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# Marrying Out Part 2- Between Two Worlds

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# MARRYING OUT: PART 2: BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Transcript for *Hindsight* 18 Oct 2009

**Michelle Rayner:**
***Today, the final in the two-part series, Marrying Out, which explores the experience of marriage across the Catholic-Protestant divide in pre-multicultural Australia. In Part Two, 'Between Two Worlds', we hear from the children who grew up in a mixed marriage. It's presented by Siobhan McHugh.***

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***[Voices reciting the Hail Mary]***

**HYMN: Faith of our Fathers…**

**'ANNA'**
They were very Presbyterian, very conservative and they hated Catholics, and so we weren't accepted by my grandmother, particularly; she was more vocal about it.

As soon as you walked in, on the piano there were photos of all the family and their weddings and there was a photo of our parents' wedding, but out mother was cut out of it, just sort of shredded out of it, and that set the tone for us. We sort of didn't feel very welcome.

**JONATHAN WICK**
I do believe my mother is anti-Catholic, for reasons I don't know. When I told her I was marrying Margaret she was I think initially a little distressed.

**MARGARET WICK**
And indeed when you told her that we were expecting a baby;do you remember that? And she said, 'Oh no,' and burst into tears!

**GAY WILSON**
In those days, you were either public or a Catholic and in those days the Catholic kids wore brown shoes to school and the publics wore black. And she asked my son, who was just five, 'Has mummy bought your school shoes yet?' and I knew what she meant: 'Did mummy buy you black shoes or brown shoes?' not say, 'What school are you going to?' I thought that was horrific to ask a young child, a five-year-old, that.

***[School bells]***

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
The nuns used to tell us if you weren't a Catholic, you wouldn't go to heaven when

you died. I piped up;I think I was only in first class;and I said, 'But my mother's not a Catholic,' and she said, 'Well, she'll go to hell when she dies.' I must have really got very cranky, because I was put outside the door, and I said, 'My mother *will* go to heaven, because I'm going to see her there,' because everyone promised me that (laugh). And she said, 'No, she won't.' And I went home and I told Mum. She said, 'God decides that.' And I went back the next day and I told Sister Celine, 'God decides.'

***Actor [Nun]***
***Your mother will burn in hell. For all eternity.***

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
Growing up in Australia in the ambiguous half-world of a mixed marriage required a delicate balancing act. It was the experience of one in five families until the 1970s, a pre-multicultural age when the country was polarised between just two groups: Catholics and Protestants. Children struggled to reconcile opposing beliefs and cultures. One girl felt like a spiritual half-breed.

**ANNA**
Oh we were slapped into a state school and he would say that we had been brainwashed, the Catholics had brainwashed us and he was, he didn't say he was going to knock that out of us, but that's basically what he was trying to do. And in those days you didn't eat meat on a Friday and so he tried to get us to eat meat on a Friday and we wouldn't and that got him quite angry.

***HYMN: ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL BOYS' CHOIR***

**KIMBERLEY O"SULLIVAN STEWARD**
We went to church every Sunday; this was the sixties, where you still wore your mantilla; and I remember being embarrassed that you'd get to the church, which was St Michael's at Hurstville, and that we'd go there and there'd be my sister and I and Dad, and that you'd see all the other people from school and it was the mother, the father and the children. And sometimes kids that didn't know would go, 'Where's your mother?' Sometimes when we got home [that] she had coffee and she was reading the Sunday paper seemed kind of really sinful and bad, like that that compounded the fact that she wasn't there [*laughs*].

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
Irish Catholics were Australia's first ethnic minority, battling discrimination and opprobrium from the Protestant establishment. To a beleaguered Catholic Church, mixed marriage threatened to undermine the faith, as priests like Father William Crahan were well aware.

**FATHER WILLIAM CRAHAN**
Of course, you put milk into the water, or water into the milk and it gradually dilutes the faith; or there's a danger of dilution; and that's perhaps one of the reasons why the church is against mixed marriages, you could say.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**

But no church could stop people falling in love. Who cared about religious differences, tribal loyalties to Ireland or England, centuries or colonial oppression, or even hostile families?

***[Music]***

**'LOUISE'**
Well, my father came from Sydney, a Protestant family who lived in Drummoyne; I think they were Anglican. He was an industrial chemist and he moved to Melbourne and was working in Melbourne, and that's where he met my mother, because they were both living in the same boarding house. But my mother came from Ballarat, from a sort of pub-owning family; her mother owned a hotel, her father died when she was very young. So that was a very Catholic family. My aunt says they were very much in love when they were first married. But I think they must have both been quite lonely, in a boarding house, both away from their families.

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
My father was a Catholic and a strong Catholic. My mother came from a staunch Presbyterian family and also her mother was in the Orange Lodge and very, very strongly anti-Catholic. Any other religion they could tolerate, but not Catholics. So, they eloped.

***MUSIC***

**ANNA**
I know my mother was Irish Catholic. Her mother was Anglican, her father was an Irish immigrant, I think. They were orchardists and she grew up on an orchard down in Victoria. My father came from a very Presbyterian family. He was one of I think it was ten children, and they were farmers. And in those days, people went to dances and my Mum clapped eyes on my Dad and she never looked at another man after that apparently. She thought he was just divine. He was a very good-looking man and she was apparently very, very beautiful too. And they were married in wartime, about 1939 or something like that. They were both 23.

**HARRY GRIFFITHS**
My mother's name was Florence Eileen Duffy. And the old man, he was born here in Australia, but his father came from Shropshire in England. His family were not very happy about him marrying a Catholic. Old man Duffy didn't seem to mind, as long as they got married in a Catholic church, but the first surprise came when my mother told him that because he was a Protestant, they couldn't be married in front of the altar, they had to be married around the side of the altar. So before the church ceremony, my father went round and saw the priest, gave him five quid and said, 'Make this as fast as possible. Get it over and done with quick!' So that's what he did. He said it was the fastest wedding they'd ever seen! *[laughs]*.

*[Music: Here Comes The Bride Wedding: fiddle*]

***LATIN HYMN: ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL BOYS' CHOIR***

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
Contrary to Protestant paranoia, the Catholic Church did not seek to convert those who courted Catholics. The odd proselytising priest may have had a go, but not very successfully. A 1966 survey showed that only about four per cent of spouses in a mixed marriage switched faith and of these, more became Protestant. That's not to say that the Catholic Church wasn't out to save souls; the real battlefield was over the children.

***ACTOR: 'We, the undersigned, hereby solemnly promise and engage that all the children of both sexes who may be born of our marriage shall be baptised in the Catholic Church and shall be carefully brought up in the knowledge and practice of the Catholic religion.'***

**FATHER WILLIAM CRAHAN**
When I started back in the fifties, both the Catholic and non-Catholic would have to sign that, to say that they were going to bring the children up as Catholics; they'd both have to make the promise.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
When you think about the people that you actually met and married in these mixed marriage situations, what was their frame of mind? Were they realistic about the issues?

**FATHER WILLIAM CRAHAN**

Well, two people in love, the last thing they're thinking about is the future, the children, the problems that they might have, or anything. They're in love and they want to get married. That's it.

**JEAN MCLEAN**
The only time I recall a form was after the marriage ceremony itself, in the vestry at the back of St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne where we were married. I had said to Ken I would marry him in the Catholic Church, despite my upbringing, because he said his mother would never speak to him again if he didn't marry in the Catholic Church. So I agreed, but only if any children we had would be Protestants, because I would not know how to bring up a child in the Catholic Church. But I signed, because, I mean we'd gone through the whole performance and I probably didn't think it had too much meaning for me, because I was a Methodist in my own mind and to be signing a bit of paper in a Catholic Church - wouldn't have made any difference if it had been Calathumpian!

*[Church bells]*

**GAY WILSON**
Well, we were married in a Catholic Church. My husband was most agreeable to that: he loved me and he didn't want to lose me, I guess. But the horrifying thing to me - my husband had to sign a document to say he would bring any children that we had up as Catholics. I thought that was such an imposition to ask someone to do that.

Fortunately my husband and I both agreed that children did need some religion and some guidelines and he thought the mother is the one who has the most time with the children and has the most influence over them during those formative years, and he was more than happy for them to be christened Catholics and to be brought up as Catholics.

***HYMN: HAIL QUEEN OF HEAVEN: excerpt***

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
They got married here in Sydney, here at St Francis in Albion Street, Surry Hills, and it was a Catholic Church. And when I look back on it, I would say my father demanded that and I doubt whether he would have married Mum if she hadn't've agreed to get married in a Catholic Church and bring the children up as Catholic. And I suppose this was a falling out then with her mother over that, because she was dead against it. And as a result of that, my father and grandmother never spoke. And every time we'd go from Bronte to Paddington to see my grandmother, my mother would say in the tram, 'Now, we won't talk about church or what you did at church this week, all right?' They would sort of rib us about Jesus Christ and the Cross and all this sort of thing, so on the way home in the tram my mother would say, 'Now, don't say anything to your father about what happens in Paddington. What happens in Paddington, stays in Paddington.' 'Yeah, Mum, yes, yes.'

*[Music: Piano - Faith of Our Fathers]*

**KIMBERLEY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
They married at St Joseph's at Newtown. She talked about them discussing should there be a problem at a birth of a child and a choice had to be made between saving the mother's life and the child, and that she had to agree, and that my father had to agree, that the child's life would be saved over hers. And she said she had a very big problem with that, she wouldn't agree to it. They left; my father said something like, 'You just agree with the priest. You just go "yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." You just agree with what they say and then you go and just do what you need to do.' You know, 'Don't you know that?' But she was taking it all very literally and seriously. So she said that was typical of an Irish-Australian attitude to the church: you go in and you doff your hat and you say 'yes, yes, yes, yes, yes,' and then you go out and you just go on with what you were going to do anyway.

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***DRAMATISED SCENE:***

*MAN*
*I will not have the pope telling me how to run my life!*

*WOMAN*
*But we promised Father Harrigan we'd bring up the children Catholic.*

*MAN*
*Bloody priests!*

*WOMAN*

*You sound more like your mother every day. First it's dirty, drunken Irish, then it's pig-ignorant papists.*

*MAN*

*Look I know my family don't treat you right, but if we bring them up Catholic, my mother will never want to see her grandchildren.*

*WOMAN*

*And what about* my *family if we go your way??*

---

**LOUISE**
Well, my brother went to the local public school and I went to the local Catholic primary school. My father wouldn't let him be raised as a Catholic.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
But then why would he have let you?

**LOUISE**
Well I guess because I was a girl. You know what they were like then, you know, it doesn't matter about the girls really.

*[Music]*

**HARRY GRIFFITHS**
I said to my father, 'What church are you?' He said 'Church of Christ.' I said, 'That's a very small church. How did you come to pick that?' 'Well,' he said, 'when I was a kid they had the best picnics.'

*Hymn: 'Bless my soul the King of Heaven'*

**HARRY GRIFFITHS**
'But,' he said, 'when I joined the army, I was Church of England, because,' he said, 'it's better in the army to be Church of England, because that's what most of them are. There's nothing strict about it, you know. Don't tell 'em you're Methodist or Presbyterian or that quirky stuff, just Church of England;straight in, straight out.' 'Cos he was advising me, because the arrangement my mother and father came to was that all the girls would be brought up Catholics and my father would decide what we were going to be. So I became Church of England, because most of the kids at school were Church of England, and my sister became Catholic.

*[Kids playing]*

**LOUISE**
It was weird me being there, and then over the road was my brother, in the public school. Yes, so we were not very close. We hardly spoke to each other really. My father would never come to my school. He would never take me there or pick me up

or come to any speech days or anything like that. He just wouldn't have anything to do with it because it was a Catholic school.

I think I found it more puzzling than hurtful. Yeah. There'd be this dark kind of cloud over the house of my mother and I going off to Mass and coming back. So there was a definite kind of great disapproval happening.

***Actor: Remember, girls, no meat on Friday.***

**HARRY GRIFFITHS**
When my sister went to the convent, after the first week, she comes home for dinner on Friday night, and she says, 'I can't eat meat on Friday.' 'Oh,' said my Mum. So my mother gets out a tin of salmon and opens it up and my sister can have salmon. Well my father said to me, 'this'll put her to the test,' he said, 'because we're having grilled chops and she's going to be eating salmon. We'll see how long this lasts!' [*Laughs.]*

*Music: Art Tatum: piano*

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
The chops reportedly soon overcame religious devotion. Harry Griffiths' father was a dance band musician and a nominal Protestant, but after seeing the carnage of World War I, he became a religious pragmatist.

**HARRY GRIFFITHS**
Now my father, during the Great Depression, joined the Masons. I said, 'Why'd you do that?' 'Well,' he said, 'I found out that Masons get preference when you go for work.' You can see he was a practical man. And he said to me, 'that's the best religion of all. Good living people and they do the right thing. Of course,' he said, 'you have to understand that Catholics don't like them. So there we are,' he said, 'I'm a Mason, your mother's a Catholic, and we get on just fine.'

My mother used to say to my father, 'Give me the Masonic grip.' She'd put her hand out, you see. She said, 'I didn't feel anything.' He said, 'But you're not supposed to. You're a Catholic, you wouldn't know what to look for.' She said, 'Well, tell me.' And he said, 'I'm not going to tell you. No. It's a Masonic secret.' So every time my mother asked, 'Give me the grip,' and she'd try and work out what it was. She died still not knowing, because I don't think he ever gave it to her! [*Laughs.]*

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
Some mixed marriages were harmonious, with religion a minor consideration. But for others, religious differences were symptomatic of a wider cultural and political chasm. In the white heat of first love, these issues could be glossed over, but once children arrived, broken promises and divided loyalties tore families apart. Anna grew up in rural Victoria in the fifties.

**ANNA**
My recollections are of a very tense family, living in a little rented house and I don't recall my parents ever sharing a room. And he was very antagonistic towards Catholics and Catholicism; we weren't allowed to talk to Catholic children. But in

those days there was a huge dividing line between Catholics and Protestants. You know, you'd be walking off to the swimming pool in a school group or something and you'd go past the Catholic school, or you'd pass Catholic kids, and all the Protestant kids used to taunt them with those songs, you know, like 'Catholic dog, sitting on a log,' I think it was, 'eating maggots out of a frog.' There was always that sort of thing, and I'd feel really… 'Oh, this is really awful,' but you wouldn't say anything 'cos you didn't want it to happen to you as well.

***Actor: Catholic dog sitting on a log eating maggots out of a frog.***

**ANNA**
So, yeah, it was very hard for Mum. She didn't participate that much in our schooling or anything like that.

***Actor: We're up to the Sorrowful Mysteries. Margaret, on your knees! In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.***

**ANNA**
Mum taught us the rosary. She taught us prayers etcetera when Dad wasn't home, probably between the time the kids came home from school and Dad came home.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
So she was actually bringing you up as Catholics but not to his knowledge?

**ANNA**
Not to his knowledge, although he was intensely suspicious and probably paranoid by this stage about it. Every summer we would go back to the farm, to her mum, and it was the happiest I can remember seeing her. And so I believe that every time a new baby went home, Mum would just off and have us baptised [laughs]. And my aunty, the younger one, she was always their godmother. And she was just such a wonderful influence in our lives, although she didn't impose or anything, but she used to…*[emotional]* after Mum died, because by then my parents were separated, and she'd come and see us in the school ground.

*HYMN: Oh Sacrament Most Holy*

**ANNA**
And suddenly we were catapulted from spending three years with Mum to being back with Dad. And if he was angry with us 'cos we wouldn't eat the meat on Friday, we'd be woken up and we'd have to go over the road to the Presbyterian Church, which I absolutely hated because it wasn't uplifting in any way, it was always dark and the people were always very sort of Presbyterian, you know, [*laughs*] very severe, very righteous in some ways. And they're singing 'How great Thou art' in this, you know, like a scratchy record.

*HYMN: How Great Thou Art*

**ANNA**
It seemed to dominate his life - trying to knock the Catholicism out of us. It was a dreadful sort of paranoia actually.

*How Great Thou Art*

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
Anna wasn't the only closet Catholic around. I've heard of one boy whose father only discovered he was being raised a Catholic when he wore the blazer of his Catholic school to his grandmother's funeral. His Protestant father, out all day at work, thought he was attending the adjacent state school.

Louise, raised Catholic alongside her supposedly Protestant brother, only later discovered how far her mother had gone to defend the Catholic faith.

**LOUISE**
My aunt on my father's side, she said that my mother had taken my brother and gone away secretly and had him baptised. And then my father found out and was just incandescent with rage. And I think that was the beginning of the end of their marriage. I think they were very, very happy up to then.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
Priests could be openly interventionist, even if the couple had married outside the Catholic Church, as Gwen discovered after she married Phil, a Catholic, in her Methodist church in 1949.

Music: fiddle: The Redeemer.

**'GWEN'**
One Saturday morning there was a knock at the door and Phil went to the door and I heard him speaking to somebody. And he introduced me to Father O'Donovan and he could have seen at that stage that I was about eight months pregnant. And the priest walked straight across, still had his great big black hat on;I t was like a round crown with a bit black brim; and Phil said to him, 'Do you intend to stay, father?' And he said, 'Yes, I do.' And he said, 'Well take off your bloody hat.' 'Cause in those days it was a very rude thing not to take your hat off when you met a woman. So he did take off his hat and he sat down, but then he proceeded to give us a sort of a lecture.

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***DRAMATISED SCENE***

***PRIEST***
***I've come to see about you getting married in the parish.***

***WOMAN***
***But father, we are married.***

***PRIEST***
***Not in the eyes of the church, you aren't. In the eyes of the church, you're living in sin.***

***[Woman gasps.]***

***PRIEST***

***Do you want the child to be a bastard?***

***[Woman gasps again.]***

***MAN***

***That's enough!***

---

**GWEN**
That didn't go down very well with me. I was a bit upset.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
Gwen and Phil raised their children as Protestants, a less usual outcome for a mixed marriage. Many Protestant parents assiduously nurtured their children's Catholic faith, even in some cases after the death of the Catholic party. Alma Douglas' mother, a fervent Anglican, took an active part in her children's Catholic upbringing.

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
We used to have big fetes in those days, and my mother was forever sewing and crocheting and knitting for the nuns, for the school, for the fete, and she made sure my brothers and I attended church.

***HYMN: QUEEN OF THE MAY***

When we'd go to any ceremony - I was a flower-strewer in those days, you know, you'd put the rose petals out - she'd make sure your basket was always painted white and she got me fresh rose petals, in fact I've seen her carry me up the street on her back when it was raining, so my white shoes wouldn't get mucked up.

***QUEEN of the MAY***

**LOUISE**
Well, you know, I'm very attracted to tinsel and fairy lights and things like that. So I mean of course the Catholic Church gives you that in spades really.

**SUSAN TIMMINS**
It was the trappings: the incense, they prayed, you know, to this papist person. The theatre of it just absolutely got right up my nose *[laughs]*.

**KIMBERLY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
I loved it as a kid, loved the ritual, really believed everything. The bad stuff was, there was a terrible lot of physical discipline that I think was really shocking now when I think about it, like caning; I remember going home with welts on the back of my leg in infant school and you think now people would call the police! That was really out by the time I got to high school, but certainly early school.

***School bell/ actor: 'Now, girls, turn to page 17 of 'A Short History'… Don't use your left hand, child, that's the work of the devil!'***

**KIMBERLEY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
The good stuff I see out of it was a real sense of a social conscience. I remember really interesting discussion and debates around apartheid; that whole thing about mission money that was really big, saving the black babies from communism and paganism, so you went home, you brought in your silver bottle tops and then we'd sew them all together into some bizarre kind of necklace thing, I don't know, this somehow… it was just a miracle this was saving black babies *[laughs].* Of course I remember going home asking my mother to make chocolate crackles and toffees and I remember kind of sarcastic comments about, 'Oh God, the black babies better be bloody happy. I wanted to go out tonight, not making chocolate crackles to sell for them.' [*Laughs.]*

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
But your mother wasn't an active Protestant, was she?

**KIMBERLEY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
Not at all. She never went to church. And that was another thing about Protestants, that they had these churches, but they just don't go. They only go when people are getting married and dying, they don't really have a faith. They kind of just went there when things were on and went home, but they didn't really connect with their religion in the way that Catholics did.

***VOCALS: Firmly I believe and truly…***

***Rosary recitation***

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
For a start, none of us would miss Mass in those days. We would say the Rosary together; not every night, but I'd say twice a week we'd say it as a family. And my mother would be doing something else, but Dad would get myself and the boys together and we would say the rosary.

**KIMBERLEY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
I didn't know anyone who wasn't Catholic until, probably, I left school.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
So it must have been weird for you knowing that your mother was a Protestant?

**KIMBERLEY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
Yeah, it was. And I remember coming back from the shops once and the nuns had told us that Protestants worship the queen and that Protestants thought that the queen was God. And this somehow got mixed into the fact that my father was a real fervent Irish republican, so the British royal family was bad and English people were bad and the Protestants worshipped the queen, they thought the queen was God and we were all like 'oh!'

And I remember coming back from the shops and sneaking my head in; I was terrified, I remember my heart was racing. I would have been about ten - sneaking up the steps and looking inside the Baptist church at the end of my street and looking in - and there was a big picture of the queen on the wall, so I knew it was true!

*[Music: God Save the Queen]*

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
I just felt quite peculiar walking into a Church of England. And you'd see over the pulpit this big eagle there, and I'd think, 'Oh!' I got a bit frightened there. And then when the minister, Reverend Patterson-Clark it was at the time, came out once and I was dusting the seats and he knew I was going to make my first Holy Communion; Mum must have been telling him; so I would have been seven, and he said, 'Have you tasted a host yet, Alma?' And I said, 'Oh no, not till the day.' 'Well, come in then,' he said, I'll let you taste one'; because they gave Communion, the High Church of England; and he gave me this host - and I thought I was going to die, because I'd already tasted the host, and I went and told the nuns the next day. Well, they went off their head.

***HYMN: SOUL of my SAVIOUR***

**LOUISE**
Well they used to go around and say, 'Who says the family rosary?' And then they'd come to me and this look would come on their faces, you know, and I'd just say 'No!' And then they'd go, 'Tsk, oh,' you know, that sort of nunny thing, 'Mm, oh, tsk, just talk to your father, Louise, talk to him about God.'

***HYMN: SOUL of my SAVIOUR***

*Actor: If we don't save his soul, he will burn in hell.*

**LOUISE**
He died when I was 11. It was very upsetting because I really thought he was in hell. So, I didn't have nightmares, but it was just very upsetting to think that he was burning away in hell.

***HYMN: SOUL of my SAVIOUR***

*Actor: Your daddy will burn in hell. For all eternity.*

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
I mean for someone to say, when you look back on it, to a young child, 'Your mother's going to go to hell, because she's not a Catholic,' that's a terrible thing! Oh, the Catholic Church was terribly rigid and I accepted that because that was my faith.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
As downtrodden Irish Catholics it was some consolation to us to know that Protestants had been sold a bum steer. The Catholic Church, after all, was the 'one

true church' and all else was heresy. Or so we thought until Vatican II introduced ecumenism in the sixties. Till then mixed marriage couples who married in a Protestant church were encouraged to rectify this sad state of affairs by conducting a second, real marriage in a Catholic church, a process known as convalidation.

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DRAMATISED SCENE

PRIEST
Ah - the convalidation application. Sit down Mrs Gordon.

MRS GORDON
Thank you, father.

PRIEST
Now, date of the attempted marriage?

MRS GORDON
Tenth of October, 1948.

PRIEST
If before a heretical minister, name and location of the church and affiliation of the sect?

MRS GORDON
Reverend Saunders, St Philip's Anglican Church, Sydney.

PRIEST
Reasons given by the Catholic party to explain the marriage outside the church?

MRS GORDON
Well, John's family were Anglican…

PRIEST
No, no, it's on the form. Was it because of ignorance or malice?

MRS GORDON
We just didn't want to hurt his family's feelings.

PRIEST
Ignorance! Good. Nearly done.

---

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**

Curiously, different religious beliefs did not seem to adversely affect a couple's relationship in a mixed marriage, in their children's eyes at least. Somehow the parents negotiated the pointy ends of Catholic and Protestant dogma.

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
I think after I was born, I don't think they slept together. I look back on it now, I slept with my mother every night of my life till the night before I got married. And I think that was their way of contraception.

**KIMBERLEY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
My mother made it really clear that she was having two children, that was all. My father, he just went, 'Oh that's a woman's business, I don't want to know.' And I remember her saying, 'Well, how could he not know, 'cause we're now going to have sex.' She'd get up and she 'd go and she'd get the diaphragm out of the cupboard and have to go to the bathroom and put it in. And that was his way out of it, 'I know nothing and I'm not doing anything.'

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
At first sight, Kimberly O'Sullivan Steward's father ticked all the Irish Catholic boxes. One of 11 children, he played footy, voted Labor, was active in the union, and hated the monarchy. Kimberly's Protestant mother had little time for such attitudes.

**KIMBERLEY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
She saw herself and her side of the family as very Protestant and upright and hardworking and secular in their thinking. Whereas my father's side, they were just always more interesting, you know, here'd come mad aunts who'd sort of break into quotes from movies and things, and everything was always kind of chaotic, and there were kids and dogs. So anything that was problematic with me or we we'd clash was all because of, 'Oh, that's the Irish Catholic craziness,' or 'the Irish Catholic blood.'

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
And yet, as you say, your mother doesn't quite fit the stereotype of the… certainly not of the wowser sort of Protestant.

**KIMBERLEY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
No! Not at all, not at all. She used to go out with girlfriends, she'd go to the movies, she'd go shopping with girlfriends into the city. She used to go off and do kind of courses. She did yoga—that was considered kind of very bizarre at the time in the sixties. She quite openly smoked and drank.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
Maybe she'd been corrupted, in quotes, by her Catholic genes? *[Laughter.]*

For everything was not as it seemed in Kimberly's family. Her father and his ten siblings departed from the Catholic stereotype in that all 11 were teetotal. And when Kimberly, a librarian, researched the maternal family history, she found that her mother's treasured Protestant identity was only skin deep.

**KIMBERLEY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
Her father was from a mixed English-Irish family and he was a Catholic. He goes to war, he's a World War I veteran, signs up and all his stuff: religion Roman Catholic. Comes back, marries shortly after the war, on their marriage certificate it says that he's of no religion and he later goes on to become a Mason. So he really renounces Catholicism. Now, that was kept quiet; my mother was really shocked to see that. I

said, 'Did you know Pa used to be a Catholic?' And she's gone, 'Oh, no, he was very Protestant and he was in the Masons,' and everything. And my mother used to have a photo of my grandfather up in the house, because I remember the outfit, and he had the little Mason apron on.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
Such labels - Protestant, Catholic and Freemason - might seem unimportant these days, except to family members. But until the 1960s, they could determine your job, your prospects and other key aspects of your life.

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
Oh, yes, being Catholic in the fire brigade in those years, a chance of promotion wouldn't have been great and even going through, my father retired in 1960; started in 1925, retired in 1960; he got up to be deputy chief, but he was blackballed quite a few times. People used to vote on various things, particularly in the Masonic Lodge. You'd apparently be given a black and a white ball in your hands; no one would ever know what ball you put in, your black or white ball, and that's how it used to be a saying in the fire brigade, 'Oh he's been blackballed,' you know, meaning 'He won't go forward for promotion.'

**"JAMES"**
I served in the New South Wales police force for 41 years. Very early in my service, I was given the task of inspecting schools throughout the area in which I worked and I was requested by two different orders of nuns to inspect their complexes as they were experiencing difficulties with hooligans coming in and doing damage. I had a book in which I recorded the date, time and result. I came to work one day and on arrival, the station sergeant said to me, 'The inspector wants to see you.' He then commenced the conversation by saying, 'You don't waste your time with these.' And he had the book open at one of the Catholic schools that I had visited. He got a red pen and drew a line across the page with such ferocity that he actually ripped the paper.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
This Catholic former police officer, call him 'James', witnessed systemic bias against Catholics in the New South Wales police force from the fifties to the nineties. A colleague, who was a Mason, told him how the recruitment system was rigged against Catholics and when he processed miscreants and criminals, James saw how even they were used to further religious bigotry.

**'JAMES'**
I observed, on many occasions, when some of my prisoners were processed, that despite the fact that they gave title to other religious denominations, they were suddenly re-categorised as Catholics. I made it clear that I was not happy with this practice because Catholics would appear to be amongst the greatest offenders of the prisoners charged. That stance by me did not endear me to my superiors and as a result I found myself doing menial tasks.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
It's common mythology that the head of the New South Wales police force alternated between a Mason and a Catholic in an attempt to keep both sides happy. Other government departments were unequivocal. In New South Wales, the water board was

a Masonic stronghold, as was the public trustee. Catholics triumphed in taxation and railways, while housing was known colloquially as 'the Vatican'. Until the 1970s, an unusually high percentage of Catholics lived in the ACT because so many flocked there to jobs in the public service. Why? Because they were barred from employment in much of the private sector, including big companies like the Colonial Sugar Refinery, Wunderlich Tiles, and certain department stores.

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
David Jones wouldn't employ a Catholic; that would have been in the fifties. It was just accepted, sort of thing, and no one thought about it as discrimination, you just didn't go there.

[Music]

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
It was quite predominant then, you'd see it in ads, you know, 'Catholics need not apply', this would be in the 'Jobs', you know, vacancies and various things like that. I never saw it in print that Protestants need not apply.

**KIMBERLEY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
I also remember coming home when I was young, so this is kind of early sixties, and having rocks thrown at me by these awful boys, and going 'Catholic, Catholic,' or something.

***[Chanting: 'Catholic dogs, sit like frogs, in and out of the water logs.']***

**KIMBERLEY O'SULLIVAN STEWARD**
And I remember holding up my suitcase and the stones kind of hitting my suitcase, and coming home being really upset. And my mother saying, 'Oh they're just stupid boys,' and my father saying, 'No this is what we go through, this is the oppressive thing that you go through being a Catholic.'

**ABC RADIO ARCHIVES (13.7.1977)**
***Loud beating of Lambeg drums***
*News reporter: The noise of the Lambeg drums, an unmistakable sign to the people of Northern Ireland as 100,000 Orangemen celebrate the victory back in 1690 by the Protestant forces of King William of Orange over the Catholic King James at the Battle of the Boyne.*

Crossfade
***[Kids chanting: 'Catholic dogs, sitting on logs, eating maggots out of a frog.' 'State, state, lick the plate.']***

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
Underneath the childish jibes lay the remnants of age-old prejudice. Irish Catholics had bitter memories of colonial oppression by the English and neither time nor distance had obliterated their sense of injustice.

**SUSAN TIMMINS**
They knew - they'd just come through the famine, they knew that they'd been dudded, well and truly, in a very, very major way, and came here and found much the same sort of bigotry. You found the Anglicans treating them as very definitely second-class citizens.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
Susan Timmins' ancestors, the O'Briens, left Ireland in the 1850s to escape the infamous potato famine. The great famine, as we call it, left an indelible scar on the Irish psyche. Like every schoolchild, I learned how the Irish ate grass and died on the roadside as the English colonial government continue to export food from the country. A million Irish starved, one-eighth of the population. The famine also triggered the biggest national emigration of nineteenth-century Europe. The overall effect was to halve Ireland's population. This grim statistic is etched into the collective soul of the Irish, at home and abroad.

Susan's relatives, the O'Briens, were among the lucky ones. They did well in Australia, and by the 1920s the family ran a store in Maitland, New South Wales. Julia O'Brien, Susan's mother, was the eldest of a large family and the future looked bright - until Julia fell in love with Errol White, a Protestant.

**SUSAN TIMMINS**
My mother's family were adamant that she should have nothing whatsoever to do with him. So what they ended up doing was, they eloped. She was the eldest of 12 and the other children were forbidden to speak of her. Her father never wanted to see her or speak to her or even hear her name again. So she did try various forms of reconciliation and they didn't actually marry until he died.

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***DRAMATISED SCENE***

**Music**

JULIA
Hello mother.

MOTHER
I didn't expect to see YOU again.

JULIA
I heard father is very ill.

MOTHER
He's had the last rites, God have mercy on him.

JULIA
Has he asked for me?

MOTHER
He has not. You ceased to be part of this family the day you abandoned your faith. You broke your father's heart and mine too.

***Music***

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**SUSAN TIMMINS**
Well I know that when my grandfather was ill, my mother went to Maitland from Sydney, went to Maitland and tried to see him. Her mother said, 'Your father does not want to see you, he does not want you in the house.' And she had to get off the veranda. From the time she left till she died, she never entered that house again.

They married in Mosman in Sydney, a registry office marriage. My father had become so anti-religion and my mother died giving birth to my brother.

***Funeral bells***

We were in an orphanage, he came to visit us each weekend, but when I was seven or eight I went to live with an aunt, his elderly sister. Now she was in fact also quite bigoted and so was her husband, and they were bigoted from the other side, they thought Catholics were 'bog Irish,' is what she called… whenever I did something wrong, it was the 'bog Irish' coming out in me.

So when I was seven or eight, my father found somebody and was going to remarry and to her shock and horror, another Catholic. So what she did was, she convinced my father that these two little unbaptised children that she had on her hands needed to be baptised and baptised pretty quickly. So just before my father remarried, lest I become a papist child, I was welcomed into the Church of England Church.

***[Music]***

My second mother was really almost as anti-religious as my father was. She certainly got married in a Catholic church and she even had her… I had another three brothers and sisters and they were baptised in the same St Canice's Church in Elizabeth Bay, but that was about as much as she ever did as far as religion went.

I can remember a priest coming around when we were children and she hid and told us all to be quiet. And she herself was one of those that brought to my attention the need in this world to stamp out bigotry and ignorance wherever you can, and overcome these things. She was a very welcoming to everyone person. She hated the fact that these divisions had been set up. My second mother taught me to believe that there was good and there was bad and to do good was what it was, it was very little to do with religion. They didn't have the market cornered on goodness.

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
To her father's dismay, Susan went on to fall in love with a Catholic. When they married in 1969, she opted for a Catholic church to please her husband's family, and even converted to Catholicism. But a few years in war-torn Vietnam altered the couple's attitude to religion.

**SUSAN TIMMINS**
I'd been married a couple of years and I thought, 'Well, I don't really believe in all of this religion anyway.' So I thought, 'What am I doing with it? To hell with it.' So we dropped everything. We had two children, neither of them were baptised. They have remained very good people: one's a social worker and one's a specialist nurse working with AIDS and works for MSF, Médecins Sans Frontières, so they've grown up I think with very decent values, all without, all to do with no God and no religion.

[Music]

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
The story wasn't quite over. Four decades after her mother's banishment from the family home in Maitland, a brother made contact with Susan's father.

**SUSAN TIMMINS**
And my father arranged that we all went out to dinner together, wouldn't this be a lovely bonding thing? Well, you can't take somebody who's had no contact with their mother's family for 30 or 40 years, and then take you all out to dinner and expect that we would all be hunky-dory. It was hunky-dory enough and a polite situation until I'd had a few drinks and I suppose I then had to ask the question, just 'Why?' I said, 'You'll have to forgive me but I'm antagonistic towards my mother's family. I don't remember any of you, I don't remember… It's all right for you to swan in from overseas and say "hi" to my father, but did you ever care about what happened to us children? Did you ever care what happened to us as kids? Did you ever care that my father was in such a dire situation that he had to put his children into an orphanage?' He described that *[sobbing]…*

God, this is ridiculous, I'm 65… but he always described that as being the most terrible, terrible time of his life. He said it was bad enough when his wife died, but to have to put his two children in an orphanage because he couldn't support them. It was after the war and widows were getting war widows' pensions and things, but he got nothing.

***SONG: Marrying Out***

**SUSAN TIMMINS**
You know, I spat it out then well and truly, it was like a therapy session at the dinner table, which was not real good, I'll tell you, in a restaurant *[laughing].* And my father was as shocked as anybody, so was my husband. I had a child myself at this stage and I couldn't then believe that anyone would just wipe children so easily. But they did.

***[Music]***

**SIOBHAN MCHUGH**
By the time I came here, in the eighties, Australia was multicultural and there were laws against racial and religious discrimination. I worked and mingled with people of over 60 ethnic backgrounds and revelled in the diversity; it was like travelling while staying in one place. With some shock I realised that to a Vietnamese or an Indian-Australian I was classified under Anglo.

Now ‘Anglo-Celtic’ has become shorthand to describe non-Indigenous Australia before the 1950s. The implication is that this English-speaking stock represents the Establishment, a polite way of saying 'White Australia'. But to blithely conflate English and Irish, Scottish and Welsh, as if we were one big cosy community all along, is far from the truth, as these stories of mixed marriage show. And I believe that if we want a more equitable Australia, we need to acknowledge past prejudice.

To today's underdogs, the very notion of an Irish Catholic underclass might seem absurd. By the 1990s, Irish-Australians Catholics occupied the highest positions in the land: Paul Keating as Prime Minister, William Dean as governor-general and Gerard Brennan as chief justice of the high court. But if Irish Catholics are respectable at last, a new ‘Other’ will always be copping the flak.

ABC RADIO ARCHIVES 2005
***[Cronulla riots actuality]***

**SUSAN TIMMINS**
I see it so often now. When you hear people ranting and raving about other religions, mostly Muslims, and I liken it to what my family went through.

***Music***

**ALMA DOUGLAS**
I think religion played a big part in our history, but I think it made our nation strong, because people had to fight for things and their beliefs. It happened within our family, even with all the conflict. It did make you question, and you accepted that we're all people.

**LOUISE**
I left the Catholic Church very easily, with no guilt, but I do have to emphasise that my mother's mixed marriage did make me very unhappy, 'cause it obviously ruined their marriage and although they sort of gave this semblance of being a happy couple I think, you know, behind it all they were both very unhappy.

**SUSAN TIMMINS**
I've been back to his grave. I've talked to him there, the old grandfather. I weeded his grave, and as I was weeding his grave, I was telling him what a rotten old bastard I thought he was. But, you know, you've got to forgive him; it was the times.

***[Music]***

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**MICHELLE RAYNER: credits**
*The series was written and produced by Siobhan McHugh from the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong. The sound engineer was Stephen Tilley and readings were by Maeliosa Stafford, Tracy Mann and the Radio National ensemble. Music in the series was composed and performed by Thomas Fitzgerald with assistance from the University of Wollongong. The vocalists were Kavisha Mazella and Lawrence Allen.*