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**FULL TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MARION REILLY, NEE MULLAN  
DOCUMENTARY: A LIFETIME OF STORIES, 2019  
IRISH SCREEN PROJECTS**

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<b>INTERVIEWER: DR ENDA MURRAY</b>	MARION REILLY
<b>Where did you do your training?</b>	At Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney
<b>And you gave up the job in the bank?</b>	I gave up the banking, yeah that was in London. I did the banking. I worked in a post office in Ireland for a while.
<b>Did you?</b>	Yeah yeah, back in the West, Connemara, and then I went to London and did banking. And then I came here and decided to do something different, so Nursing it was.
<b>So tell us your name and where you're from.</b>	So my name is Marion Reilly, nee Mullan from Máimín, Lettermore in County Galway. Contae na Gaillimh.
<b>Cad is ainm duit?</b>	Muireann ní Mhaoláin is ainm dom, iníon Chóilín Johnny as an Máimín, Leitir Mór, Contae na Gaillimh.
<b>An mbionn tu ag caint gaeilge</b>	Gaeilge ó dhúchas atá agam. Tá Gaeilge mhaith agam.
<b>So tell us about growing up a little more.</b>	<p>[It's a] lovely part of the world, beautiful. Looking back it was the best childhood you could ever wish for. Small village, very wonderful community spirit, everybody helped everybody out. If there was anything needed everybody came out. When we had the turf, saving the turf in Summertime we'd all help each other it was just wonderful.</p> <p>And then we'd start to go into the shore in summertime and pick periwinkles and sell them off or maybe a whole bag for only five pounds, but for us it was like five million pounds in them days. So it was great.</p>
<b>So tell us about your family was it a big family?</b>	There were nine in my family, well there were actually ten but one of the children died when she was only six months old, the eldest girl in the family. So there were ten of us

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and, yeah unfortunately a lot of them had emigrated by the time I was growing up because I was the second youngest.

But having said that, when they came home from England or whatever part of Ireland they were working in, it was wonderful just to be all together.

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**And did you do the civil service exam?**

I did yes to be a Garda.

**Tell us about the exam**

My father was always on about education, that was his main thing. We all needed to be educated, so we were all sent away to college at a young age when we were all finished with the primary school or the national school as they called it in Ireland. He believed that education was the way to go you know, hence the fact all my brothers and sisters before me went to boarding school.

But I dreaded the thought of going to boarding school because I used to go to Tuam and visit my sisters when they were there, and I was hoping that there'd be some changes and there was. They built a new comprehensive school so I was delighted because it had just opened by the time I went there. So it's the fact that I went to the Comprehensive school in Cararoe which was wonderful as a secondary school. I didn't have to board and came home every day on the bus, and went to school on the bus, it was wonderful.

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**And tell us about the Civil Service, and your dad.**

Dad worked in the Civil Service. It was a, well, there were very secure jobs in them days of course. If you worked in the Civil Service you had a job for life, set up for life. So hence the fact I went to Dublin did the exam for the Garda, Then of course I had passed the exam, but I didn't want to be a Garda.

Though I wanted to travel you know, my sights were set on long distances far away so I had two brothers in Australia, one in Sydney one in Melbourne. So I was dreaming of such, and definitely going there. It's the fact that I wanted to go to London and save some money and do some traveling.

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**Can you remember the moment you decided to go to London to Nepal**

Well my brother was home from holidays. John came home for a holiday as they do in summertime and he, sort of, more or less suggested... Well he was saying, oh you know talking about London and how wonderful it was and what a big city. You know these wonderful stories and I

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thought oh gosh this sounds too good to be true so I need to check it out.

So I went over for the Summer holiday when I finished my Leaving Cert, and I loved it of course. You know, it was great. Holidays are always fun as we know and we don't have to work, just do whatever. So I had a great time and couldn't want to get home to finish my time at the Tech, or what they call it at home in them days and come back to London to work. That was my dream, so yes that's what I wait and longed for.

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**Tell us you worked in the post office**

Oh yeah just for a short while. My grandmother and my aunt Sheila had a post office in Lettermullen, well it was there til recently. And so we used to go there during the holidays and help out. So it was sort of an experience to be selling in the shop and in the Post Office. It was great fun as kids you know going there and maybe steal a few sweets and things like that in the meantime when they weren't looking! So yeah, great fun.

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**And tell us about London, tell us what year you went to London, what did you do there when you went to live?**

I went to London 1974 and I stayed with my sister she had a house in Northolt in Middlesex. So I stayed with her she was married she had a young child as well, and it was very handy.

Then I went for an interview for the bank to work in National Westminster Bank and I got the job so I used to travel from Northolt into London every day which was an hour on the train which was lovely. I mean it was okay you know, I was young and I thought it was great excitement to be on a train, fast train in London. I worked in a bank and the people they were lovely. I worked with a lady from Kerry, Teresa she was lovely, she helped me a lot you know so to get through the stuff that I had to learn and all that. I really enjoyed it and I was there for a year and a half.

So I was very happy there and then I did casual work at nighttime because I wanted to travel so I used to do waitressing, which was wonderful. In them days, like, I managed to get to keep a day job and a night job and the weekend work, now and again, when I wasn't in the Galtymore dancing or whatever there was a Ceilí on, or a dance somewhere in London. So good times.

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**Tell us about the nightlife in London for the Irish in the 70s**

Mostly around Willesden of course. We used to go to the Galtymore so that was Sunday night and that would start at 7 o'clock in the evening and go on till two or three in the morning. And then of course we'd have to get up for work the next day, but that was fine.

You'd dance the night away they had two dance halls in the Galtymore. They had this side where the the Ceilís were; and then the the other side you could do any dancing you wished. You know, disco whatever. So we'd meet people from home there, t'would be great! You'd meet with a lot of the Connemara people which was wonderful. And we'd be speaking the Irish, it was lovely, great craic all together.

And the big bands would come over from home like Big Tom and the Mainliners, Margo, Philomena Begley you know you name it. They'd be coming to the Galtymore because the crowd were massive - like the the Irish in London in them days was just crowded. Packed to the gills, so yeah we had a great time.

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**Tell us about the decision to travel to Australia and the method of travel you decided.**

Okay, so I was in London and we used to get the *Irish Post* and read it every week, to see what was on in London, what was happening in the area and who was doing what. You know, it was like a letter from home for us because we have all the updates. I was browsing through it, and of course I saw spotted this ad for companions to travel to Australia. So somebody had put the ad in, and I thought oh this sounds good I could respond to that. And of course in them days it was all about writing. There was no no mobiles or anything like that, which was wonderful.

So anyways I responded to the ad and the girl happened to be from Kerry and her name was Sheila Godfrey. Months went by so it took a while. So, she wanted to know what I was doing and why I was interested in going to Australia. Overland of course, which was the exciting part. And I just said, you know, I just want to travel and I just want to see the world. All excited, you know I couldn't wait.

So it took about six months altogether between all the calls and everything, so eventually we met up in the Irish Embassy in London. The *Irish Post* came as well, they were there and they took photos. It turned out that there were three of us in the end. She decided on two other girls to travel with her. She said she had many, many many responses - especially men of course!! Saying oh yeah, I'll

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accompany you, don't worry - we'll go overland.

But eventually she decided on just three of us. So yeah so our photos were taken for the *Irish Post* and we felt really great. Very excited about the whole trip and what we were doing. Of course in them days we only had the maps, you know, to look at. So we didn't really know, personally speaking I didn't have a clue where I was going I just thought oh we're going there, you know, let's just do it. I didn't start to go into it like they do now, checking everything out and making sure that the weather was good and that the temperature and the culture and all that. We had no idea. Well I didn't personally speaking, so it was great!

I think it was better, you know, they say 'fear of the unknown...'. But I had no fear of the unknown so and then again I was, you know, 20, so 20ish so what do you do? You go with it.

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**What did you think when you saw the bus?**

Well we got to Earls Court and my family were with me my sister and her husband and the child and my brother. We got to Earls Court to catch the bus, the overland bus to Nepal. It had 'Intercontinental Transits' [written on the side], that was the bus company and we were standing around waiting and looking. There was heaps of buses there and then my brother is a mechanic and he's sort of looking around. He's going "Where is the bus you're traveling on?" and I said "Oh, you know over there. It's the Intercontinental Transit one."

And he looks at and he says "Oh my gosh," he said "That bus is not going to bring ye to Dover let alone to Nepal." So anyway he was very concerned, but I wasn't. I thought we'll be fine, we'll be great. So he was right, you know. Every time we started, we were travelling a bit and the bus would stop and the driver would get out and lift the bonnet and start hammering something in it; and away we'd go again for another while. Eventually we got to Dover and crossed on the ferry to Calais so we made it to there. And then we started travelling from there on through Europe and yeah kept going.

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**And tell us about Yugoslavia**

Ah well, rewind. We were going to Yugoslavia and then the night before we were stopped on the border of Austria and Yugoslavia in them days. That was in 1970, sorry 1975 Christmas, towards Christmas. Our driver had been there many times. So he says to us, we were sitting around

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talking; there was 32 of us on the bus. So he's sitting away chatting and he goes "You know what? Yugoslavia is not a very nice place. It's very backward you know, you won't like it. It's really backward, so how about we just, I just drive through the night through Yugoslavia and get ye into Greece, before, you know the next day sometime.

So of course we didn't know any different, so we said "Oh yeah that'll be fine, let's do it." So we had our sleeping bags and we slept in our sleeping bags and we were all sort of fast asleep. And in the middle of the night about three or four in the morning there was a bang so we were all rolling, we woke up rolling. I thought I was having a nightmare just rolling away in the bus. And discovered, of course, that we had been hit by another bus from behind and we had rolled over an embankment and they had rolled over the embankment on the other side of the road.

Their driver got killed, whereas our passengers in the back of our bus got badly [injured], the guy that was in the backseat - he was stretched out on the backseat - he got broken bones. He couldn't move. He was just paralyzed so he was transferred by air back to London the next day ..and a few more [were injured]. Like, I had swapped seats with a bloke that night when it happened and the seat that he moved into, where I had been, he lost his arm and his ear. So I was very lucky that I sorta, you know, had swapped seats with him, thank God.

So yeah so we ended up in hospital in Titov Veles {A city in modern day Macedonia now known as Veles} and they didn't speak English and we didn't speak Yugoslav so it was a difficult situation to be in but we survived. We got there..., only 20 of us finished [the journey]. We went on from there to Greece so we sort of lost a few of our passengers, unfortunately, sadly. And the other thing was the police were very corrupt there. So they kept blaming our driver for the accident so we were actually on house arrest for about a week. We weren't allowed out of the hotel because of the fact that we we could be guilty of causing an accident - or the driver [was guilty]. So he eventually got his solicitor from London to bail him out and got on his way but he ended up going back to London again so he didn't travel with us for the rest of the journey.

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**Tell us about the Magic Bus.**

So we weren't on the Magic Bus. There were a lot of people traveling in them days overland. It was kind of, you know, the done thing for young people to sort of say "Ah

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yeah, let's do an overland trip to Australia, or Nepal or wherever. And finish up, you know, somewhere where they speak English which was our plan sort of to end up in Australia because it was the only country that could speak fluent English. And so yes, you know there was a lot of people doing it... a lot of young people between the ages of say 18 and 35.

In them days the plan was to travel from London or Europe, maybe from France, and to travel to Nepal. That always seemed to be the 'in place' to go. And then fly to wherever from there, so that's what people did.

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**Where would be the stop off point, what would be the main countries?**

So the main countries would have been France, Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Iran Afghanistan, Pakistan, into India and then up to Nepal. That would be usually the the area they would travel through on buses, and it would usually end up in either India or Nepal, whichever one you choose.

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**What's your biggest memory of that trip looking back?**

Looking back my biggest memories there, I think was I'm glad in a way that I didn't have studied it too much. Because it was just so exciting - it was the excitement and the wonderful experiences that we had. But we hadn't studied it previously. So every new country we go to I would be saying what's here? what's happening? what's the exciting things happen in this area? Our driver was pretty good, he had been many times. Or you know he was telling us places to go and things to do.

So looking back it's like a dream really. It feels like it's a dream. Only that I look at the photos now and I think "Oh my gosh! Have I done this? Have I been there," you know.

And we did go through a lot of danger zones as well; and we did a lot of things that we shouldn't have done. But you know, once again it was just the joys of innocence as far as I'm concerned. Like we walked around Iran, for example. You know in Tehran, we didn't cover up like we should as females in them days and we used to get followed by a lot of men. You know it was kind of daunting in a way but in another way we were having great fun. We were thinking it was really funny having these guys chasing us around the streets of Tehran or wherever we were at the time. So yeah it was good.

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**What is your memory of Pakistan?**

Pakistan, we really enjoyed Lahore in particular because we discovered that there were Irish priests there when we went to church on a Sunday morning. We discovered there was a lot of Irish priests working there and teaching there so we happened to meet up with them after Mass and we were staying in this lowdown motel/hotel very bad accommodation and they invited us to stay with them. So we were more or less sent from the ghettos into a five-star motel as far as we were concerned. Because they had servants and they waited on us hand and foot and we were just spoiled. The brothers took us out on scenic tours around Lahore; brought us to the school where they were teaching. We were like celebrities, you know. The kids, school kids, would stand up and applaud us when we come in and it was just amazing and I loved it.

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**When you arrived in Sydney you changed tack in your career?**

You don't want to hear about the Taj Mahal, oh what about the whiskey?

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**Tell us what happened when you got to the border of Pakistan and India?**

So when we were traveling through different countries there was very bad weather. We had snow and ice and we used to be sort of put off the main roads a lot with landslides because of all the the snow and the ice and the bad weather they were having. Because it was middle of Winter, like there it was December. So when we were on the border of Pakistan and India and we were stuck in some remote area of the Pakistan. So before we went to the Khyber Pass and we found out the driver used to give a bottle of whiskey to [the border guards]. Every every time he got to the border he'd take out a bottle of whiskey or Johnny Walker whiskey and give it to the border security. And they would just, you know, beckon us to move on to keep going so we thought this is great fun.

So anyway one night we were stuck in the snow on the driver had gone off to stay in a motel as he did, and we were really bored with ourselves. So we thought just some whiskey on the bus so we might as well get stuck into that.

So we did, we drank a bottle of Johnnie Walker. Anyway the next day, of course, we get to the border and the driver he looks at where the bottles of whiskey were kept. And it was the last one; we didn't realize it was the last one he had on board but it was gone. So he's going "Well if there's no whiskey for these guys on the border we're going to get you know past them. They're not going to let us through and we'll be here for ages," And we didn't

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know... too bad we didn't know it was the last bottle!

Nobody owned up to it of course for drinking it because we all we were all in the same boat; or in this case in the same bus. Anyway we got to the border, course and sure enough everybody was told to get off the bus. Take our bags out, our luggage emptied everything out. We were there for four or five hours. We really paid the price for drinking that blasted Johnny Walker whiskey! Between that and the hangover it wasn't worth it in the end!

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**You went to the Taj Mahal?**

So we we went to Delhi and we we stayed in Old Delhi actually. It was great experience, there's no running water, no lighting, no electricity, but it was just the experience of it all being with the locals and beautiful people in their own country. As I discovered with all countries we were in. The people there are just so amazing. They were so kind-hearted and so lovely and, you know, they treated us so well.

But we we drove from New Delhi to Agra and onto the Taj Mahal. And we hadn't realized - we hadn't done our research - but coincidentally we got there on the full moon. And that's everybody's dream is to get to the Taj Mahal on a full moon. So we we were very lucky. It was so beautiful they were singing and chanting in the Taj when we got there, the moon was shining; full moon shining and of course we got all this water out the front of it and the reflections on that water was just amazing. So we'll never forget it, going to the Taj you know all this marble and built for love. You know it was just amazing, a fantastic experience and I'd love to do it again but the memories are too good to spoil.

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**Tell us what happened when you got back to Sydney? you decided to change tack, tell us what happened when you arrived.**

So we three of us arrived in Sydney in February 1976 and we were pretty down and out when we got to Sydney Airport because we had to we realize that after all this traveling; over three months of travelling that eventually we'd have to look for work. So I always remember getting into Sydney and going through customs and immigration and everything; and obviously we looked very depressed so I remember one of the guys at immigration said to us "What's up girls? What's wrong with you? Why are you not happy you've arrived in Sydney, Australia?" And we're going, "Oh we've been travelling all these months and we've had the best time of our life, and now reality bites. We've got to go to work, we've got to look for somewhere to stay and we've got to work". So it's you know, we've got

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our reasons to be down and out. So he said "Oh welcome to Sydney. It's a wonderful country, you'll love it here."

And of course he was right. So I'm in Sydney then I decided to do something different so I did nursing and started off working in a nursing home for a while. And then after that I decided to do my training at Prince Alfred Hospital and I haven't looked back since. So except that I injured my back in the early 1980s, hence the fact that rather than going on compo at the time I went and worked for Telstra for ten years which was a wonderful experience as well. So all my jobs I've actually really, really enjoyed them. Except the early mornings of course in Telstra, having to get up early in the morning because I'm not a very early morning person!

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**So what's your day like now?**

So I am now semi-retired. I only work two to three days a week which I love. I've got a great social life which means I catch up with all my friends whenever I feel like it. I do a lot of voluntary work. I work at Calvary Hospital I try to do some voluntary work here at the Support Agency as well when I can. I help out at other different venues around Sydney which is good - it's very rewarding, quality time with people that are visiting hospitals and all that where people are very lonely or isolated. And I work a couple of days a week, which I love because I do admin work and I'm my own boss so don't have to worry about what time I start or finish, it's all up to me.

So it's alright I really enjoy my life, I've got four beautiful children three girls and a boy and now my son has got a grandchild which we adore and I'm very very content.

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**In Sydney in 76' what was the social life like for Irish people?**

In Sydney in the 1977 when we got here it was just amazing. Like the first place we visited of course was the Gaelic club at Devonshire Street. And that was like walking into, you know, some centre in Dublin or Galway or wherever we came from. And the Irish here they're different to London. They just want to know about home. Because I suppose London is so close to Ireland you know they don't worry too much, but here everybody embraces you.

We always associated people with the county that we came from so you know - Kerry or Galway or Dublin or Mayo or wherever. It was always, oh they're from County... whatever county. But people were amazing, like when you tell them that you just arrived, you know "Have

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you got a job, Have you somewhere to live?" They were just wonderful. And the social life was amazing. Like there was the Irish club we'd go there maybe on a Friday night. Saturday night there'd be the bands - the Drover's, Martin, Jordan, the Unicorns then we go to Lidcombe. On a Sunday night there'd be a dance on at Lidcombe and that would be ... once again all the Irish; so many Irish people.

And we danced the night away and had a great time; great craic you know, amazing. And then of course we used to unfortunately end up in Kings Cross a lot of the times. Now Kings Cross in them days, I now hear people say, "oh you know there were drugs around, there was this and that available" you know, all of that. To me, I've never seen that, I never saw anybody pushing drugs in Kings Cross in the 70s or the 80s. But then again I might have been naive about the whole thing. You know, I wasn't concerned about drugs, so maybe if I was I'd probably find them but...

We used to go to the Texas Tavern that had music all night, or we'd go to the Bourbon and Beefsteak up on Kings Cross and that have music. It was all to do with the dancing, the singing and the company, and a few drinks. It was just there was nothing else. We were just enjoying life to the full and we sure did that.

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**Tell us about your Claddagh ring.**

So this is a Claddagh ring and the Claddagh is in the city of Galway (of) course. And the Claddagh was an area where a lot of poor people used to live many many centuries ago in Ireland. Apparently a man from there became a jeweller and he became very famous. And they found out that he was very good at designing jewelry so he was brought to England to start making jewelry for people over there. And he ended up making a Claddagh ring. The idea of the Claddagh ring is that it's a heart shape and there are hands holding the heart. In other words it symbolizes love. So they used it in Ireland years ago as a wedding ring, and it's still very popular all over the world. People love the Claddagh ring and the symbol of it which is love, as I said.

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**And where did you get your Claddagh ring?**

Well I've got a story and a half about Claddagh rings. My father bought me a Claddagh ring for my 21st birthday but when I came to Australia, when I was here for a short while we were travelled around Australia so we went to Cairns we stopped in Cairns in a motel. I had a habit of doing this to my finger {makes ring-twisting hand action} so we were walking down to the beach one day.... So I was walking down to the beach in Cairns and I discovered my

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Claddagh ring wasn't on, so I panicked and I ran back to the motel. And because, you know, my dad gave it to me for my 21st it was very sentimental.

Got to reception I said "Oh you know my ring is missing blah blah," so anyway we went to the room had a look. It was gone, but the cleaner was in the room so I kind of said to the cleaner you know missing my Claddagh bla bla bla bla bla. Long story short, she didn't own up to it. So obviously she had taken it. So then I put a reward up in the motel to get the ring back but I never did. So I was talking to my family about the Claddagh ring and how I missed it; and this I got for probably my 50th birthday in Sydney from my children, from my kids. So this was actually designed in Sydney this one. But I also have my mother's Claddagh ring. I've got it at home but I dare not wear it in case I lose it or something happens it, so it's very sentimental and I've kept it in a box and I'm looking after it very well in in a safe place.

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**ENDS**

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