australian subconscious. The labels shifted, from 'English' to 'Protestant', and 'Irish' to 'Catholic', but the sub-text remained the same: Oppressor, the English Protestant Establishment, and Oppressed, the Irish Catholic Underclass.

ACTOR (READING)

The term 'Irish Catholic' was a label designed to separate and distance those of that tradition from the mainstream of Australian life, to imply that they were foreign and

apart, inferior of course, not truly of the real Australia. It was a label which carried with it an historical load of old divisions and prejudices, too old or too silly to be openly reactivated, but there as shadows on the mind.

- Patrick O'Farrell, historian.

“GWEN”

I don't know why to this day but that was something that you might have added in your conversation: 'Oh yes, but she's a Catholic.' I went to a school at Burwood and we had a Catholic school directly opposite, Holy Innocents, and I can remember some of the girls used to call out across the road to each other, because they used to ring a bell over there so often at this Holy Innocents school that we all wondered what was going on over there. We wondered if they ever had any lessons because every time the bell rang somebody said they had to go to prayers. *(laughs)*

SUSAN TIMMINS

It was not even the religion, although that gave them something to pin it on. It's a bit like Muslims and you can pin it on their dress: 'Look at them, they're different, their dress.' Well, I guess in the 19th century it was, 'Look at them, they're different, they're dumb and they practice this weird papist religion.'

A lot of it was about religious practice but a lot of it was having the ascendancy and it gave them an instant class to look down on. I still come across it with some of the English, 'Oh the Irish this and the Irish that.' And it's that hangover from a few hundred years of superiority.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

So what happened when a boy and a girl from these opposite camps met, and married?

MEG CLANCY

My great uncle Eugene married Eunice, and she was a Protestant, and that caused terrible ructions in my staunchly Catholic family. They argued constantly, over everything: matters of faith, politics, where to educate their only child. Both of them were really stubborn and just would not concede defeat. And as a very small child in Melbourne in the early '50s I was puzzled by the two portraits that hung on their lounge room walls. You see, sometimes the Queen's picture would be facing out but the Pope's would be turned to the wall. And when I asked my mother about this, she sheepishly explained that, well, it depended on who was winning that day's argument. If Eugene felt he was right then he made sure the Pope faced outwards and turned the Queen's picture the other way, but if on the other hand Eunice thought she had the upper hand, then the Queen faced out and the poor Pope faced the wall!

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

In early Australian history, when Catholic priests were hard to find, the Catholic Church took a liberal view of mixed marriages. The alternative, after all, was worse.

ACTOR (Priest):

In the eyes of the Church you're living in sin!

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

But by the mid-1860s, the Catholic Church was well-established and its clergy increasingly were Irish-born. Priests put a stop to many a romance between a Catholic and someone who 'dug with the other foot', as we used to say. Take the case of Richard Higgins, a Catholic, who fell in love with Elizabeth Stoyles, an Anglican, in Braidwood, New South Wales, in 1864. The local priest was not impressed.

Dramatised scene:

Priest:

Love? Do you think that's all marriage is about? Think of the children. Will she take instructions and convert to the one true Church?

Richard Higgins: No, Father, she could not hurt her parents by abandoning her faith.

Priest: Well, she's a lost cause then. But there's no point in having your children go the same way. I will not marry you unless she agrees to have them raised in the Catholic faith.

Richard Higgins: I think she'll agree to that. So we can be wed in the Catholic Church then?

Priest: Not in front of the altar you can't. You don't want to insult God by putting a Protestant in his very face. I'll do you behind the altar, as I do all who suffer from the impediment of mixed marriages.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

In response to the overbearing priest, Richard Higgins repudiated his Catholic faith - in rather spectacular fashion. He fired his Rosary beads out of a rifle down the main street of Braidwood.

Brought up in an Ireland that was 95% Catholic, where people still kowtowed to the Catholic Church hierarchy, I liked the stories of Australian Catholics standing up to bullying priests!

Take Phil, a former altar boy, who wanted to marry Gwen, a Methodist, in 1947.

GWEN:

He just said to me, 'Well, I was told that yes, they were quite happy to marry us in the Catholic Church, the only stipulation was that I couldn't be married in front of the altar, it had to be behind the altar.' And he said, 'That doesn't go down well with me. I said to them "if she's not good enough to be married in front of the altar, then forget it".'

So then we decided to go and see my minister, Mr Gibbons, and Phil introduced himself and said, 'Gwen and I are getting married. I'd like you to know that I'm a Catholic.' And Mr Gibbons just looked at him, smiled, and said, 'So what?'

His elder brother said that he would come to the reception; he wasn't allowed to come into the church. And then his cousin, same thing, that he would come to the wedding,

but he wouldn't come into the church because his wife had said that there'd be trouble at home if he did.

They walked up the steps and there was a window as you got to the top of the steps, there was a window on the left looking into the church, and that's where they both stood.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Like many Catholics of my generation, I've never been to a Protestant service. The Catholic Church forbade it in my youth - not that that would have stopped me, as I rebelled against its strictures while still at school. Not a good idea in a country where Church and State were intertwined.

Yet for all my abhorrence of the hypocrisy and arrogance of the Catholic Church hierarchy, Catholic rituals and beliefs nurtured my sense of spirituality. And while some clergy would be revealed as paedophiles and sadists, others championed the disadvantaged and battled for social justice. Like it or loathe it, the Catholic Church provided what the Irish writer John McGahern called the 'sacred weather' of my childhood.

FEMALE VOCALIST: HYMN: HAIL QUEEN OF HEAVEN (A CAPELLA)

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

In Australia, I had to rewrite 'Catholic' to incorporate 'Irish'. But then where did these often fifth and sixth-generation 'Irish Catholics' fit with being Australian? For Meg Clancy, growing up in a pub in inner Melbourne in the '50s, Irishness and Australianness both derived from being 'The Other', not English.

MEG CLANCY:

There were always lots of anti-English jokes in the family and the Irishman got the upper hand and the Englishman was proved to be foolish, and everyone used to love those and slapped their thighs and wiped away the tears and had another drink, so it was great! (laughs)

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

And how much did a sense of Irishness bleed into a sense of Australian kind of nationalism?

Meg Clancy:

You aligned yourself with an Australian sensibility. Certainly in my grandfather's time they always voted Labor and in that sense you would never vote Liberal. And Bob Menzies was certainly an anathema to most of the people in my parents' generation because of his arse-licking, if you like, of the Queen. They did turn their backs on the Establishment but, on the other hand, I asked my mother about this one time and she said, 'Yes, but I have to admit that I do like living under the Westminster system of government.' So there was kind of a contradiction.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

John Haynes, estranged from his family for marrying a Catholic in 1961, was brought up an Anglican in Sydney's eastern suburbs. In his world, Englishness and its flag bearer, Anglicanism, were paramount. Fealty, not faith, was the issue.

JOHN HAYNES:

It wasn't as if my parents had ever gone to church, except for weddings and funerals, it was just that my father was very much an empire man, and I think in those days Robert Menzies was the epitome of an empire man, and everything that came out of Great Britain, including I presume the Church of England, was to be admired. And you were somehow letting the family lineage down and history down if you changed that through bringing up children as Catholics.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

At times the two communities maintained a virtual social apartheid. In Rockhampton in the 1930s, for instance, anyone wary of transacting business with a Catholic could equip themselves with a handy brochure, 'The Protestant's Guide to Shopping in Rockhampton'.

DRAMATISATION:

"A leading hosiery supplier seeks reliable and experienced representative. Roman Catholics need not apply."

Meg Clancy:

You always did business with other Catholics. Like if Mum had to renew the insurance she made sure it was through the Hibernian Society. So where possible you'd always go to the shops that were owned by Catholics, you didn't really give any support...you gave as little as possible to any Protestant businesses. So it was a ghetto, in a way. But when you're in it, you don't know you're in a ghetto, you know?

DRAMATISATION

Wunderlich tiles: fitters, machinists wanted. Roman Catholics need not apply.

John Haynes:

You were more likely in Australian society to prosper as a Protestant than as a Catholic. The Catholic represented an underclass at many levels. They did ask in your interviews what religion you were in those days.

SUSAN TIMMINS

Absolutely. My father tells the story of my mother trying to get a job, I think it was at David Jones, because she applied for a job there and they asked, 'Would you state religion?' And she said that she put down Catholic and they turned her away, said, 'Don't bother', they wouldn't even interview her.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

The opposing camps in Australia were very clear. The question for me was whether or not there was a middle ground. Was it possible to meld Irish larrikinism and English orderliness? To reconcile Irish roguishness and English respectability? To overcome bigotry and bile? Mixed marriage seemed to point towards a third way.

Kevin Hincks:

We were brought up as Anglicans, Church of England in those days.

Bev Hincks:

I was brought up very Catholic. I was on holidays with a friend coming back from the Gold Coast and we crashed the car, and Kevin was coming home from doing relief in a pharmacy, and he was the first car to arrive on the scene. So I was a pick-up!

Kevin Hincks:

I just thought, silly so-and-so, fancy running up the wall!

Bev Hincks:

But I can remember him telling me that...he must have been starting to like me and fall in love with me, if I can put it that way...I remember him telling me, 'Buster, religion will never be a problem if we get together,' because he knew that I'd had problems before. And I think they were some of the loveliest words I ever heard.

Kevin Hincks:

I knew that if we got married...I knew the children would have to be brought up as Catholics etcetera, it didn't particularly worry me.

Bev Hincks:

We were married in 1959, just as John XXIII was calling Vatican II, which I think has been the story of our lives because we've lived it. As the churches have grown, we've grown. Well, I've grown, Kevin didn't have to grow as much as me.

Kevin Hincks:

Out of the four [children] it turned out one married a Catholic, one's married to an Anglican, one's married to a Uniting Church and one's married to a Jew, so it's a really ecumenical family.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Bev and Kevin Hincks from Newcastle are among the one in five Australian couples who 'married out' between the 1890s and the 1960s. I've been gathering stories of these marriages and they've upset a lot of my cultural stereotypes. I met a hilarious Methodist and a friendly Mason. I found a large poor Protestant family and eleven teetotal Catholic siblings. I met one Catholic who married three Protestants, and another whose forebears serially married Anglicans called Gladys.

But does passion overcome prejudice? Does faith help or hinder a hybrid marriage?

Let's start at the very beginning, what we might call The First Joyful Mystery - when boy meets girl.

MUSIC

NORA DUNNE

Well, I think it was really a fairytale meeting, because they were running dances in the city hall in Newcastle for the war effort and that. It was midweek, it was during

the barn dance and he saw me and came in the barn dance, and it was like as if we'd known one another all our lives.

GWEN

They built the Concord AGH, which was the military hospital then, and on the day that they were opening it in 1941... I had a girlfriend staying with me from work and just for something to do I said to her, 'Would you like to go over to the hospital and see the opening ceremony?' So over we trotted. I think my husband-to-be was the first air force patient in there.

GAY WILSON

I met him at the local technical college and I thought he was the most handsome thing on two legs. And religion never entered the equation for us.

KAYE AMBROSE

In 1963, had my parents' friend not caught her finger in the car door, we would never have met. But my parents had a friend who was playing the piano as a rehearsal pianist for the Williamstown Light Opera Company, so she asked my parents would my brother take over as rehearsal pianist, and I just tagged along. His mother had actually been one of their star lead performers prior to the war, so he'd joined, and that's how we met.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Once a couple decided to marry, the big question was; which Church?

TONY DAVIS:

We decided that we'd get married...because Elaine's parents were both Anglicans, that we'd get married in the Anglican church. The next step was to go and see the Davis family who lived on The Hill in Newcastle. They were a fairly influential family and a very strong Catholic family. So when I went to see them and told them that I was going to marry Elaine, my auntie said to Elaine, 'Come out on the veranda and look at the ships and while we're doing that, I'll talk to you about how easy it is to become a Catholic.' And my wife-to-be said, 'I don't think you will, because I'm not going to be a Catholic.' So from that moment on they told me that they would not come to the wedding and they didn't really care if they never spoke to me again.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Tony Davis ended up converting to Anglicanism and, a radical shift, becoming a Mason, something he could not bring himself to tell even his liberal-minded Catholic father.

Tony Davis:

Because my dad believed that Catholics and Masons should keep as far as they can away from each other. But when I did go and see my father one day when he was quite ill, he said to me, 'I want you to really promise me something and that is that from this moment on in your life you will never join the Masonic Lodge and become a Mason.' And I said, 'I will never do that, from this moment on.' I think I'd been a member for ten years. But there was no point in me telling him because he would have got very upset.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Catholics who married in a Protestant church were automatically excommunicated, a fate that befell Prime Minister Ben Chifley. After his marriage to a Presbyterian, he always stayed at the back during Sunday Mass, unable to receive Communion. The Catholic Church was, however, quick to claim him for the glory of a prime ministerial burial.

Protestants who chose a Catholic ceremony were required to familiarise themselves with basic Catholic principles. Father William Crahan, from Navan in Ireland, handled numerous mixed marriages during more than 50 years of ministry in rural New South Wales and the ACT.

FR WILLIAM CRAHAN:

What I'd generally say to them, 'You're both Christians and you've got an awful lot in common.' See, the first instruction is on the existence of God and the next one is on Jesus Christ, and then the third is on the Pope, the infallibility, and then the commandments of the Church and the sacraments. And then the fifth one of course was on marriage.

Five nights they'd have to come and see me. I'd go through it in about half an hour. Some of them would fall asleep and some of them would ask questions and say they didn't believe in it and why, but generally it was quite a nice meeting.

JONATHAN WICK

Margaret's priest, Father O'Donovan, had been with her family for many, many years. He initially gave me a bit of a hard time and wanted me to prove to him that I knew my Bible and wanted me to go to him and have lessons and whatever. I didn't like that but Margaret said, 'I think you should know something about my religion,' which I accepted.

MARGARET WICK

But you didn't do five, you did two.

JONATHAN WICK

No, I didn't do five, I wasn't happy about it. But I knew my Bible, I didn't have to prove anything to him, and if he didn't like it, well, bad luck!

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Now it was the Protestant's turn to feel like a second-class citizen. Even armed with the Five Instructions, no Protestant could be admitted onto the main altar of a Catholic Church. The exuberant splendour of a Nuptial Mass was for Catholic couples only. Mixed couples got a no-frills affair, with the exchange of vows relegated to a cheerless setting out of sight of friends and family.

NORA DUNNE

Yes, in the presbytery. It was a dirty old presbytery too.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Did you feel hurt by that?

Nora Dunne:

Not at the time I didn't. I was married in 1942. You know, you obey what you can do and what you can't do. But as the years went by I did, because there were two other people married at the same time and both those girls were married in the church, but they were both pregnant, and I wasn't.

JEAN MCLEAN:

You know how it's always so beautifully performed, the whole marriage, with the bows on the pews and the people sitting down in their appropriate seats, his side one side, your side the other side, all this nonsense. And all I can remember is arriving on the steps of St Patrick's Cathedral, all my family and friends etcetera all standing at the top of the this church, and they're not Catholic, they're Protestants, waiting for me to come on the arm of my uncle. And then they're all scattering down the aisle ahead of me! (*laughs*) Then turning the corner at the bottom near the altar and going around the back to the vestry. So instead of being the bride in all her finery coming down the aisle, everybody turning, looking at her and gasping, instead she sees the backs of all her family scattering down in front (*laughs*).

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Ken and Jean McLean married in 1949. Pope Paul VI rescinded the inflammatory 'not in front of the altar' rule in 1966, but before that there were always priests who didn't toe the line, as Father John McSweeney discovered in the 1950s.

FR JOHN MCSWEENEY:

In our church in Dulwich Hill, the parish priest decided that that wasn't a good rule, we needn't obey it, so he didn't obey it himself and we, the curates, we didn't obey it either, and so we conducted all marriages the same way, they were all in front of the altar and they all had the same ceremony and we didn't discriminate in any way between mixed marriages and Catholic marriages.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

And did you ever get into trouble for that?

Fr John McSweeney: No, never had any trouble. Probably the Bishop knew about it but he was wise enough not to do anything about it.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

The Bishop was indeed wise not to take on that particular priest, one Dr Patrick Tuomey. The Irish priest was fined 30 pounds for sedition in 1918 for 'having by word of mouth encouraged disloyalty to the British Empire'. He'd spoken out against British rule in Ireland, in the wake of the 1916 rebellion in Dublin.

Sectarianism in Australia peaked in the 1920s, fuelled by mutterings of Catholics not doing their bit to support the war. This perception was bolstered by the very public anti-conscription stance taken by Archbishop Daniel Mannix of Melbourne, another outspoken Irish cleric.

ACTOR: [Daniel Mannix]: “Australia first, the Empire second.”

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Mannix lambasted conscription as 'the undignified process of spurring the willing steed'. And indeed, the records show that Catholics enlisted in World War I in the same proportions as other Australians, but the myth of Catholic disloyalty persisted, entrenching the sectarian divide.

ACTOR: *'This is a Protestant country and it is our pride that we have absolute liberty under the Union Jack.'* EK Bowden, Australian Minister for Defence, 1922.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Such Protestant triumphalism made Catholics more determined than ever not to give ground. Mixed marriage became the battlefield. Despite hostile clergy and family fatwas, many couples were determined to bridge the gap.

MUSIC

The First Sorrowful Mystery: Kaye, a Methodist, marries John, raised Catholic 1966.

KAYE AMBROSE

This was written on the 5th of September in 1965. So she says:

'Dear Kaye. When John told me he was taking you out again I asked him not to get himself involved as it would only bring unhappiness to everybody. I also mentioned I would not like him to marry outside his church. He assured me I would never have to worry about that. But you were not satisfied to take him as he was, you had to mould him to your ideas. We knew John decided to go your way just after Christmas. You must feel very proud and honoured at what he'd doing for you, but is he proud of himself for what he's doing to his family? You are taking our only son, his father's name and his and our pride without even consulting us. You will probably say it is your life and your decision. We agree with you there. But John owed a good mother and father more consideration than that. I have only my prayers left to hope for a happy solution for us all. Mrs D Ambrose.'

But I did respond to that letter. A lot of this I had forgotten over the years and it was only when I looked at it again that some of it came back to me.

'Dear Mr and Mrs Ambrose. As you know, John and I have been going out together for almost two years now. It didn't take us long to realise we loved each other, but the fact foremost in our minds...'

And I'm going to cry now, only because he's died recently. (*sobs*)

'...was our different religions. Having both taken an active part in our own respective churches we knew that a marriage without a religious unity has no foundation, and although we worshipped the same God, it was pointless going on together and it would be better for us to be apart than together and of separate faiths, and so we broke off. Not because we wanted to, but feeling it would be better for all concerned. This didn't happen once but five times and each time we were aware that our love and need for each other was growing stronger and bringing us together again. Believe me, we tried hard enough.' (*sobs*)

We were like chalk and cheese in our religions. There were a lot of differences that I found quite unusual.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

And were you dismayed to find he was Catholic?

Kaye:

No, I don't think I was. I don't think I had any prejudices. In fact I'd been out with a guy who was an Aboriginal and I'd found a lot of people weren't too happy about that and my parents were a bit wary. But unbeknownst to me one night he announced that there were certain things about the Catholic religion he didn't like and he just...I don't know, saw something in me that he felt I had more out of mine than he did out of his.

So it was in October of that year when my father, my mother, John and I were at my work's ball, the band struck up and the MC announced our engagement and he produced the ring that he'd been hanging onto for ten months. Not even my parents knew. And then I sat there thinking, oh boy, have I made the right decision? Oh it's too late now! (laughs)

His father refused to come, would not come at all. His mother said she would come as long as we did not have communion. So I said to John, 'Well, you might need to decide whether you're marrying me or your mother.'

At the end when...in those days the bride and groom got in the middle with the family around them and then all the guests usually stood around in another big circle and you kissed goodbye to everybody, and...I know we've got a photo, you can see the look on his mother's face, the tears welling up in her eyes.

MALE VOCALIST: HYMN: Jehovah

KAYE AMBROSE

He had a lovely singing voice, a tenor voice, and he would sing in the choir, and we'd made that decision that if we had children they'd be brought up in the Methodist Church, and everything settled down quite well. But his father didn't speak to us for four years, and he wouldn't come into the same room as us, he wouldn't eat at the same table as us.

I've seen John go to shake hands with him and his father would turn his head, put his hand out and turn his head, wouldn't look at him. And I would always walk in and kiss him hello and goodbye whether he liked it or not, because I used to think, you old so-and-so, I don't care what you think, I'm going to kiss you hello and good bye.

And it wasn't until we'd been married for four years that I lost our first baby. She was born full time, she was a week late, inhaled a lot of fluid, got pneumonia and died when she was two days old, and that was on the 6th of November of 1969. And when we went down to his parents' place that Christmas Day, and I can still see it like it was yesterday, his father was sitting in the chair in the lounge where he always sat because

he wouldn't go into the dining room with us, and I just walked in and kissed him on the top of the head and he just muttered, 'Sorry about the baby.' And I burst into tears.

And his mother came running out from the kitchen defending me saying, 'Did he upset you?' But he didn't, I was crying from happiness that he'd finally spoken to us. That was in '69. And then in 1970 I had my daughter Robyn, and he died of cancer when she was six months old. So we didn't have that relationship for very long. He'd wasted a lot of years.

MUSIC

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

The Second Sorrowful Mystery: Heather, a Presbyterian, marries Cliff, a Catholic, 1961.

HEATHER SHEPHERD

Well, my father was a Presbyterian and he came out from Scotland when he was 16, and my mother comes from an English background, and I was brought up on the farm. We met in the Agriculture Bureau, we were both members and we went out on outings together.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

But how did you feel, then, when you found out he was a Catholic?

Heather Shepherd:

I was quite happy about it because he has a wonderful family, but of course my family weren't. When we told them we were going to be married...well, they were upset, we were upset, it was quite an upsetting time really. My father didn't say much but my mother told me she wished I was dead, that she didn't want me to marry Cliff. My dad never gave me away when we were married. Well, he was a Mason and it sort of didn't go too well!

We got married on the 22nd of April 1961, it was in the Catholic church in Marulan. And it was quite a good occasion, but there was one thing that happened after the wedding which, somebody took the nuts off one of the wheels on the ute that we were going on our honeymoon in and the wheel came off. Cliff just gently guided it until it stopped. We weren't hurt. We still don't know who that was.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Tell me then about your mother after you got married. Did she soften her attitude?

Heather Shepherd:

No, never. And when we had children she used to tell me what ugly children they were. She'd sit there at the table and say, 'That's the ugliest child I've ever seen.'

I still had a good relationship with Dad but when he died he left the place to my brother, just because I married a Catholic, yes. I knew, he told me before we were married, he told me that he'd disinherited me. It didn't particularly worry me, but later on when he was very sick he wanted to change his will and I wouldn't let him. I said no because I thought he's not in his right mind now, so we didn't change it.

MUSIC

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

The Third Sorrowful Mystery: John, raised Anglican, marries Helen, raised Catholic, 1961.

JOHN HAYNES:

We were brought up as Protestants, Church of England. This was the children because my parents never seemed to participate in any of these activities themselves. So as far as I was concerned my parents were as close as you could imagine to good citizens with religious moral attitudes but didn't practise or attend anything that was religious as far as I was aware of. And my uncle was a member of the Masonic Order and took his membership very seriously.

HELEN HAYNES:

Yes, they were dour Calvinist sort of...not fun-loving and in fact if you were having a really good time that would not be something that they would approve of. Even your mother liked to have a cigarette and liked to play cards, and was it brandy she drank? She liked to party, she liked a good time, and your father didn't drink, your father didn't smoke.

John Haynes:

He was very interested in sport but not one of the boys, not one to go down to the pub and have a drink. I never heard him tell a joke.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

And what was your father's occupation?

John Haynes

He was a manager of a NSW authority called the Egg Marketing Board.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Do you think that the Egg Marketing Board was a Protestant enclave?

John Haynes:

Yes, I do. The senior positions there would almost invariably be filled, irrespective of merit, by Protestant people.

Helen Haynes:

Yes, I always was under the impression that one of the big reasons is that he didn't want people at work to know that you were marrying a Catholic. He probably had risen as far as he could go then, it wouldn't necessarily be for promotion but I think it was probably the shame of it. It was a stigma to have a Catholic in the family.

John Haynes:

That's putting it pretty strongly but I guess this explains why I was so surprised. I could not think of any rationale.

MUSIC

Helen Haynes:

My parents were very supportive. They just loved John, so he could have been any religion, they wouldn't have cared.

John Haynes:

They were welcoming, they were terrific.

Helen Haynes:

They never said anything ever critical about your family, and yet I know that my father was absolutely furious that his daughter would be treated like that.

John Haynes:

Helen was *never* welcome, even ten years later, Helen was never made to feel welcome in our house.

MUSIC

Helen Haynes:

We went overseas and lived in Canada for three years, just to get right away from families. And it was when we came back, Philip was older than a baby, he was a toddler, he was walking, that you then decided that you would do something about it.

John Haynes:

I think my attitude may have been, how could you resist this little toddler, such a cute little kid (of course we're all biased), it's got to be an icebreaker in this whole thing, and it turned out only very partially to be an ice breaker because my father had really made up his mind. In fact he died in 1973, our kids were born in '68 and '70, so he never really got to know them. And I think he harboured the suspicion that they were being brought up Catholic, but they weren't being brought up anything at all.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

But how ironic in the end that the children weren't brought up Catholic.

Helen Haynes:

No, no.

John Haynes:

He really had nothing to fear but he didn't know it.

MUSIC

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Your father died suddenly, I believe. Were you actually really reconciled with him before he died?

John Haynes:

No, we'd never really had a satisfactory debate.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

Do you feel angry with him for what he did?

John Haynes:

No. I think there have been times when I was supposed to be angry but I couldn't bring myself to be angry. I just thought, well, he's got it wrong and his attitude is different to mine. In all other respects he was a good, caring, loving father. I had sadness, because I felt that the family, which had been a very strong unit previously, had suffered a serious disruption, but what was done was done and I had no regrets and I never heard my father express regret either for his attitude. No, we were never comfortable after I was married.

SIOBHAN MCHUGH

And did he disinherit you?

John Haynes:

Yes.

Helen Haynes:

Both their wills were changed because I remember after your father died, one of the first things your mother said to you when she got over the shock and the grief was, 'I want to change my will.'

John Haynes:

She wanted to right what I think she felt privately for a long time was a wrong, and she didn't change her will. Funnily enough my uncle, when he died a few years later, he had one of these distorted wills as well and I was cut out of that.

Helen Haynes:

So John feels quite a bit of pride that he was cut out of three wills! He figures that not many people would have been cut out of three wills.

John Haynes: It was all for the same reason - this business of religious bigotry.

__MUSIC TO END__

Michelle Rayner: That was 'Not in Front of the Altar', the first of a two-part series, *Marrying Out*, about mixed marriage between Protestants and Catholics in pre-multicultural Australia.

The contributors were Gay Wilson, Harry Griffiths, John and Helen Haynes, Meg Clancy, Susan Timmins, Tony Davis, Bev and Kevin Hincks, Nora Dunne, Jean McLean, Kaye Ambrose, Father William Crahan, Father John McSweeney, Heather Shepherd, Debbie Millardship, Judy Wells, and others who don't wish to be named due to family sensitivities.

The series was written and produced by Siobhan McHugh, and the sound engineer was Steven Tilley. Readings were by Maeliosa Stafford, Tracy Mann and the Radio National ensemble.

The series music was composed and performed by Thomas Fitzgerald with assistance from the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong. The vocalists were Kavisha Mazzella and Lawrence Allen.

And if you'd like to comment or leave your own story of mixed marriage, go to our website. Plus you can also join Siobhan McHugh for the Life Matters talkback on this very subject on Friday.

And do join me on Hindsight next week for part two of Marrying Out, 'Between Two Worlds: Growing Up in a Mixed Marriage'.

EXCERPT: WEDDING OF KAYE AND JOHN AMBROSE, Methodist Church, Wantirna, Victoria, 1966.

ENDS

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Read Siobhan McHugh's *History Australia* article about mixed marriage at <http://publications.epress.monash.edu/toc/ha/6/2>

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