

Tuam Oral History Project

Transcript of interview with John Egan

Interviewer: John Cunningham

Date: 16 July 2020

Location: Mr Egan's home, Castlematrix, Rathkeale, Co. Limerick

Length of Interview: Two recordings: one of 69 minutes, 43 seconds, the other of 6 minutes, 3 seconds. Total: 1 hour, 15 minutes, and 46 seconds

The following items were copied and submitted by Mr. Egan for the archive:

1. Birth certificate
2. Marriage certificate
3. Photograph of Mrs Healy (mother)
4. Five photographs of Mrs Cooney (foster mother)

This is John Cunningham for the Tuam Oral History Project. I'm interviewing John Egan at his home in Castlematrix, Rathkeale, Co. Limerick. So, John, we might start by talking about memories you have of the Tuam Home, including from when you were born.

JE: My name is John Egan; I was born in 1951 in St Mary's Home in Tuam. I don't remember much about the Home to be honest, but I have a few small memories and I'll share them with you. My abiding memory is that I would have been very much afraid of dogs. I

remember coming back from school one evening, and there were caravans, Travellers, parked outside or near the school, and I got frightened. I ran away because they had big dogs – greyhounds or something like that. Well, I ran away, anyway, and I was gone for quite a while, but when I came back all the suppers were over. At that time we had a big long table in the home – a huge big long table – and there could have been a hundred boys around it. But when I came back, everything was cleared, everything was gone; it was straight to bed. I can remember that fairly clearly. I can't remember if someone brought me back or if I made my own way back. What I do remember is that there was no supper.

JC: You mentioned a hundred boys – were boys and girls segregated?

JE: I can't remember that. I do remember being friendly with one boy in particular – like, we were together a lot – and I still know him today. We got in touch a few years ago. His name is P.J. Haverty. I used to enquire about him from the social worker when she'd come out to see me in Gort, but she never gave me any information about him. She never said whether he was dead or alive, and anything about him. I'd describe him as being smaller than me, with blond hair.

I was listening to ... Vincent Browne. Vincent was going around to all the constituencies before one election, a couple of elections back, and he must have been in Galway East. They were in Ballinasloe I think, and there were a couple of lads in the front row – they mentioned that P.J. Haverty was there, and Catherine Corless, and there was somebody else who was very badly treated in the Home. And I got in touch then with Catherine Corless the following day, and I asked her would she know about P.J. Haverty. She did a bit of research, and it transpired it was the same P.J. – he was there the same time as myself. So we got in touch, and I met him about six months later in the Corralea Court [Hotel] in Tuam. And we spent the night talking – we spent most of the weekend together there. To go back to Tuam – as I said I don't remember much about that period. I do remember that there was a fall of ground when you came out from the school, and you went downhill onto the main road. And then cross the road and down to that school. John [JC, interviewer] tells me it was the Presentation, but I didn't know that. Then I was fostered out at the age of about 7 – it was 1958.

I was born in '51, so it was about 1958 when I was fostered out to a woman by the name of Mrs Cooney in Gort – she was Mrs Ellen Cooney, and she had no family. Herself and her husband were there at the time. I can remember the day I came out there; I was with Miss McCormack in the car. I suppose it was the first time I was in a car. We were travelling out from Gort on the Scarriff Road, and we met this woman on a bike ... she pulled up, and she was talking to her. It transpired that she was the woman I was going to. She continued to Gort, and Miss McCormack brought me to the house, because she was expecting to find her husband there – waiting for me, like. But when we got to the house he wasn't there, he was gone to a neighbour's place, helping them bring in hay – they were making a rick of hay, a cock of hay. And he had just left the house. Anyway we went up the road, and we met him – it was Fogarty's. They had dogs as well, and that was my problem, because I was terrified of the dogs, absolutely terrified, so they had a big job to try and keep me quiet, with the dogs

It was hard going in that family because I got the feeling that Pat Cooney, the husband, that he wasn't particularly fond of me, because ... well, he had his own family, nephews and nieces, and they went on to inherit that place, that land. We didn't get on very well.

I remember I didn't like going to school.

JC: Did you go to school in Gort?

JE: I went to Lough Cutra National School – out the Shanaglish road. It must have been September when I came out to Mrs Cooney, and I'd say I started school shortly after arriving there. I remember girls of the Noones – there were four or five of them – and one of them brought me to school the first day. I wasn't a great camper going to school; I didn't like school at all, but I went anyway. I had problems always at school because when I went into that school, I went into second or third class, and I had only been in first class leaving Tuam. I felt that they were gone way ahead of me, and I couldn't catch up. Sums I couldn't catch up on. Irish and English and things like that I got on alright with, and History and Geography, I could do all of them. It was a three teacher school, There was a Miss Gillespie there; there was a Mr Burns – he was the headmaster. They [the Burnses] had about thirteen or fourteen children, and his wife was a very nice woman. They had a big container that they

used to have to fill with rainwater – for washing clothes and things. And she'd ask some of the boys from the school, maybe a couple of times a week, to fill the tank for her. And I was always trying to get that job. Well, I was dodging school, and I was also getting nice buns, because she was a great baker.

JC: Was she a teacher as well?

JE: She was a housewife. The school was right beside the teacher's house. We used to be asked over then to fill the tank, and we'd be all mad to go. I used to get the job nearly always. She was a lovely woman. He was absolutely atrocious; he was terrible. I don't want to go into it now, but he was tough. So I went to school there, and spent whatever number of years I had to spend in it. And then I went on to Gort.

JC: Before we move on, you were saying you didn't get on with Mr Cooney, what about Mrs Cooney?

JE: She was OK like, but a bit over-protective. I wasn't used to that sort of thing; she was too protective – because I had never been hugged or anything like that, I found it very hard to be affectionate or anything like that. Because you didn't get any of that in Tuam; I don't remember any of that in Tuam. She was over-protective as I said, she wouldn't want you mixing with the young lads around in case you'd be getting bad language or anything like that – so, over-protective in that sense.

JC: As regards expectations of you, were you working on the farm from an early age?

JE: I was working on that farm all the time – there was always something to be done. Fencing; you'd be cutting rushes with the scythe; paring the sides of the ditches and cutting the hedges. There was always something to be done – fencing especially

JC: Stone walls?

JE: Mostly stone walls, and then you'd have to put a bit of wire on them to stop cattle breaking in. I remember when I went there first – Mrs Cooney's cattle might break in with Jordan's cattle, or Jordan's cattle would break into her. And they'd be a big row over the cattle – they're after eating all my grass and everything. Then they'd start fighting over the cattle, and the next thing it would come around to me – that she was rearing a bastard. I was called a bastard out there.

JC: Openly?

JE: Openly: 'you're rearing a bastard'. I can remember that, and they fighting down the road over it. She got a rough time too over it.

It wasn't the done thing at the time to foster out anyone from a home or anything like that. There was a man who was instrumental in it, I would say, a Fr Conway. He was very friendly with the Cooneys ... and I used to hear her say, 'Fr Conway got us that little lad to help us'.

JC: So did you feel that you were there more as company than as a worker, or the other way round?

JE: I don't know how I felt, to tell you the truth. It was hard to know at that age – you don't know what you're feeling.

JC: Would you say you worked harder than the other young fellows around?

JE: I'd say it was all the same really. We all had jobs to do, all the young lads at the time. They all had jobs to do on the farm. Everyone worked that time, whereas now it's different, because now they have machinery for doing everything. Young lads aren't asked to do much at all. That time they were asked to go and get the cows, and to milk the cows; they'd have to clean out the calves or clean out the hens. All them kinda jobs had to be done that time, and it was young lads that were doing them.

JC: You mentioned name-calling in the village – was there any of that at school?

JE: I always felt that there was something funny about the school, because you'd get a bit of it, though I can't remember it directly. What I used to find worst was the parents' day, the parent-teacher days – they'd say 'Bean Uí Chuanaigh', and I was Egan you see. So, Cooney and Egan weren't the same. Young lads wouldn't be long copping on – how was he Egan and she Cooney? I had to ... kind of ... not take too much notice of it. But it was nearly worse in the secondary school than it was in the national school. I went to the vocational school in Gort then – St Colman's – and it was very evident there because ... young fellas are very clever, and they'd see this name on a sheet or wherever – Bean Uí Chuanaigh – and they'd be asking me how was that, and I'd try to explain that I was fostered out. I suppose you'd be treated a bit different alright like. But I got on well in games, football and hurling and that kind of thing, in the school. I played with St Colman's, and I had the crack with the games; I got on alright.

JC: Did you continue with the hurling?

JE. I remember playing with Kilbeacanty one time. They brought me down – there was no training that time. I was a nice hurler but I didn't want to be in the goals, I wanted to be out the field, but as it transpired the evening they brought me they had no goalie, so they put me into the goals. We were small fellows, and I remember they came from Ballinderreen, and they were men - six feet high some of them. Imagine them coming in on top of you – three or four men on top of you into the goal. The result was there was about seven goals scored in about twenty minutes – I was afraid of them, stood to one side and let them in. We had no backs because they were too small. Our team was miserable compared to their team. That would have been a school team. That was the end of my hurling... My foster mother didn't want me going anyway; she didn't want me going training.

JC: Was this about protectiveness again?

JE: It could be, but it could also be about the work – if you were away, you wouldn't be doing the jobs, wasting time. So that was my sojourn with the hurling. I did like hurling, and I loved football as well, but I didn't get much of a chance to play it.

JC: So you went on at school?

JE: Yes, I did the Group Cert and the Inter Cert. To tell you the truth I don't know how I done in either of them, we never saw the certs.

JC: And did you stay at home then?

JE: I stayed at home to work on the land. And I started to visit my foster mother's brother who lived in Woodford. His name was Jim McNamara, and he told me if I looked after him that he'd give me the place. And I loved farming; that's all I wanted.

JC: Woodford was a long way from Gort?

JE: Yes, it was about 28 miles from where I was living in Gort, a place called Inchaboy. And from Inchaboy to Derrygoolin was 28 and a half miles. And that was done by bicycle, maybe two or three times a week when I started. Two hours, maybe two and a half hours, because the last six miles of it from Woodford to Derrygoolin was west and the wind was almost always against you. And it was hilly... Derrybrien is very tough. You knew when you're going up there by Derrybrien – you look back and you think there's a fall, you think it's level, but it's a very deceitful there.

JC: There's Egans pub?

JE: Yes, and I often went in there for a drink, for a cup of tea or something, a bottle of orange. And then I'd go on to Woodford, and I'd go into Moran's shop, and maybe bring some milk from there. But from Woodford to Derrygoolin was the hardest part.

JC: So that was a couple of times a week. And you were working on the farm?

JE: Yes, I was working on two farms then. He had died – well, Jim McNamara was alive, but Pat Cooney had passed on, about 1969 I think. We didn't get on well, as I said. He'd be trying to put me to school, and he'd come down the road after me – following me with a

stick. He was supposed to have heart trouble but ... I'd start firing stones at him anyway. As a small lad I was rough; I was a bold boy, like (laughter). I didn't want to go to school – that would be after me coming there first.

JC: He died anyway, I'd say when I was 10 or 12. I can remember his funeral, there was a lot of people around the house. There were hundreds of loaves of bread; it went on for two or three days... bottles of Guinness outside. A traditional Irish funeral. He was well-known and well-liked.

JC: Mrs Cooney lived on.

JE: Oh yes she did, until about 2000 or so. She lived on for a long time. I started coming in then to Derrygoolin, to Jim. He was over 70, and he needed help. He was living alone at this stage. Well, the sister was with him for a while, when I started going there first – she was called Annie, and she was trying to look after him. He was contrary too – it was hard to please him. Her back was very bad, she had an abscess on her back or something. She used to ask me sometimes to dress the bed and things like that. The bedclothes were very bad, old blankets and that, and when you'd shake them, they'd be all dust. She lived in bad conditions to tell you the truth; I found them bad anyway, by comparison with where I was. She got cancer then, I think, and she died. He was on his own then and I was going in and out to him all the time.

JC: What was he doing?

JE: A few cattle, cows and a few calves. All sucklers.

JC: So your job was maintaining the place, fencing?

JE: Yes, and helping him with the hay and the bog, sowing a few spuds, the general farm work, like. And there was no thanks for it, and no pay. I remember one summer, probably the first summer I spent there – I was still at school, but I spent the whole time there from when I got the holidays until I went back to school. And he gave me a pound. For the whole

summer! He came into Scarriff – I remember being at the fair in Scarriff with him. He'd bring you in, and give you a mineral and Geary's biscuits – big biscuits, they were about half an inch thick. You'd get two of them and a cup of tea. That was the reward. It was hard going bringing the cattle in there, because the cattle you see weren't used to being out on the roads. And they weren't used to people. And they were stone wild... You had to walk them from Derrygoolin to Scarriff, which was about ten miles. And the first few miles were hard going, because you had commonage on both sides of the road – with no fencing at all, wide open. You were alright when you got them onto the roads with fences, but then you had to be going in front of them all the time, standing in gaps, standing in roadways, driveways and things like that. I remember going in near Scarriff, it was in June, and the grass was about that high in the fields. And you'd be running through this grass to get out in front of them, to stop them at the next road. And I remember you'd be wet up to your back. And that there was no notice taken of it; you just dried your clothes on your back. He'd be coming along behind, I suppose he had a bike. All I can remember about the selling of the cattle was that he had blue polly cattle, blue polly bullocks, like the Belgian blues today. He had one – a three or four year old bullock – and he was getting £70 for him. And he had a younger one coming up – about a year and a half – and he was also getting £70 for that one. And I said, 'Wouldn't you have been better to have sold him, and not to have kept him for the extra two years to get the same money for him'. 'Ah no', he said, 'if I sold him then, the money would be gone' (laughter)... Having the cattle was like a bank; once you had the cattle you had the money.

JC: So you had no money. Did you get some sort of an allowance down in Gort?

JE: No allowance. If you wanted to go the pictures, say when I was 18 or 19, coming up to those ages... we got a car then, she bought a car about 1972 or '73, a Morris Minor, and I learned how to drive on that. Maybe you'd go to the pictures and things, but you'd get ten shillings when you'd be going out, the red ten shilling note. Sure you'd get three gallons of petrol for a pound that time... You'd have a good bit of money with the ten shillings. There was no weekly wage or anything like that. Just when you needed a pound going out, you got it. I started farming away in Derrygoolin. He went to the Home then, in Loughrea, and he

was there nearly two years. He had poor health, but he didn't have dementia, but he wasn't far from it I'd say. We got him to sign the place over to me before he got too bad.

I knew that time was slipping from me, and I'd put all this effort into it. I said I needed to get something back. So we discussed it, myself and herself [Mrs Cooney], and she said if you get in a solicitor... So we got in Dominic Kearns in Portumna, a very straight man. I rang him and said this man is in the home, in Loughrea, and he's there a few years now. I said I had worked all these years there, and that he had promised to give me the place. He said, fine. He came in anyway, and I went out of the room. She stayed with him, she stayed in the room, with the solicitor, and with Jim. He made the will. He made what they call a deed of assignment, which was better than a will, because it couldn't be challenged. I didn't know it at the time; I didn't ask him to do anything like that. But he felt ... he was one of the old school, very straight, and he felt that whatever I was getting I was entitled to it. So that was alright, that went through.

Then, his sister came from America. She was Molly Mac or Mary Mac. She came home around 1973 – 1974. I got the place in '73, she came home in '74. She moved into the house in Derygoolin – with me like, because I was living in the house nearly full-time, She moved in; she had a room. I remember one day she got the post, and she nearly lost it. She was raving about Mr Kearns. She wrote to Mr Kearns of course. What I didn't know when I got the place was she had given Jim £500 in 1955 or so to buy half the place. I didn't know that at all. She came I'd say with the intention of selling the place, but she got this letter from Kearns telling her she was statute barred... I didn't know she had put this money into it. So I said to her, you have a room in the house; it's going to cost you nothing, and whatever is there we can share it, the house is there for you the same as me. There was no talk about rent or anything, but she still wasn't happy. I was getting it all the time – she had this habit of talking to herself, and you'd hear all the conversation about what I was doing, giving out. But as I said I was bringing her to town once or twice a week, whenever she wanted to go. I never got a shilling from her... She retired to Ireland, she had nephews and nieces in America. I think her plan was to come home and sell the place, and give them the money. Anyway it didn't transpire; it didn't work for her. Anyway, she lived away there until she died.

The house went on fire – she was there, she was still alive. I was there at the time, and I was doing a bit of work around the farm here, and Josephine [Mrs Egan] came over

the field to where I was. And I knew there was something up when I saw her coming. She said, 'I have bad news for you, but there's no one dead.' That's all right so, I said. I thought that the yank might have maybe got a stroke or something. 'The yank' is what we called her. The house is after going on fire, she said, in Derrygoolin. It was a fine house, two storey, built in 1913 I think, stone-built by Dennis Woods, who was a renowned stone mason in that area. The whole thing was gutted. She happened to be outside, she used to sit out in the haybarn. She was reading the paper or reading something when she saw the smoke coming out the door. She went to go in, but the flames were coming out the door. Luckily enough she didn't get in; if she did she'd have been burned to death...

I was between here [Castlematrix] and Derrygoolin and Gort, because my foster mother was still alive in Gort, that woman was alive in Derrygoolin. I was farming in Derrygoolin; I had a few cattle there. And I was coming here, so I had three places. I used to leave here in the morning at 6 o'clock to go to Derrygoolin, spend two or three hours in Derrygoolin and do whatever had to be done there, and then I head on for Gort, and then I'd have to take my foster mother into the town to draw her pension and to get her few messages. We'd come back then, and we'd have tea and different things. I never got back here until 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning. At least once a week, sometimes twice a week. 'Twas tough going.

JC: In the meantime you'd got married?

JE: Yes, I got married in 1982, in Limerick. My foster mother was at the wedding. And there was a sister of hers that came home from America – Kathleen. I have a photograph someplace... We got married in St Mary's Church in Limerick and we had the reception then in the Greenhills. We only had the families, we had no big wedding. Josephine wasn't into having big weddings and I wasn't into it because, well, I didn't like big crowds around – sure I had no one belonging to me, only my foster mother, and you'd have a few friends. Hers was a big family, and a lot of them didn't know that I was fostered out at all when we got married, and there's some of them that still don't know probably. Josephine had no problem with it, but you know the way that the older generation were – they would look down on somebody like that, so we said we'd have a small wedding and it went off grand. I started farming full-time here then. We didn't get the place here until later on – she got it in

1995 I think. Josephine got the place here. Her parents were still here – we lived with them for years. The mother died about 30 years ago, and the father is dead nearly 20 years. So we were farming here, they were milking cows here, so we milked away and we reared a family. It wasn't easy now. There was nothing easy about it, but John was nice, her father was lovely. We got on great — he was like the father that I never had. He was great. When I started here, I was doing bits and pieces. I started doing blinds, going around putting up house blinds – fitting them. Roller blinds ... and all of them, as a kind of a side-line. People would be ringing you up then to go out, and I didn't know the area, so he'd come with me, show me where the houses were – he was great. We got on great the two of us; I missed him.

JC: Then at some point you tried to trace your own background?

JE: That was going on all the time; that was going on even before I got married. I wrote to Miss McCormack. I didn't know if she was still alive. All I could remember was her name. I wrote to her in Tusla in Galway. It was Galway County Council I think at the time the Health Board or something. I wrote to her anyway, but I didn't get any information really.

JC: Did you have much contact with her? We're going back to when she brought you out to the house in 1958. Did you have many memories of her subsequently as a visitor?

JE: Yes, I remember her coming a couple of times a year. Sometimes I wouldn't be there. I saw it in the file later – there's a big file there. You can see in the file that if she came and I wasn't around, she'd put down: 'John is gone on holidays' (laughter). I was out in Derrygoolin, like.

JC: So she would have continued to visit you until you were ... 16?

JE: Yes, probably that. Of course Nell, my foster mother, was getting an allowance for me, like. But they'd come out every so often to check everything, to check the rooms and the beds, and to make sure that the money was being spent and that kind of thing. She wouldn't talk to me at all, she might say hello to me, but I can't ever remember having a conversation

with her. But she'd come to check the house. Then when she'd write the report, she'd say, 'John is gone on holidays'. I said to Áine Burke – it's on the file there – 'it was no holiday, like'. Because, when I'd come in from Gort into Derrygoolin, when I first started doing it, you'd have Jim ... the house would be in a wreck. There was an open fire and the ashes mightn't have been thrown out for a week. The first thing you'd have to do would be the clear out the ashes and put down a fire, get the fire going to boil a kettle of water. And then when you'd have the kettle boiled, you'd have to wash down everything, you'd have to wash the cups. All the week's cups would be on the table. And cats and dogs walking around the table – there was a flock of cats there. You might find then that there would be a calf, a month old, tied to the leg of the table, and he could be pulling the table around the room, around the kitchen. So you'd have to tidy up all that before you'd even have a bite to eat – after cycling two-and-a-half hours. I'd try to tell them [family members] that when they were young and they thought I was mad. They thought how could anyone do that – crazy – they wouldn't believe you that you did it. But it's true. You'd cycle different ways to see if it would be shorter – I used to go by Scarriff sometimes – it was a little bit shorter but it wasn't easy. You'd have to do all that before you could eat a bite.

JC: If you go back to Miss McCormack, you were in touch with her again when you started ...

JE: I started research then. I got no information at all, never knew where my mother was, they gave me no inkling at all of where she was. Then there was lady going around one time, she was doing insurance, and we were talking, and she asked me if I was always here. This was in Derrygoolin I met her. I said to her I was from Tuam originally – she said she was from Tuam herself, and I asked her did she know any Egans. 'I know two families of Egans', she said. This was before we got married, I'd say a month or so before we got married. She said one of them is doing B&B. Both might have been doing B&B, but one of them she said I could talk to...

Anne was the woman she recommended if I wanted to go to check it out, to see if there was any connection. We went there anyway, we went to Tuam on our honeymoon, and we stayed there in that house. It was Anne and Tom Raftery, but she was born Egan, she was Anne Egan, and she had a sister called Bridget I think. She did have a sister alright who had a child out of wedlock around the time we were talking about, but it transpired ...

because she told me when I was talking to her... I broached the subject with her about the second night we were there about what I was looking for really. She said I did have a sister that had a child, and that she got an awful doing, because when she'd be coming home from College, or from ... she was probably working in Galway, she'd have to come across the fields. She couldn't come around by the road, because the neighbours would see her – it was all about the neighbours that time. She did say she had a sister alright, and she was very anxious that we'd be related. So we kept in touch and we're still in touch.

JC: You had to get a birth cert to get married?

JE: I got a birth cert alright, but Kathleen Egan was all that was on it, that was the only information that was on it – and it said that I was born in St Mary's Home in Tuam.

JC: But no further details?

JE: No, just her name, and 'Domestic' in Loughrea. I used to think then that I was actually from Glenamaddy. I don't know how Glenamaddy came into my head, but it transpired that there were Egans in Glenamaddy alright – that was the one that I called to see, but as time went on I discovered that my mother was from Sligo, and not from around Glenamaddy at all. But it was only a real chance years down the line – I was years and years at it – it was at the start of the Tuam thing [Mother and Baby Home controversy] that I met Catherine Corless. I wrote to Catherine one time, or I rang her or something. I gave her access to my DNA, and I asked if she'd be able to help me, to match me up with someone. And she said that it was leaning very much towards Sligo, and that there was one person she said that was alive all the time, a man by the name of Luke Healy, and I have a feeling that he's related to you. She knew from the DNA that it was pointing in that direction.

So she said his name is Luke Healy, and she gave me his address, and she said I should look him up. So I was thinking about it for months and months, and the next thing was that we were in Tuam one day for a meeting, and I said to Josephine, we'll go to Sligo, we'll go up to see Luke. Up we went anyway, and we asked a few people around where was Luke Healy. Eventually we found the house and went to the door, and I told him who I was. I said to him do you mind if I come in, and he said no, come on in, and we sat down – it was a

big seat like that one. We were talking away for a while, and I gave him my name and address, and phone number and email and everything. I said to him my mother's name is Kathleen Egan, and your mother's name is Kathleen Egan, so I said we might be related. That's what I said to him when we met first. So we went in as a I said, and we were talking away – I'd given him my address, but I didn't ask him for his address. It was up to him if he wanted to contact me.

I said you have my name and address, so if you know anything, tell me. Probably I said, 'Sorry if I upset you, but I'm probably in the wrong place'. And he looked across to me, and he said, 'maybe you're not'. That was the comment he made, 'maybe you're not'. I said to him, 'Can Josephine come in' – she was in the car – 'can she come in to see you?'. And he looked around the house at that, and he said, 'No, I'll bring you to the graveyard'. That was after meeting him for five minutes like. So we down to the graveyard – up in Rhue in Sligo – and he showed me all the graves, his mother and father's grave, he showed me his uncles and aunts, the whole lot, all around. And I took photographs of them all. We came back to the house then, and I left him off, and I heard no more from him for twelve months – never heard a word. So one day then, I was talking to Áine Burke – I had told her I was meeting with him – and she rang me back one day, and she said, 'how did you get on with Luke'. I said the her, 'To tell you the truth I never heard a word from him'. So she said, 'Do you mind if I try'. I said I had no problem with that. Off she went anyway and she wrote to him, and he replied to her within the week, and they met up. And I had said to her, when you are talking to him will you ask him if he'll do a DNA – because I wanted to be sure that I was talking to the right people, So she said he had no problem with the DNA, so we arranged for the DNA to be done on the 1st of April 2019.

It transpired that we were half-brothers. So that was grand. The day we were doing the DNA, when we were finished doing the samples and everything – she took care of all that. She had said to me, 'Will I send you a sample to be done, and will I send him a sample to be done?' I said I'd like to see him doing it, because I was afraid that if he was under pressure to disregard me, he could get someone else to do it. And you couldn't be 100% sure unless you saw him doing it. So I said: 'We'll do it in your office if that's OK with you'. And she said that was perfect. So she rang him anyway to see if he was agreeable, and he was agreeable. He came and we did it on the 1st of April 2019. We had everything sorted; she had all the stuff put away and everything, and I said would he come for a bit of food –

they had a canteen there. 'No', he said, 'I'm in a hurry, I have to meet someone in Galway'. This was in Merlin Park. So I said fine. And he said, 'By the way, you have a sister in Clare'. Just like that – it nearly knocked me for six, like. I asked him if he was sure and he said, 'I am'. 'So, where in Clare', I said. 'I can't remember' he said, 'off the top of my head'. So I started reading out the towns to him, Kilrush and Kilkee, Kilbaha and all the different towns in Clare. And I finished up with Scarriff, and he said, 'That's it, Scarriff'. Just over the road, and I passing through Scarriff all my life. So I asked him if he knew the name, and he didn't know the name that day. So I said to Áine Burke, 'Will you follow up this?' And I left it to her to follow it up, because I didn't want to be causing any more trouble to anyone, and they have a better way of doing it. She said she would. He gave her the name and address of the person, and she turned out to be Marie Bolton of Scarriff. I didn't know the woman at all before that. So when she rang, she told her, and Marie was delighted that she had a brother. She never knew she had a brother. She was also looking for her mother.

JC: Did she spend time in Tuam as well?

JE: No, she spent time in the orphanage in Loughrea; she spent all her life in the orphanage in Loughrea until she was 16 – 14 or 16, I'm not sure. She was born two and a half years before me, She was born in 1948; I was born in '51. She was born in England actually, but for some reason she came back to Ireland. They took the child off the mother; she was committed to the orphanage in Loughrea. They made out that the mother wasn't able to look after her. And there was a court order or something that she was actually committed to Loughrea – my sister was, because they made out the mother wasn't capable of looking after her. I don't know why.

JC: So your mother had gone to England when she was pregnant?

JE: With Marie, yes. Whether she got pregnant in England, or she got pregnant here, I don't know.

JC: And she was put out to work in the County Home?

JE: No, she was put to Garbally College, she was out there as a domestic ... in Ballinasloe. She spent a lot of her time there. And then there was a nun there from Scarriff, or near Scarriff, and she had people in Whitegate that needed a girl ... that needed someone to mind children. So she brought Marie from there to mind the children – in Whitegate. And she settled there, and she was working for a family called ... Burkes I think. The Burkes had some relation in the town, a Mrs Solan, and she went to hospital to have a baby, or to have an operation. And she [Marie] was minding the children at Solan's. And she wrote to the nuns in Loughrea – she said she wanted to stay there, she was getting a few pounds, she was getting paid there, and she loved it, got on great with the family and everything. She wrote to the nuns, the head one, the Reverend Mother. And the next day there was a car outside the door and she was bundled into it and taken up to Dublin – they had somewhere near Stillorgan. They put her in there, into another laundry, and she pleaded with them to be let out again. So she was let out again, out to Burkes, the original people she went to. But they didn't want her to stay in Solan's. So she went back there, and she was going to the dances then...

JC: I'm not so clear on this. She went from Burkes' to Solans' ...

JC: ... and they brought her off to Dublin. She wrote then again back to the nun in Loughrea, pleaded with her, and eventually anyway she got back to Whitegate again, and she started working for that family, and then I think she moved into Scarriff, into the town. And she met her husband – he's Bolton. He was local, Noel Bolton. They had four children like ourselves: three girls and a boy, and we have three girls and a boy.

JC: And did you do DNA with her?

JE: I did DNA with her

JC: And are you full siblings?

JE: No, we're half siblings, different fathers, the mother was the same. I met with them, with her and her two daughters in Gort in June following the DNA. We met in Gort and we had a

great day there. I had family then, and one of them was in England, and one was in Abu Dhabi, and I knew she'd be home for July for holidays and that, and I said we'd all try and meet up – as many of us as could – in July, so we met in July last year [2019?], we met in the Lakeside Hotel in Killaloe and we had a great day, the whole lot of us, and we were supposed to do it again this year, but Covid changed everything.

JC: You never met your mother then?

JE: No, I never met my mother. And Marie didn't meet her either. And she met Luke nearly 20 years ago. I don't how, but she got to meet Luke, the fellow I met eventually – that took me nearly 20 years – but she got to meet him. And she said that about a month after she meeting him, she saw a death notice in the paper, and it was her mother. It was a month's mind notice or something like that – she saw a Mass or something for Kathleen Egan, and herself – and I don't know did one of the daughters go with her – they went up to Sligo, they went up to the Mass, and they met Luke again. And he came down to see her, down to Scarriff alright, once ... but she never heard from him from that day until I got in touch with him. But it was ironic that he was the contact that we both made – that got us together. Only for he saying that day that, 'You have a sister in Clare', I would never have found her.

JC: Do you know how the social worker connected you with Luke Healy?

JE: Well no, it was Catherine Corless that put us in touch with him first. From the DNA she was able to point us towards that... He, or someone in that family, must have provided DNA at some stage, because it was it was pointing towards that side... Catherine Corless was thinking that my mother or my grandmother ... yes my mother... My mother, she had Marie first and then me, but then there was this Thomas Healy – I think that was an arranged marriage with Thomas Healy. Now Thomas Healy was a widower, and he had six children before he married Kathleen Egan. Catherine Corless said to me that Thomas Healy's [first] wife had a brother a priest ... I forget now what the name was ...I think it was O'Callaghan. But she thinks it was an arranged marriage. This woman was coming out from the Home, and he was after losing his wife. Catherine thinks he – Fr O'Callaghan – might have been my father. She was inclined to think that at the time – and she sent me a photograph. There's

actually a photograph in there if I can find it. She thought I looked very like him. Catherine was great, she was very good to me. It was she that put me ... on that road, because I was gone away from it altogether. There it is [photograph] – that's a letter from Catherine. He was in Loughrea you see

JC: So he was one of the senior priests in Loughrea – the administrator of the parish.

JE: Catherine thought that we looked alike ...

JC: I don't see it

JE: I don't see it either... I have the DNA and there's stuff coming in, but there's a lot of Quinns coming into it from around Loughrea. I can't follow DNA – if I was good at that, and if I could get someone who was good at genealogy, they might be able to match us up with someone ...

JC: Did you find out much about your mother after all of that?

JE: I got photographs from Marie ... sure she found out nothing about her either

JC: But she had a long life down there as Mrs Healy

JE: Mrs Healy, yes. You could say she reared twelve, fourteen children. She had her own two, she had his six, and she had six again [from Mr Healy's first family]. She had eight children herself. And he had six. Though some of his might have been shoving on when she got married. But there's birth certs there, I was looking at the birth certs. There was nearly a child every year for three or four years, and then there was a break maybe for a year and a half or two years. I have six half brothers and sisters. I have one half-brother alive, and I'd say I have half-sisters who don't want to know about it. That's possibly why Luke's hands were tied. I'd say the rest of the family didn't want to know anything about it.

JC: An did he [Luke] have the place?

JE: No, he was out working for some company, and he was living in a house in Tobercurry.

JC: But did your mother marry into a farm?

JE: I don't know that. I don't know what Thomas Healy had.

JC: And your first contact with the group was with Catherine Corless?

JE: I can't remember. I don't know how I first got in touch with Tuam. It must have been I suppose.

JC: So you saw her, and you saw P.J. Haverty on the telly, and you made contact with her subsequently?

JE: And I made contact with P.J. then, and we were talking. And these meetings were coming up then. You had different people, different chairmen. Peter Mulryan was chairman for a long time. There was a bit of rancour then ... I don't like it, and I couldn't figure out what it was all about. And I left the group for a while. And then they changed chairmen ...

JC: But was it a positive thing for you, making contact?

JE: With P.J. it was, and then this thing started, with personalities. You had different groups then, you had Anna Corrigan, she had her own group; then you had our group, and they weren't pulling together, gelling together. So I went away from them for about twelve months... Oh yes, Michael Flaherty is the chairperson now

BREAK – Recorder stopped

JE: ...It was tough going, you always felt different: that was the thing about going out, going to dances, it always held you back because you didn't have a proper family.

JC: That was partly how you felt yourself, but also how ...?

JE: ... how people perceived you. You felt inadequate really – always that way like, because you didn't come from a proper family. I always knew that where I was, that I wasn't their ... child. I was old enough to know – when I was coming out there, I met her on the road, like – I was old enough to know that she was not my mother. But my mother wasn't bothering me that time – it was when you get older, when you're fourteen or fifteen, or even coming towards your twenties, that you'd start to think about your relations , the people behind you. And it was then that I got interested in trying to find out something. It was a brick wall all the way.

JC: There was something you mentioned before we started the interview – that you ended following up a wrong lead

JE: That's right. I got in touch with [someone in] Tusla, and she showed me this letter that she got from this woman in Skegness. I followed up that lead and it transpired that while the name was the same – she was Egan as well – that she wasn't my mother. DNA established it. The man himself was very upset, I felt sorry for the poor man. In fact I often felt that I should have rang back, or rang back his sons, to see how he was. It was a big upset for him, because he would have thought that he was married to someone who kept this secret from him for forty years. At least the DNA cleared it up, so it was a good thing. I said it was the only way to clear it up – for both of us, for him and for us. I did feel sorry though that I caused him that upset, but I suppose, as the fella said, you can't make an omelette without breaking an egg.

JC: And it wasn't your fault that they ...

JE: ... that they had given me the wrong information. It was inside in my file, so I was going on their information.

JC: Would you say it was carelessness or ...?

JE: I would say it was carelessness; I wouldn't think it was malice. But then again ... at that time it often transpired that they had changed names, and that they changed dates and did

all this kinda thing to throw people off finding their relations. But I often felt that my mother – I have photographs of her there – that she didn't look a happy woman, like. She must have had a tough life. I feel sorry for her in a way that she had to go through so much – that she had to go to England, and then to come back, and put her child, put Marie, into an orphanage in Loughrea, and was probably denied access to her from there on. Marie doesn't know what happened in the intervening years, and I don't know. And I probably did better than Marie in the sense that I went out to a farm, and I had a bit more freedom, whereas they were still chaperoning her, even after she'd gone over the age.

She was working for this family and she was still being kinda chaperoned. So I had more freedom than she had. But it was a pity that she didn't get to meet her – when she came so close. She only missed her by about a month. She was probably in a nursing home or a hospital when she was talking to Luke. But maybe he couldn't connect them. I think he wasn't getting the go-ahead to connect them from his five... I do think that – one of his sisters was working in the HSE or adoption society, working in that area. She may have come across a file at some stage, and I'd say she put a stop to a lot of stuff.

JC: So we can leave it at that. Thanks very much. I'll be in touch in the next few weeks with the transcript, and your documents.

JE: OK, lovely.