Clare, Dublin. Interview: 6th July 2002.

1 CK: My name is Clare K. and I was born in 1928, so I was eleven years old when the war started. I lived in Phibsborough, in Dublin, and spent the war years in the Drumcondra area until [pause] I lived in that area until the war was a long time over.
2 MM: I'm going to ask you a little bit about what you can remember about how the war impacted on your home life and particularly, what you can remember about how your mother would have coped. Were you, you were obviously going to school, did the war have any impact on the day to day life from that point of view?

3 CK: No. I lived fairly near my school so it was only a matter of walking but one thing always stuck in my head. We had a little dog who loved bananas and almost immediately, bananas were not available and that poor little dog went without.
4 Now, I do remember the day the war broke out. I remember being aware of Danzig, Gdansk in Poland, and we must have read the paper and heard the radio. It was shocking but we never thought it would go on long. We had no particular affiliation to any party. Many Irish people were sympathetic to the Axis and did not mind if England was bombarded or anything else. My parents were apolitical and just took it as it came.
5 From the beginning, we were aware of shortages of certain foods. When rationing began, I expect it was a little later than 1939, we were given our portion of butter and there were many rows in my house because I managed to keep it for a week, unless it was stolen on me. My brother reminded me of this recently. I was a source of great envy because I did not like margarine. I had a friend who was a girl with two brothers and in her family, as rationing went on, the brothers were given the butter that came to the household and she got beef dripping. Now she grew to be a beautiful girl so obviously it didn't do her any harm but I think she resented it or she wouldn't have ever mentioned it. Fruit became very scarce. We didn't have oranges so there was, I'm sure, a certain vitamin deficiency. We almost immediately transferred to brown flour, which was the native Irish flour, which proved to be quite nourishing and not damaging, but when white bread became available through friends in the North of Ireland, say, it was like getting cake. We became accustomed to this restricted diet, if you like, but unless you had family outside Dublin, in the countryside, the butter was the main thing that was missing. Tea became scarce so my mother would ration it strictly among the adults. There weren't any adults really, at the time, she had some houseguests and the tea was kept for them. We drank a terrible concoction from South America, shell cocoa, which formed some kind of a hot beverage. This is now used to keep down weeds in gardens, you can buy it in the garden centre in big, big bags and when I saw it, it brought it all back to me what a horrible drink it was. We did not make the ersatz coffee.
6 MM: Can I just stop you a second? Would it not have been as difficult to get that, coming from South America, as tea?
7 CK: It was imported as a substitute for tea. Tea was very scarce because of the distance it had to be brought from India and Ceylon.
8 MM: Surely the distance from South America was equally far?
9 CK: I cannot imagine what the difference was except that maybe the North Atlantic was not so vulnerable to U-Boat attack.

10 In this period, children developed a disease called scabies and every family had to go to the Iveagh Baths to be washed down with a white liquid, immersed in the public bath, to our absolute shame and horror to be stripped down in front of everyone. We had to be immersed in this solution because scabies became rampant. It was a condition of the fingers and toes and perhaps it was due to a vitamin deficiency, I'm not sure.
11 During this period, my mother was very skillful at cooking in unconventional fashion with what we called a 'sawdust' cooker. It consisted of a strong biscuit tin, which was actually square. It was given out by Jacobs Biscuits through shops. You would try and find one of these and you would fill it with sawdust. In the middle while you were filling it with sawdust you would put down a very strong bottle. My brother reminded me it was a champagne bottle; we didn't drink champagne but that's what it was. So then the sawdust was packed tightly around this bottle in this twelve-inch square tin and dampened and through some method, it became congealed, I suppose, and then it was ignited and it burnt very slowly, in a manner like a slow cooker and it was extremely efficient. Apparently, there were other systems known as hay box cooking, for keeping food warm, because gas was rationed in the Dublin area. You got one hour for cooking and then you must turn off the system and people [pause] the glimmermen went around checking for gas, whether it had been used in the off period. It was extremely limited in the amount you could use every day so this haybox system would keep food warm where people came in for a late dinner or whatever.
12 We didn't make the ersatz coffee because we were not coffee drinkers; it was made from roasted parsnips but it was not part of our diet. We missed the fruit because we had been accustomed to it, growing up to age eleven, but eventually it came back towards the end of the war.
13 My mother worked quite hard to feed the houseguests. Now she had only two but she wanted to make sure they were nourished, I suppose, to keep whatever they gave her to supplement our income.
14 As far as I know, many people went from my area to England to work. They worked in the munitions factories. One of my contemporaries, towards the end of the war, went to the WAAF, the air arm, but that was very unusual. Many men went - that was a girl - but many men went for a career in the English services.
15 The bombs that fell near the North Strand in Dublin, I think were about 1941, were an absolute horror to us. We all went down to look at the damage, principally because one of the main houses hit, my mother had lived in for quite a time when she was young, but it was such a rare thing to see such devastation that we went. We also went to the south side of the city, which was the Jewish quarter, where some bombs had landed and we also wondered why that area was selected, whether it was deliberate. There was quite extensive damage in that area.
16 MM: You were saying that you were eleven when the war started. How many other children were in the family and how old were they?
17 CK: There were six. My sister was nearly two years older, my brother was about a year younger, another brother was a year and a half younger, the youngest would [pause] 1935, four years old. We were all ages and we were well nourished at the beginning of the war. We had no problems with local food. It was simple but we all attended schools comparatively near so we didn't have to pay bus fares, or anything extra like that.
18 MM: What about things like having vegetable patches in the garden, that sort of thing? Did your family do that?

19 CK: My father always had an allotment, where he worked on his only day off in the week. He worked very hard, grew potatoes, cabbage, they were the main choice vegetable. My mother was more adventurous in that she would grow runner beans, parsnips, carrots, a lot of different vegetables, but we had quite a lot of vegetables.
20 MM: Were other neighbours doing that sort of thing as well?
21 CK: I don't think so. It was a mixed neighbourhood, there might have been no children, [pause] or whatever.
22 MM: What about your mother's daily routine? Was she going out to work or at home with the children all day?
23 CK: When the war broke out we had a shop and we had only just taken it on and unfortunately, commodities became scarce and it was not a good time to open a shop. It was a small grocery, dry goods, I don't think they ever had to go to the market or anything.
24 MM: So, if your mother was going to the shop, did you have to do anything, looking after the younger children, or was there somebody to help?
25 CK: There was, yes. There was a woman who came in to work at washing and cleaning. We would go to the shop, we did a little help as two or three years went by but it was a very bad time because of the rationing. I remember seeing what they called 'penny packets' of tea, where people would just buy enough tea to do maybe the husband and the wife and they would ask for [pause] they couldn't ask for 'best butter' as we called it, they would have to take margarine mostly. It was not a good time to own a shop, a small shop.
26 MM: And was this because of the rationing or because people's incomes were very small?
27 CK: In the area where the second shop was – we had a second shop afterwards – it was a poor area where they lived from hand to mouth, with just buying per meal. I remember them asking for 'best butter' but that wasn't so often. But their diet would have been quite limited and they were in an area where it was tenement property. I remember one family, they were living in a large room and I remember going in and seeing mattresses piled on top of each other which were taken down at night. They were young adults, they were not small children, a very large family.
28 MM: Where in Dublin was this?
29 CK: That was in what's now Sean McDermott Street. It was an area where my parents had started originally in a shop and they went back to the same shop, which was very strange, but the whole circumstances of the area had changed over a period of about fifteen years.
30 MM: And why would you have needed to go there, was it that you had a school friend or something living there?
31 CK: No, we used to go to help in the shop after school.
32 MM: No, I mean to the tenement building.
33 CK: Oh, just because they were regular customers. I must have been invited in or carrying a message or something but I was invited in. I remember, I can still see the woman's face but they considered themselves very lucky to have a huge room in an old Victorian house, whatever it was. But we walked to and from our house to this shop, which was not a viable proposition at the time. So, my father's income was not a very big one and my mother was extremely energetic and she tried to boost the family income by doing this. In the First World War, she had been a manager of Lipton's store, when the men were all gone away. She was a very capable woman but the timing of the rationing devastated the shop.
34 MM: And would she have considered any other kind of work if she was concerned about the family income?

35 CK: No. She boosted the income then by having two houseguests and that was it, but she couldn't do any more than that.
36 MM: These were people who were paying for board and lodging?
37 CK: Yes. They were the same people that she'd had in a previous home and they were quite happy to follow her.
38 MM: In that case, was it not quite difficult for her to make the money to pay someone to come in and help with the housework?
39 CK: She probably worked for very little. She was with us for years and years. She was very capable and very nice. She used to bring her little niece with her and I remember my mother giving the child bread and jam. Jam in those days came in a 7lb. jar, a stone jar, which people prize now as antiques. I have one out there. And I remember there was a mixed fruit jam, we were told afterwards it was made from mangolds, which are fed to cattle, but it tasted like jam, it was quite acceptable. So gradually, towards the end of the war, almost overnight the white flour became available and nobody went back to the brown flour. But nobody was any less healthy because of the dark bread.
40 MM: Was this like rye bread rather than the Irish soda bread?
41 CK: It was grey, it wasn't quite what we're used to do. It didn't do people any harm.
42 Then there was another thing, coal could not be bought. So houses were getting fuel from the turf banks which were in the Phoenix Park. These were cut turf, stacked in yards long piles in the Phoenix Park. The distributors would bring it to certain areas of the city where you would buy it by the bag. So this was brought to the house and you sometimes had a little trivet on your ordinary fireplace. When there was no gas available you would have a kettle always on this metal trivet in the fireplace. And the fuel, the turf did not burn very well, it burnt away very quickly, it was soft fuel but there just wasn't coal available. But with the turf came fleas, by the million. Everybody suffered from the fleas. We became expert at checking our blankets at night. We would look at them before we got into bed and you might find two or [pause].
43 MM: Would this have been from fires in the bedrooms?
44 CK: No, they would have been in the house from the turf. No, I don't think we lit fires in the bedrooms, it wouldn't [pause] because Irish people were not accustomed to heat in the bedrooms. But the fleas would get into the bed, probably on our clothes. They were just endemic. Because of this turf, they lived in it, and everybody suffered from them and we used to squash them between our thumbs and fingers, our thumbnails. We became expert at finding them because otherwise you would be bitten. So you just lived with them and I remember, I was about fourteen visiting a distant cousin in a big old house in Rathfarnham and I was supposed to stay [pause] I went on my bicycle from Drumcondra to Rathfarnham, never having taken the journey before and found her in this house with her four children. So we went to bed and I couldn't sleep. They virtually ate me all the night long. They'd obviously got them [pause] they were in a feather mattress or something, they thought nothing of it. I came home the next day.
45 MM: What about things [pause] you know you were squashing the fleas but, soap and toiletries?
46 CK: Our soap was very basic. Sunlight soap that we buy today, that was the main soap, you'd to wash your face in that. Then there was carbolic soap, that was like a red soap and the soap for washing floors, that was supposed to be, that was called 'Dirtshifter', a grey soap. You could wash the clothes in it if you hadn't got the other one. Then to boost our meagre diet we were all given cod liver oil and a drink called 'Parrish's Food' which was iron, mixed every

morning and we swallowed that dutifully. We didn't like the taste of the iron but they balanced each other. Nobody said they wouldn't have it, they were just given it.

47 MM: Was there a widespread feeling that it was a meagre diet, because apart from maybe a shortage of tea and fruit, the vegetables and the rye bread and everything were quite good for you.

48 CK: Oh yes, if you had your own vegetables you were quite well off. I don't know how people managed. Now there weren't many imported vegetables, it was mostly very basic Irish vegetables that were available. Broccoli hadn't arrived on the scene at all; cauliflower would have been expensive. Peas were the Sunday vegetables because they didn't have a strong smell. My mother would never cook cabbage or onions on a Sunday. She had good meat, Irish meat. We had pork steak, which would have been stuffed, that was expensive even then.

49 Then there was the problem of another area, personal hygiene. Because there was no gas for the geyser, you couldn't have a bath more than once a week, which was normal and in some families, they would only have a tin bath and they all got in the same warm water because there was so little of it. In turn, you know, I suppose the eldest got in last, there was only children up to that. We had a bath all right, we were okay, but I don't know how the water system worked because the gas wouldn't have been available. Now there was always the dreadful problem of the head lice, which were endemic, and they're back again now, it seems. Our method of treating them was a Saturday morning combing, to remove the lice, and a treatment with an item called 'Harrison's Pomade'. It stung the head after the fine combing and that was diligently done. Our hair was kept cut very short for hygiene reasons. Nobody in my family had long hair, it was not allowed. My mother did her very best to keep us free of these creatures. They would be found every day from school.

50 MM: This would have created a lot of extra work for her?

51 CK: Well, no, it was the same for everyone. Everyone had the same, we were laughing about it in the swimming pool this week, and we all had the same experience, people of my age. We all had the mothers working on the lice, we all had the cod liver oil and the Parrish's Food, so we all got the same. It was normal. And the fleas, we all had to do the fleas. We were laughing over this; it was no problem.

52 If you lived in the country, it was a different story because there would have been more plentiful butter and milk and cheese. Well, milk was never scarce, but milk was not pasteurised, it was from the dairy, wherever your neighbourhood dairy was. People didn't appear to suffer from it. There had been a very serious epidemic of tuberculosis, about 1935, but I suppose by the time the war broke out they'd brought it under control by creating new housing. They moved from the congested areas. But this TB didn't appear to be around during the war period, as far as I know.

53 Other than that, well I think shoes would have been rationed. So you got a pair of shoes [pause] I got a pair of shoes at Christmas, when I was eleven, well the war wouldn't have broken out at that time, but I remember Confirmation Day for me was in February, the 1st of February and I was disgusted I did not get another pair of shoes. That was the normal thing, unless you were really rich you didn't get a full new outfit. The shoes were varnished to make them look like new. Well, you got hand me down clothes, everybody worth their salt could do 'make and mend', which meant cutting up adults' clothes for children, because the clothing coupons were very rationed. If there were a special occasion, like a wedding or something in the family, a First Communion or something of that nature [pause] I remember being given quite adult dresses by one my mother's friends and I wore it very happily. It was a grown-up's dress, I was about

fourteen at the time, but I never protested and clothes were passed from one member of a family to another.
54 MM: I presume then if you were the oldest you did better?
55 CK: Yes. When my husband bought his first car, it had been on blocks all through the war period. It was a Wolseley and it was in mint condition. It had never been used because petrol was not allowed for private cars. It wasn't our problem, we didn't have cars, we used bicycles. And I got a bicycle when I was twelve, a big old-fashioned bicycle, second-hand and I was delighted.
56 MM: I presume the roads were safer without the cars?
57 CK: Oh perfectly safe, because also, it would have been after the war [pause] there was still a blackout for a long time and a kind of a curfew that the lights went off at half past nine. And I remember, I must have been [pause] it was after the war, walking home at about ten o'clock, and no street lighting. I don't know why at that time there was no light.
58 MM: I've seen a lot of references, in fact one or two of my interviewees from the North said that one of the things that struck them when they came from Belfast to Dublin was at night, the brightness.
59 CK: Of the lights?
60 MM: Yes.
61 CK: Well now, in the early part of the war, 1941, 1942, my brother reminded me that a man knocked on our house one night and said 'I can see a splink of light'. We had blackout curtains made of very black material, I think possibly dyed, commercially dyed twill or something like that, and the window had to be screened with blackout and if a splink of light showed, you would be warned to correct it. It mustn't show. You couldn't even have a light in the street; apparently, it would have been visible. I don't know at what period lighting would have come back in the city. After 1945, I expect.
62 MM: Well, these references to the light were quite explicit.
63 CK: Maybe it was the summer? I remember walking home in pitch dark, at maybe half past ten. Well, I would have been sixteen so [pause] but there was, buses went off at night and if you didn't catch that bus, you would walk it. Nobody minded walking. It was perfectly safe and of course, there were very few cars on the roads so everybody did it. I used to cycle to school on this big bike, it was an 'upstairs model', we used to call them, with a high saddle.
64 MM: What about going to secondary, was there any difference that you think, you know, listening to other people's experiences of the later period when the war was over. Had there been much impact on your school life?
65 CK: Very little really, but it was very unusual to be in secondary school. We had moved to another house and in that area people went to work at fourteen. They all went to work and I remember getting some kind of a scathing remark about me still being at school. It was only up to age seventeen, anyway, but it was not usual then. But then, in other areas, people stayed on to Leaving Cert. Some went to university but my contemporaries and friends went in to jobs at age eighteen or so. They took jobs in the Civil Service, they used to get into that, and there were bank jobs and then all sorts of retail marketing and that kind of thing. People didn't seem to be left without a job, there was plenty of work.
66 MM: And yet there was a lot of anxiety about getting a job.
67 CK: Of course, I'm talking now about 1947 onwards, when it would have been easier. I think most families had a regular income. Mostly, the fathers would have been around, not like nowadays when there are a lot of single parent families. People survived quite well. The

Children's Allowance was non-existent. I don't know how widows managed. I think, perhaps, there was a very small pension, very, very small. Most widows went out to do work, like cleaning, because they had to keep their children somehow. Another widow I know did dressmaking. She almost blinded herself working away at night. So people just had to fall in and we were grateful that we were not involved in the war. After the initial bombing, there was never any further attack outside.

68 MM: I know it was very strictly censored but would you remember any discussion in the family about the possible course of the war and events outside Ireland?

69 CK: I don't remember any strong political discussion. We just took it day by day. The reports of the VE bombings were very frightening, because of the impact and they could travel such long distances. That was in 1944 or so and we always hoped they wouldn't overfly Ireland but I don't think Irish shipping was in business then, they wouldn't have been on the high seas at that time, yes, it was after the war. But Irish men, a lot went into the merchant navy and some didn't come back, so there were many women keeping the home fires burning, as they said in England. Waiting for the cheque every week, whatever the husband was doing, however it came in to the post office and that was the payment.

70 MM: Did you know anyone personally who went to England for work?

71 CK: Not during the war, no. My friends all had their parents in Dublin and they had various ways of life, and they were full-time mothers, of course.

72 MM: What about breaks away from school? Did you go on family holidays?

73 CK: We didn't take family holidays. My father took us once, before the war, to Balbriggan, took three of us and after that, there were no long holidays. We used to take days out, mystery tours. Now the mystery tours would have been before the war as well, to Northern Ireland, which were lovely. We all went on a train, we didn't know where we'd end up but no, I don't remember any special holidays. We just weren't [pause] my sister went to England, that was during the war, to work in a convent, but that was very unusual in Dublin. People from the west of Ireland went to England, that was normal, but in our family it was unusual.

74 MM: What about people coming to Dublin from the country, looking for work, would you have been aware of that?

75 CK: Yes, yes. As I grew up and took a job, after the war, many people came from the country. They honed in on Dublin and as I worked in the Civil Service I knew many people from the country.

76 MM: Actually, there was quite a significant migration to Dublin from the country in the pre-war period. But to go back a bit, the woman who came in to help your mother, what would her daily duties have involved?

77 CK: She would come in for the day. She had lived with us in two or three houses because my mother kept moving, and in the first house there were three stories and she would clean, I presume, there wasn't carpeting, it would have been linoleum. I presume clean the bedrooms and wash those floors that needed to be washed and she would do the washing.

78 MM: Did she actually live in the house with you?

79 CK: No. Before that, we did have a maid living in, we were all very young, but she didn't stay long. No, this person came, she would have come two days to do this main cleaning, and she took care of us. I don't remember her ironing. My mother must have done the ironing herself because I don't remember this woman ironing but she was a good natured lady, she lived in Eccles Street. She was in a house there, I can still remember it. She can't have been very young but that was her income, to do house cleaning. She did it well, I presume.

80 MM: How would she have done the washing?
81 CK: In the sink, hand washing everything. Oh, all the bed linen went to a laundry and it got what they called a 'full finish' which meant it came back ironed and starched. The bed linen went and table clothes, and I think, maybe towels, anything of that nature. The rest then was just personal clothing. I remember even my mother using a laundry [pause] laundries must have been available all through the war, with the scarcity of soap and the limit on water heating, laundries would have been normal and possibly expensive, I don't know. We had a big linen load. One laundry was the Metropolitan Laundry, that we used all the time. You would have a number and a tape would be attached to your sheets, pillowslips, towels and you got back most of them. Occasionally, something went missing. And it was collected from the house, in a van and brought back, fully finished, beautifully laundered. I don't know whether that service is still available.
82 MM: Of course, through those years some orders of nuns were running the so-called 'Magdalen' laundries.
83 CK: Yes, the Magdalen Laundry, that could have been one of the laundries, yes.
84 MM: And the women were paid virtually nothing so it would have been cheap to run.
85 CK: Yes, I remember being in Hyde Park Laundry, that was some years ago, it could be like ten years ago, and some of those people who had lived there all their lives were there running these ancient machines. They were totally institutionalised, there from their late teens, and they were still laundering big items that wouldn't fit in an ordinary washing machine, like a big cotton quilt, but it was available. And I think most people used it because laundry was normal, even if it was expensive. So that we always had very smooth sheets, that's once you got over the fleas in the blankets (laughs), but you see, the fleas were easily, you were easily aware. You could see spotting because you see all the bed linen was white, there were no coloured sheets in those days and you could see spotting on the sheets.
86 MM: This was because the fleas had bitten you?
87 CK: Oh yes, absolutely. The sheets would have to be laundered, but we accepted it, everyone had them. It wasn't a problem, like everyone had head problems and you just got on with it. I don't know how bad it was, I know head lice are endemic again in Ireland, so it can't have been the diet. It was just that they came in from the turf. Well, the head lice from personal contact in the classroom.
88 MM: What about childhood illnesses, things like measles and mumps, how did your mother cope if they ran through six children?
89 CK: Before the war I got mumps and chicken pox, diphtheria, which was endemic. I remember getting it, I was aged eight, I sucked a lollypop from my friend, she handed me the lollypop to lick and I took a lick. She was in the hospital the next day and I was in two days later. I was in for eight weeks. It was isolation, in the Hardwicke Hospital. I was in it for seven weeks without contact with my family. I thought they had died in a fire in the house and they were all gone. After one month I used to be allowed to go down to the garden where my father could see me. My mother never came, because she might have brought it back to the rest of the family. And two years later, my sister, who was two and a half, got diphtheria and was isolated for fourteen weeks, which was [pause] she was isolated in Ben Eavin Hospital, which was in Finglas. Her hair was cut short, she had lovely long hair, it was cut short and she had no contact with her family, which must have been very damaging. My mother could go and look at her through a window and we never went near that hospital. So diphtheria was treated effectively.

It's very rare nowadays but scabies was the worst experience for all of us, because the whole city must have had it because we had to be treated. It went with this one immersion.

90 MM: What about less serious illnesses? How were they treated?

91 CK: Oh, we had a family doctor and he was on a retainer rather than per visit because with six children it was likely that he would be called. He was a lovely man, Dr. Shepherd was his name. He was very kindly. I can still see him. So we would all have these minor ailments but he was on a retainer, it wasn't a payment per visit and he was quite happy with that. And there were no seriously infectious conditions, except the diphtheria. My brothers [pause] there was another thing that was quite common, impetigo. It was probably from hygiene or something, I don't know why it would have been around. But one brother had gashed his elbow and cut it and he got impetigo. It was a terrible thing to get because you couldn't get rid of it. It didn't go up the arm but it was very difficult to heal this condition and people dreaded it. It would come on the face, around the mouth, and it was very obvious that you had caught impetigo. Eventually, with the elbow, he had to be brought to Hume Street Hospital and it took, like, maybe a year and impetigo was the dread disease. So how you avoided it, I don't know, but he was the only one who got it.

92 MM: Was it because it was obvious that people were sort of shunning you?

93 CK: Well, it was just that it was so infectious, it was seriously infectious. It would come around the mouth here, it was ugly and it wouldn't go away, and as I say, the elbow was a long time being cleared. A hit of the elbow, he must have fallen, but life was very simple.

94 In our family, we didn't attend the cinema very much, because there wasn't much spare money. We weren't given the fourpenny rush every Saturday like some people did. I didn't go to the cinema until I saw 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarves' when I was about eight and I didn't go again, I can't remember when I next saw a film. We were not cinema people because it would have involved six cinema tickets on a Saturday but I knew people who went every single week. They had small families, maybe.

95 MM: What did you do for entertainment?

96 CK: Long walks on a Sunday, all eight of us we walked from Phibsborough to the Phoenix Park or to the Canal at Finglas. Broombridge, were we saw Lord Norbury's house with his skull on the wall. That was a landmark, we'd go as far as that and walk back again. It was quite a long walk on a summer evening. We would take a tram from the city centre to Dollymount. It was not expensive, I don't think, it wouldn't have been even four pence. And as sure as we'd be on the beach the rain would come tumbling down and that would be the end of the day out. That was considered a great day, going to Dollymount with a picnic and have a swim. But I remember flooding on the sand, with the heavy rain as it is now, but that was the extent of our outings. The mystery tours to the North, the trip to the beach in the summer, the long walks – I remember seeing bats flying at Broombridge in the evenings, and there wouldn't be much else.

97 MM: Did the mystery tours finish because of the war?

98 CK: I think so, yes. They went to various places before that but I don't remember going through the war but for our family, life was simple. My brothers didn't play contact sports, I think my mother was afraid of them. They didn't have to play them in their schools, they went to the Christian Brothers. We were very simply dressed because the coupons were so scarce. If you got a dress, it was for a very special occasion and you kept it for as long as you could fit into it.

99 MM: Presumably most people were in that position, having to deal with that problem?

100 CK: Yes. Now, if they were wealthy people, on the south side, I don't know what they did, maybe they went abroad and bought it, I don't know. Flights were not even considered at that time, it wasn't normal to fly out of Ireland, so holidays abroad were very rare in our circle.
101 MM: I suppose the major impact of the war so far as the South was concerned seems to have been the rationing and certainly, employment opportunities for women were enormously restricted compared to the pre-war period.
102 CK: They were restricted so much as the men had gone away in a lot of cases so the women just stayed at home. Now it was rare for women to go out to work, that was rare. I really don't remember any career people who were married.
103 MM: Yet there were a lot of women who, not necessarily having careers but like your mother, who were supplementing the family income, who had jobs. Those opportunities, as manufacturing got restricted because of lack of raw materials, they got restricted as well so people were worse off.
104 CK: I think factories probably functioned up to a point, there wasn't great unemployment. I wasn't aware of it myself, as I didn't have anybody in that area. My father worked in the same public house for years, working very long hours but obviously publicans' business didn't suffer.
105 For fun, we read a lot, we didn't have personal radios, that was not usual. There would have been one radio in the house. We had access to the library from a young age and we went regularly. We'd leave the house and go to the local library.
106 MM: What sorts of books were you reading?
107 CK: Quite a wide variety of books, from the age of about eight. Mysteries, all sorts of things, anything that would interest us we could bring home and read. I mean, I always remember having a book when I should have been studying. I'd be in my room and supposed to be studying in isolation but I'd be reading. So I was lucky. I read less now than I did then because I had access to the library.
108 MM: What about your school, was that all girls?
109 CK: Oh yes, it was never co-ed in those days. My friends and I all attended a Holy Faith Convent in Dublin. We had been at a primary school before that and we formed strong friendships, enjoying being there. I was very sad when I left, I would have liked to have gone further, but I had to leave for money reasons. I finally finished school at seventeen, after doing a commercial course, and I then went into the Civil Service. But some of my friends stayed on and took training courses – radiology, medicine, things like that. Oh yes, the fees were very high.
110 MM: Were you told from an early age that you would only be going to primary school?
111 CK: No, but I won a scholarship. Only for the top level of each class there was a scholarship and then I won another scholarship for the commercial college and that was the end of it. If I had not had scholarships I wouldn't have been at secondary school.
112 MM: Was there ever any thought that you would try for a scholarship to university?
113 CK: No. I was steered into the Civil Service. My mother recommended that I should do that and I was the only member of my family who stayed in Ireland. My sisters went to England and my brothers went to Canada.
114 I was very happy in the Civil Service. I had a good level of Irish and I remember trying for various exams to get in, while I was in the commercial college, and my friend and I went neck and neck – she was one place ahead of me in each exam – and we became firm friends, starting in the same office. The people there would possibly all have leaving certs or a lot of them. I didn't have the leaving cert and they would have been from the country.
115 MM: Which office were you in?

116 CK: This was the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. She was from Dublin, she was the lady who was given the beef dripping, a beautiful lady. She had lovely hair, it never did her a bit of harm. We stayed together as firm friends and we formed a lot of strong friendships at that time. We would have been more or less on the same wavelength, as the saying goes, and we all married, except one, and we had families but we stayed in touch.
117 MM: Was there a marriage bar?
118 CK: Well, we had to leave, that was the way it was. I left after six years.
119 MM: What about at school, would there have been an emphasis in your education on your post-school career being subject to the expectation that you would get married and have children?
120 CK: Yes, that was accepted. So to have to leave your job on marriage was understood. You couldn't protest and very people were employable anywhere else because we didn't have the mainstream skills for the commercial world. If you had to leave - now unless you had worked in a bank or something - if you had to leave the Civil Service you were not considered employable by some commercial firm because the training was different. And at school, you just went as far as you could afford the fees, and my scholarship was only for two years and then the commercial school. My younger sister did the leaving at secondary school but no other member of my family went to secondary school.