

Welcome to another episode of the Restless Politics Leading with me Alistair Campbell and without Rory Stuart who's having day off or holiday or something, I don't know, preparing to attend the coronation with his friend, the king.

But I'm delighted to be joined by, I think you're the second former president that we've had on the podcast, Mary Macalese, two-term president of the Republic of Ireland.

And Mary, I don't know where to start with you because there isn't an awful lot to get through.

I think that, you know, we get quite a lot of criticism for not having enough women on the leading podcast and there is a pretty obvious reason for that which is that through time and still today, there are far more male leaders than female leaders.

You were, I think still, are you still unique as being the, you were definitely the first woman president to succeed a woman president.

Correct.

You followed Mary Robinson, but still leadership is very, very male and you've talked a lot in the past about misogyny within Irish society, within culture more broadly, within the church.

So I want to start with that really, your take on women in leadership.

Why so few?

How do we get more?

I mean, we're talking at a time when someone might come straight back at us and say, well, you know, you've been the president of Ireland, you know, you got to be a provost's chancellor of the university.

We're sitting in yesterday at a women in business conference in Belfast.

I looked down and there was the head of the civil service, a young woman, the chief justice of Northern Ireland, a woman.

I looked and I found Louise Richardson, an old friend of mine, who was the first woman vice chancellor of Oxford.

But actually, we can also say of each of them, they were firsts, you know, and that itself is telling.

There is a generation coming through now, thankfully, with the advent, particularly a free second level education and the massification of third level education, which women have really taken advantage of. Women have seen education as the conduit to much more broadly opportune laden lives than the lives that were previously available to them, which were corralled into narrow, very often domestic spaces or low grade jobs, service type spaces, where they were never expected to shine or certainly never expected to outshine my men and certainly never expected to be out promoted in favor of men.

So there's been a huge cultural shift in terms of women preparing themselves to have the skills, the qualifications, and I think not just the heft and the momentum, but the personal courage because it does take personal courage in many ways to invent yourself as a woman who is going to areas of life, whether it doesn't matter what profession it is, because there are very few of them that were not dominated by men in some way or another.

And part of the difficulty was, and I found it certainly go, you know, becoming a barrister and then a law lecturer and then, you know, a president.

People have this notion that you're, you know, if you speak at all about the subject of women, women are strident, you know, you know, men are articulate, but women are strident.

And a thing that is often missed in the telling is we come from cultures in which are deeply, I mean, really deeply embedded attitudes about what is appropriate for men and what is appropriate for women.

And even that, you talk about the culture and of course Ireland has got this very, very strong division of Catholicism and the power of the church.

And you've said some extraordinary things about the church in the past.

You call the Catholic Church an empire of misogyny.

It still is.

A global carrier of the toxic virus of misogyny.

It's never even tried to seek a cure, though it exists, its name is equality.

Correct.

And you think that's still the case?

Oh, utterly still the case.

I mean, the Catholic Church is probably a classic example.

It is not the only faith system regrettably in the world that has a culture of embedded misogyny.

There is a tendency, I think, in the secular media, I would be as guilty of it as anyone else, to rather dismiss religion as passe, it's yesterday's world, who bothers with religion.

And to some extent, I think that is true.

Young people are walking away from religious practice, precisely for those reasons, because they find it a hostile world, young women in particular.

But the truth of the matter is, I mean, five out of ten, five out of ten, five out of ten, five out of seven people on our planet identify with some one of the world's major religions.

You mentioned the Catholic Church, to which I belong.

It one in six people in the world are notionally Catholic.

And what's your relationship with the Catholic Church now?

I don't remember the Catholic Church.

But why, if you see it as this...

Oh, because I'm darned if I leave it and be allowed then to be ignored.

Oh, no, no, no.

I mean, one must stay.

You stay, because also I believe in fairness that it has...

But is it not about believing in God?

Well, fundamentally, that is for me what it is.

But it's all...

Let's park that just for the moment, because...

Park God.

Let's park God.

Let's park God for the moment.

And let's talk about this extraordinary structure built up over centuries, which is today the biggest NGO in the world.

There is nothing to equal the Catholic Church in the world in terms of its NGO status.

It has 200,000 schools, it educates some 70, 80 million children.

It is a huge key influencer of attitudes and laws, and that's the important thing, laws and structures.

It's a good and bad.

Good for good and bad across five continents, and there is good in it, but there is also bad in it.

And part of the bad is if you like the breaking mechanism that it is for women right across those five continents, because the attitudes that it takes with it across those five continents into its schools, into its welfare system, into its orphanages, its leprosyria, all of which are wonderful institutions, they also have a dark side.

Well, we know the dark side in terms of clerical child sex abuse.

We know the dark side in terms of the appalling use of corporal punishment in institutional care.

We know all that.

But what we don't really know is the more ephemeral, the stuff that we can't, if you like, set a commission to measure.

And that is the embedded attitudes that go from generation to generation that outcrop in law.

Just where we are sitting right now, if I look across the street from where we are, that's where I was educated as a lawyer in the law school here at Queen's University.

And among our very, in our first year, we learned Roman law, which was fine.

That was interesting.

And then we went straight from Roman law to the common law.

And what was missed, and it may very well have been missed for political reasons, was canon law, because, of course, it's the connection from Roman law to canon law to the common law.

The English common law that I grew up with was largely historically based on canon law.

Why was Henry VIII in trouble with the Pope?

Did nobody ever ask themselves that question?

Because, of course, he was subject to the canon law of the Catholic Church in relation to marriage, but not just marriage.

It was in relation to many things.

When I was a young lawyer, criminal responsibility started at the age of seven.

That was embedded in our common law, and eventually in our statute law.

Where did that come from?

That would be canon law.

So I decided, whenever I ended my time as president, that I'd become a canon lawyer, because I had the temerity to believe that there was so much wrong with the church in terms of...

Do we have to call you anything special now that you're a canon lawyer?

Not really, no.

No, you can't call me Mrs. Canon Lawyer, it doesn't sound right.

But I did make it my business precisely because, I'm a scholar, I'm an academic, that's what I've always been all my life, I'm an academic, but in civil law.

So I decided, when I lived in Northern Ireland, I lived in a hugely dysfunctional society in

which religion was a deeply, deeply embedded perspective.

And it was a Christian religion in which Christians hated each other, basically, fundamentally.

One of the young producers who is clearly not a person of faith and doesn't understand it, just scribble me a note and say, can you ask us to explain what canon law is?

But you see, there you go.

Exactly.

That's a really good question.

Well, canon law is the legal architecture of the Catholic Church, built up over 2,000 years.

And it was because the Catholic Church was a universal church, hugely influential throughout the world, and indeed is the only faith system in the world to have permanent representative status at the United Nations.

Now for you.

Sharia doesn't have that, does it?

No, absolutely does not.

So the Catholic Church developed a system of laws, essentially it started out as ways of solving problems.

I mean, the Church founded by Christ wasn't five minutes old when the apostles and disciples were fighting as if they all lived in Northern Ireland, all their lives.

And it took somebody to solve the problems.

And as every problem was solved with an answer, each of those answers essentially became a law.

And then they started to aggregate, you know, and suddenly there were bunches of them.

And then they put them together, you know, in canons.

And then eventually, after 2,000 years in 1917, they codified them.

And that was hilarious because when they codified them, they realized, what a lot of bologna money was in there, swathes and swathes of laws about, you know, what color of a band was worn by certain types of Monsignors, green for this cryden, pink for this cryden, purple for the other cryden.

Where did Christ say that now, where exactly was that?

So all of that.

Now, do you know, are you sorry now you asked about canon law?

So things like priests were to avoid women because we were objects of suspicion.

Now here's the bad news.

I mean, I'm 72 years old and this is real killer.

Once you get to 40, you're no longer an object of suspicion.

No, you can't say that.

You can't say that.

No, that's true.

Up to 40.

You're an object of, excuse me.

Are you a Catholic?

Are you a Catholic?

Is this the canon law?

Are you arguing canon law with me now?

Oh, is that the law?

Is that the law?

Up to 40.

Yeah, that was the thinking that up to 40, you know, you were an object of suspicion after 40.

Really, you were pretty much dead.

Yeah, what was the life expectancy?

You were losing your teeth and your look.

What was life expectancy back then?

Well, no.

No, in fairness.

It was a couple of years of non-suspicion.

Yeah, so I've had a long, long years of being, you know, non-suspect, but then it's very suspect for other reasons.

You've said some strong stuff in your time.

When they set up the Synod of Bishops on the family, you said 300 elderly celibate men who've never changed a nappy in their lives and not the people that decide what's a family.

Or about family life.

Or about how we as parents should instruct our children in Christian family life.

These elderly men that you would run into in your time as president, what did they make of you?

Oh, yes.

Well, I had a dreadful row with Cardinal Connell.

We were made friends, funnily enough, but we had terrible rows because shortly after I became president, I took communion in a Protestant church and you see, God is sitting up there in heaven, you know, and he's watching very carefully who goes into Protestant churches, who goes into Catholic churches, and if a Catholic president went into a Protestant church, having promised to be a president for everybody, and to respect everybody, and to respect all faiths and none, and having been invited by my Protestant neighbors to this service and offered their communion hospitality, he absolutely, apparently God did not like the fact that I took communion.

Do you think we should insert that there is an ironic tone to your voice just in case some people are taking that at a face value?

Really?

Okay.

Right.

Because Cardinal Connell, he took out, he went mad and said terrible things, and he also then said, of course, that the Church of Ireland communion, the Protestant or Anglican communion as it might otherwise be known, was a sham, a sham, really.

These are people who are worshiping the same God he believes in, who go to church in the same way that he does, and somehow, because they give me communion, offer me their Eucharistic hospitality that I'm engaging in a sham.

So anyway, there was a fierce row over that altogether.

Okay.

Listen, see, you've got this incredibly powerful church, right, in the sense of a powerful church, and yet, Ireland, on all of these issues you've talked about, has moved immeasurably.

Yes, and who has moved?

The people of God have moved, because these are people who are very often still going to mass or still connected to God and to spirituality in some shape or form.

A lot of them, I admit, very turned off by the Church because of misogyny, homophobia, and of course, the big scandal, and of course, the first scandal was the scandal in relation to what we call the Humane Vite, which outlawed the use of artificial contraception against the advice of Catholic theologians and Catholic doctors.

And that was at the time when we had the beginnings of the massification of second level education, the confidence that comes from education, and importantly, the critiquing skills that come from education.

Before that, you had a population who sat in the pews and were told what to think.

Now that was not just reversed, but really, there was a tsunami of education, discussion.

In Ireland, we are a people who talk, talk, talk, and interestingly, we talk intergenerationally.

You have to, you know, because you're in the house with your granny and your mummy.

And out of that came a complete change of view.

Thank God people can change their views.

And if ever there was an example of that, the profundity of that as a reality of the human condition, the capacity to change, Ireland is it.

Great.

Okay.

Let's just take a break.

You mentioned homosexuality.

So, and you have a son who's gay.

Yes.

Three children.

Three.

Three girls, yeah.

So, if you go back a couple of generations, how difficult would that have been for Ireland?

And what's the situation now for gay people in Ireland?

Well, it's interesting.

I know you've got a gay T-shirt, which is again a sign of an advance.

Yeah, absolutely wonderful.

I got involved in campaigning for gay rights as a human rights lawyer in 1975, 10 years before my son was born.

Some people think that I coached him to be gay from the day he was born.

You will be gay, you know, but I didn't actually, but I didn't know when he was about seven that he was gay.

I started, I started campaigning for gay rights back in 1975.

Why?

Because I'd been, I knew nothing about, I was in this university, I never heard the word gay.

I didn't know there were any gay people when I was at university.
I thought everybody around me was heterosexual, but I didn't even answer.
I didn't even kind of question that because just nobody talked about it.
And then in 72, I went to America to work on a J1 visa in San Francisco.
And my boss in the place that I was working in was the most gorgeous gay man and he was handsome as well as many gay men are.
And one of my colleagues took me aside and said, you know, don't be falling for him because he's gay.
And I went, and oh, he's really nice.
He's lovely.
She said, no, no, no, no, what I mean is, because the word meant nothing to me.
You thought he was happy?
I thought he was just a happy person.
So my, my crush and hell on him was crushed and, and I then, but he and I became great mates.
And cause I was fascinated.
I'd never heard of this stuff before and I was fascinated.
And then I learned from him because there was a, in fairness, there was a kind of an aura of sorrow and darkness that hung over him for all that he was a gay person in every way.
Was this around the kind of Harvey Milk time?
Correct.
And so he told me about how he'd been excluded by his family.
Like me, he was Catholic and he told me about, you know, how oppressed he felt both in family terms and his family had effectively thrown him out because they believed the church is teaching and they believed a lot of the ambient views about homosexuals that they were evil.
So I remember coming back thinking, like, this is a human rights issue.
This is ludicrous.
So at the first opportunity when I came to work in Trinity College, one of the first friends I made was a very well known gay Senator, David Norris.
Oh yeah.
David Norris.
The guy who ran for president.
Yeah, exactly.
Did he run against you?
No.
Later.
Later.
Later.
Later.
Later.
Later.
Later.
Later.

Later.

Later.

Later.

So I ran for president.

Haha.

Later.

Later.

Hey.

Later.

Later.

Later.

Later.

Later.

Later.

Later.

Later.

Later.

Later.

Later.

Later, but I realized, much later, I came under to the European Court of Justice, Mary Robinson.

God bless her.

She took that case pro bono and we won in the European Court of Human Rights.

And anyway, won that case and then thankfully a woman minister for justice, Maura Gavan Quinn.

In answer to a question from a journalist that the campaign, you know

Probably would end up with looking for the right to gay marriage and this was regarded as a subject of great mirth

And but I said well, of course

I mean that's a natural corollary of where we're going if we're talking about equality of citizenship and

How ridiculous it seemed at the time as both the best way of gauging that is that my mother did not bring me up to give

About what I'd said even right up to the campaign my mother would have been saying that she'd have to follow the church

Luckily, she didn't have a vote anyway. No, and she might also ever gay brother

And in fact in fairness to my father and mother when he announced that he was gay around the table some 40 years ago

My father said are you gay son?

My father my brother said yeah, I am he said which that's grandson

Aren't you still our son and what was it when we're having for dessert and that was it was over

There was never a word about that so your brother and your son what experience have they had of homophobia look

they've experienced it every which way every which way they've experienced it and

Because it's still in the ether

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Unfortunately on the other hand they live through times now where they know from the referendum in the Republic

That at least

66% of the people they meet on the streets are on their side and that's a wonderful thing

That's a wonderful thing to walk down your street hand-in-hand with your partner knowing you're not going to be spat at or hit

But we still like every place has the the acts of homophobic violence the picking off of the low-hanging fruit the young gay guy

Who's coming out of a bar on his own at night, you know, who's going to get kicked by some

Yeah, so that still goes on unfortunately and

Because again, it's got to do with embedded practices, you know a lot of this stuff particularly sexism and homophobia

Has become what I would call privatized now in the past people could articulate it openly because they thought that it was

You know that it was perfectly okay to say it now

We don't accept that language, but it still goes on in you know in what I'm I call little hermetically sealed bubbles

Where people feel safe just in the same way that sectarianism did and you know was hot-housed here in Northern Ireland in

Elitist groups, they wouldn't say the same thing outside those groups that they would say inside them

But the fact that it was said inside gave those toxic ideas

Legs, okay, and I want to go right back to your childhood

I know that the Irish Constitution allows for anybody born in the island of Ireland to become president

But it still strikes me as quite extraordinary that you were born in Northern Ireland grew up here

Mainly educated here and yet went on to become president of Ireland

So I'd be quite interested in that and also just the other point on your childhood is your sense of the troubles and

Any of the experiences that kind of really experience of what was happening here?

Well, I grew up in Ardain one of the most deprived parishes areas in Northern Ireland

It is the area with the greatest incidence of sectarian killings bar none

So you're a Catholic living in a product

Well Ardain is very often described as a Catholic, you know

Republican nationalist enclave. I grew up on the other side of the street

Yeah

If you've ever driven up that road the Cromman Road

You will see that there's a huge wall massive big wall and that wall didn't exist in my day

But it might as well have because there was the wall of in people's hearts and minds

But I grew up in the Protestant side, which meant that I'd only ever Protestant friends apart from my school friends

So that was good actually because I also had a great understanding of

Where my Protestant friends were coming from and what they thought of politics how they loved the

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Queen you could mean in our house

She went through the front door and there was the picture of John the 23rd and John F. Kennedy
I walked across the street and in through the door and there was the picture of Her Majesty the Queen

So I knew that and I also knew that some of my neighbors had very strong connections to the British army

We never did in our family. My grandfather had been in the IRA

Had been in ADC to De Valera

but I think probably what marked me off from many of my

Colleagues and friends at the time was my father was from the West of Ireland and

He was from Ruscommon in the West of Ireland where I now live

so I had another hinterland to draw from and

We would go there as soon as school closed you got you got out of Northern Ireland

It was a pretty awful place to grow up in let's face it as a Catholic

It was a miserable place the police force didn't represent us the government didn't represent us the judiciary didn't represent us

They all pretty much were down on us the system was down on us

We were aware of that so you know at every hands turn my father got us out of here

And what my father came here for work because work was very scarce

He came here at 14 years of age with his first pair of shoes first pair of shoes

He said you know he was 20 before they fitted him because because his father went into town and bought them without my father being with him

And and my grandfather at that state of my grandparents were living in a small little cottage in the West of Ireland and

The electricity came down their road my grandfather wouldn't have it because it was the devil's own cursed instrument and

Secondly it wouldn't catch on

So there you go

My poor grandmother had to suffer the indignity of all the neighbors getting their kettles and their cookers

And she poor creator was still using the open fire for cooking and for all of that

It stayed with electricity for the rest of his life until the very end when he got a single light bulb

There wasn't a lamp shade on it and when we went down for the official turning on of the light

He already had six papers attached to it. He couldn't see your finger in front of you

Was this your first sort of opening the event exactly?

So hold on when did he die then he well my grandfather died in the 1970s so right to the 70s

Oh, yeah, absolutely. Yeah, so but about two years before he died

So my father had insisted on the electric going in and we went down to see this great event

Happening this great concession. I mean George Mitchell has no has nothing on my father trying to persuade my grandfather to get the electric

So I

Toggled between the madness of Belfast and the you know the awful sectarianism and the West of Ireland

and in terms of the

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Republic can be commuting the Republic
You never felt there was a resistance to you because of your
Where you came from? Oh, yes
My grandfather thought my father was mad to have married a northern woman. Even though she
was a Catholic
I mean she was really a quasi Protestant in his eyes because we lived among Protestants on a
campaigning obviously interested in campaigning when you were campaigning to be president
How conscious were people that you were this rather exotic creature from the north?
Well, that was part of it if you like of the attraction that I knew the north but bear in mind. This was
1997. Yeah, and George Mitchell was now
You know had gone very gray
Trying to bring the northern parties to the realization you understand the of the north helped you in
the south
It did and also I had worked as a journalist
I'd worked as a journalist for the national broadcaster RTE in Dublin. I'd also been an academic
lawyer
I had you know, I was educated and grew up here. I worked here for a short time as a barrister
I knew this place
Intimately and then had come back to live in northern Ireland in 87
My husband had trained as a dentist in Dublin
But then had come to work along the border in a famous place called Cross McGlen
He was a dentist at there and in Besbrook and I had then come back with our children
We've come back to live and strategically placed ourselves beside my mother for babysitting
purposes in the magnificent village of Rustrever in County Down
So I knew that I you know, I know the north
And so far as anybody knows the north, you know, we all have our own narratives of our own
experiences
But I've been a little bit involved in politics when I was here before when I when I was working here
I also was very much involved in church life and very much involved with father Alec Reed and the
redemptorist peace ministry
Which involved the talks between John Hume and Jerry Adams. Yeah, so
And I had already you know, and also even the choice of becoming a lawyer
Was part and parcel of trying to get under the skin of this place and to understand what is it about
the law and structure?
That that is holding us back and that which have changed could help us to move forward
Okay, so why I'm back to the troubles and growing up
Yes, there's an experience. You've talked about before your your dad run a pub. Yes
And we're on the falls road on the falls road and you were confronted very very directly. Yes
The consequence of terror just tell us that well, we have we lived in our doing
but we now we lived in a Protestant part of our doing we live right beside a loyalist estate and
There had been a campaign of intimidation against Catholics in that area very significant
campaign a lot of people put out of their houses and then the murders the sectarian murders started
and then the tit for tat with the
provisional IRA coming into the frame and

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our house was attacked and
To well sat tack several times actually crowds came and broke up paving stones and pitched them
through our windows
That they attempted to kill my brother who's profoundly deaf and almost succeeded in killing him,
but thankfully not
Then these were all loyalist attacks now and these were all by neighbors of ours incidentally known
to us
known to us and
And people whom you know
We had been some of them in some cases we had been friendly with
Some of our I'm the oldest of nine children
So some of my brothers and sisters would have been friends with some of these people's children or
brothers or sisters
So then when that didn't work and they they killed our neighbor murdered our neighbor who ran the
little sweet shop up the road and
We realized then I said I realized then I was about I was 18 then 19 and I realized this we're next
you know, they're coming down the road for us and
Anyway, they did they came with machine guns and they emptied them through our windows
But luckily because there were Protestants, they didn't know what we were at mass. So and my
mother had us out at first mass
Thank you God. And so yes, they didn't kill anybody, but they tried like my sister Nora's bed was like
a colander
I've never been able to forget that I still get horrible dreams about seeing this mattress with all
these mad holes in it
anyway
So we survived thanks be to God
But then my father had a pub on the just off the falls road place called Leeson Street very well-
known pub called the Long Bar and
they put a car bomb outside of it and
My father went out on he got all his because it was called a long bar because it ran across two
streets
The car was left in the Leeson Street entrance and my father got everybody out the other entrance
Cyprus Street
He got them all out and then but he went back to check and when he went back to check
He saw a young woman run across the road a young girl, all of McConnell
Who thought her child was on the street and because the hue and cry had gone up and that there
was a car bomb
And she ran across the street and unfortunately my father thought she had tripped and fallen
But in fact what had happened was the car bomb had exploded. My father mercifully was unharmed
physically, but I'm told that it was the
The keys of the car had broken her neck and so she looked on marked you see and there was no
blood
my father grabbed her and
Then when the first person on the scene as it turned out was an RTE and the

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National broadcaster and a cameraman a great old friend of mine as it turned out later
He he was first on the scene and he realized that my father did not know she was dead and
So my father was a very gregarious man with storyteller
Well, you know full of fun, but that was the day his life changed really he when he came home. He
was
we now know that he was suffering from a catatonic depression which he suffered from for the next
few years he didn't speak for a
couple of years was unable to talk and
Funnily enough I came home from university one day and my mother said my father just sat all the
time listening to a transistor radio
and
There was no word no words out of them at all and it was been very hard on my mother raising nine
children
No money coming in your dad had not been had depression before that never my father depressed.
He had never never ever
Did he struggle with depression for the rest of his life? Oh, absolutely no utterly utterly and and
there was no name for it
Then we didn't know about you know trauma or post traumatic anything
But as well as that we what we didn't have a home of our own then you see we'd lost our home
And we were living in a house that had been condemned
It was owned by nuns who lent it to us and we were now over in West Belfast in Anderson's town
And the house was a bit of a disaster to put up mildly
Like when we the day we walked into it
There were 19 of the windows and it had been broken and somebody had tried to set fire to it
There were reasons for that as we discovered subsequently the IRA had been using it as a place to
hide weapons
We didn't know that then obviously, but they didn't want us there either. Thank you very much
So so the the loyalist didn't want us the IRA crowd didn't want us and we were in the middle of this
and my mother is now coping with nine children and
And this man who went out that morning, you know, reasonably happy go lucky comes back not
speaking. Anyway fast forward
You're literally not speaking. I'm literally not speaking not talking
No, no saying nothing just sighing into the fire going to bed getting up in the morning sighing like a
whole day of sighing and
Just awful
Anyway, I came home from university one day came in through the back door my mother said to me
I'm not gonna believe this. She said your daddy your daddy started to talk today. I said, huh?
What did he say? What did he say? And he said shut up to hell. Yeah, I'll bet you what he said that to
you
He said he said that to you. He said no, she didn't say didn't say it to me
He said it's some woman on the radio called Margaret Thatcher
So we call it the miracle of Maggie Thatcher he brought him back to life
We don't even know what she said because she wasn't Prime Minister Alistair at the time
She was Minister for Education when she was snatched in the milk. I get it must have been that

could it have been that
Why would the Irish media be covering?
Okay, you know just to get you know because he was like a lot of people in Northern Ireland
He maximized the number of hours in the day when it could be insulted and so
So, you know, he'd be listen, maybe it's radio four or you know, BBC radio one radio all started
I even know it existed then so we never were able to find out what the broadcast
How for the rest of his life, how how chronic was the depression?
He came back to himself and he tried his best. He did
Did he ever get treatment?
Not at all. Not at all. You didn't do that then because you know, you're with no he didn't
What would you say to your friends and people who came around and saw your dad like that? What
would you say was going on?
You know, I don't we didn't even talk about it. Here's the thing. We didn't talk about it. Honestly
Alistair is disgraceful
We didn't talk about it. We hadn't the language
I was coming home one day from work here in Queens and I lived in Restrever
And I love to turn the car at the seafront and Warren Point and just say to the sea take it all
I'll catch up with all my problems in the morning and the way back
But to the sea and the waves take it now go on home to face whatever we were facing
But as it happened that week
I got a I was ill and I was in bed and my dad came around as he did every day and he sat at the edge
of the bed
Out of the blue. I said to him dad, could I take you back to that day of the explosion and
The day when our lives just seemed to change so catastrophically
Could you tell me what what went on in your head? And you know what he said to me?
You're the first person ever asked me that this was donkey shears later and I mean donkey shears
later
and
And so he did he talked about it and I said, did you ever think of yourself as a person who suffered
from?
You know an illness that needed help, you know, maybe from a psychiatrist or psychologist
No, he said I didn't he said there were too many other people around me who'd suffered death and
destruction and people had suffered physical injury
So who was I to say there's anything wrong with me? And I've often said Northern Ireland is a place
of
swathes of people like my father who are suffering from
real real depression
But don't say it because they believe that there is a hierarchy of victims
There's a hierarchy of illnesses and that we have a culture of
Stoicism that doesn't allow them to break even today. Oh even today even today
Worst would you say than the rest of Ireland or the rest of the UK?
Absolutely utterly what look at the suicide rates here Alistair
We've had more people died by suicide here since the Good Friday agreement and died from the
troubles

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And the suicide rates here, I don't know if you've seen the stats, but the suicide rate here is through the roof
What does that tell us because the red line that shows you the graph of actual suicides
Underneath that there's another graph of attempted suicides of mental ill health of untreated mental health problems
There's a whole swathe of that going on here
I know the people who take refuge in what we call cans the canned culture drink it away or
Drug it away or just be lonely in it
And that's it that I think that's one of the great tragedies of Northern Ireland that really has not been properly dealt with
There are wonderful organizations great organization for example like wave trauma that has tried to address that
But but you know, they're pushing them they're pushing them mountain
They're just pushing them mountain in front of them. And of course, it's a lot harder if you don't have a functioning government
It's impossible if you haven't got a functioning government because again
Like so and this is the kind of stuff that doesn't even get talked about in the political context
and I think my father's a classic example of
Some kind of pride would let him talk about it not because he thought he'd be letting himself down or weakening himself
But rather that he thought what people might think that he was looking for sympathy
And there were so many other people deserving of sympathy and we'd lost so many friends
I mean the day I was married two of our best friends were murdered the morning of my wedding
Which kind of ruined the wedding to put it mildly
You know awful and here they are and their family had terrible problems
Subsequently those two men one of them had you know, he'd seven children
Seven small children when he died for nothing except that he was you know a Catholic bar owner
and then in retaliation for them
The IRA that was loyalist murdered them and the next day
The IRA go into a pub and kill a perfectly innocent Protestant man
And his daughter becomes a great friend of mine later where we both find ourselves in Florida
In Miami and by we got talking politics because it was 12th of July and everybody was acting the idiot
You know and you know banging drums and singing singing the songs that are associated with the 12th in good great good humor and together
And then I discovered that her daddy had been killed in retaliation for the two O'Reilly brothers
Who were murdered on the morning of my wedding?
so
you know that brings you back to earth with a bump because that's the world we lived in tit for tat tit for tat and
Nobody able to break out of the sectarian bunker. They only the only wounds that we felt were our wounds
We didn't feel their wounds and and I think my father
probably felt too

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That like so many people here there are much people are much worse off than me
Now the thing you say about the hierarchy of pain and that that's a very very powerful point
Now I love the fact Mary that we've done almost an hour and
We haven't talked once about your time as president really we haven't talked about so much in your
life that you've done
but I want to close with it with it with a couple of questions one that does relate to your time as
president and one that relates to
the here and now and
You mentioned when you were growing up in in the house's opposite
You'd have a picture of the Queen and yours you'd have a picture of JFK and you did become the
president who?
Welcomed the Queen yes to the Republic, which was a pretty amazing moment
And the and the issue
I want to get you and I really want you to get you going on this about the here and now is your views
on
Brexit which I have heard and
Which I love for our listeners to hear as well so you can take those two questions or whichever order
you wish well
My president seat was about building bridges. I'd come from the north
We were in the throes of getting the Good Friday Agreement sorted and getting a new dispensation
for the north
I felt my job now here is to take the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement and indeed the strand
Three parts of the Good Friday Agreement
between the Irish between the Irish and the British and and also the cross-border
Because the the agreement was about people inside Northern Ireland across border and then east-
west relationship and across those three strands
I wanted to do what I could to drive forward the spirit
So building bridges was my theme and we worked very hard very assiduously at that and long before
I became president
I have met her Majesty the Queen and had
Learned from her that when I was actually a province chancellor here
I met her in the context of our big anniversary of our University and
I had discussed with her that her great ambition to come to the Republic of Ireland and I'd said to
her
And not quite a throwaway line
I mean I meant it that if it's anything ever we could do to make that happen
I'd make sure I'd work assiduously to make it happen. So when I went into office
I did along with a lot of other people besides so bringing her to the Republic
For those four days bearing in mind that you know that some people were so security worried that
they just want her to come in
for half a day get a cup of tea and get her gone and
You know and I said actually you can't call that a state visit
That's a flying visit. It's not the same thing and if we do that we still have to have a state visit
No, we're gonna do this right because I think she's going to come as a pilgrim

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She's not going to come as a tourist
She's gonna come as a pilgrim and I knew that I talked to talk to her so many times about it
and she and I had pretty much the same the same kind of religious sensibilities and
We both believe very firmly in the power of life. You're trying to tell me the Queen was a Catholic
No, not at all, but she was a very good Christian woman. She was a woman of great deep Christian
sensibilities
so she and I shared those and
So and I knew that I knew for her that this was a pilgrimage and I trusted her implicitly and
thankfully she trusted me
So we've kind of been set up a back channel for and the things that went into that visit that we were
told could never go into it
Like her speaking Irish or going to Crow Park or going to the Garden of Remembrance
She did them all with a heart and a half. She was wonderful superb
Was that a high point of your presidency?
It was a great memory. Absolutely a high point. It was a high point in terms of the building bridges
Undoubtedly if you're asking me for the best day of my life as president
It probably wasn't that it was back in 2003 when we hosted the World
Special Games Olympics and in Crow Park
We had the opening of the games and we had young people with intellectual disabilities from all over
the world and honestly
I was up at that stage and for one moment
I felt that I'd been beamed on to another planet because the mood was it was sort of exuberance
multiplied by a million
It was so beautiful and wonderful and that was special
But actually there was something of that too in the Queen's visit
It released a graciousness a goodness a happiness and at the end of her visit when she left
Bearing in mind she got more letters about that visit than she got about any state visit
So did I I got loads of them
But one of them came from this 90-year-old woman who started off saying that she was a Republican
and she didn't like monarchs
And she didn't like the monarch next door and she didn't think I should have asked her
Oh, God, I read the letter and I thought here we go
But then she said I decided to watch it on television and I watched it for four days
She said she wept for four days. She felt this history
Drained out of her to be replaced by something really healthy and good
And she said when the Queen's flight took off from Cork Airport
She looked back on those four days and she said this was choreographed by the angels
And I thought you should have seen the people who choreographed this deer. There weren't angels,
but you know, God works in mysterious ways
But but wasn't that wonderful and I would settle for that
So that was a wonderful relationship was a great high point
Because you know during Maggie Thatcher's time
We hadn't had a great relationship and over the years the relationship been up and down
John Major, bless him and Albert Reynolds had recalibrated the relationship brilliantly

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Tony Blair and Bertie Hearn had worked on that assiduously
And now we were we were actually in a golden moment really
Where we really felt that history was moving us in a direction where we were partners and friends
Different but friends and then came Brexit
And I could not believe Brexit
There hadn't been a hint
That the United Kingdom would even be remotely considering leaving the European Union
Which for me is the greatest adventure
And the greatest the most noble adventure ever undertaken by humankind in the history of
humankind
You know that extraordinary phenomenon
France and Germany
The the the allies and the Axis forces coming together
after
The great blood fest that was the second world war into this remarkable partnership for prosperity
Through collaboration through cooperation through collegiality remarkable phenomenal
I really bought into that. I loved all that and then suddenly we've Brexit
No green paper no white paper no preparation just a bunch of shibboleths and suddenly
You know and these ridiculous mad promises and nobody mentions northern Ireland and nobody
mentions the good Friday agreement
With the noble exception of course, you know, of tony blair and john major and and bird here her
But also of course treason may to whom I give huge credit
And well the fact that she came here during the campaign
She came here during the campaign
She saw the dangers and then when she was prime minister in order to avert those dangers
That deal that she came up with had a bus not been run over it by the d up among others
That that would have absolved us from these blessed years of arguing over a protocol
And what is more we would have reverted to a situation that was so good here on the island of
Ireland
After we got the single european
Market in 1993
And and the customs union there was no need for a border
Then the only border we had was a militarized border
Then the good friday agreement and it gave us demilitarization
So we had this huge normalization on the island of Ireland, which was so healthy built up good
neighbourliness
We had the the cross border bodies onto the good friday agreement
We had the spirit of the agreement and there was a wonderful
Just a wonderful sense that we were now going to grow organically
So how do we go from that queen visit to brexit where we are and how did that happen in your view
careless politics?
the politics of populism and
Bad really bad politics from people. I mean, I have no I I'd say this publicly. I've said it before
anyway

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Um, I have no respect for politicians who are populist and unprincipled
And who are you know greasy pole climbers in the same way that I have no time for clerics who are greasy pole climbers
She'd absolve Theresa may have that
That woman I had you'd absolve David Cameron. I like David Cameron. Don't get me wrong. I do like him
I like him very much, but I think I think the calling of that referendum was just a big mistake
And johnson if he was going if he was going to call it have a two-year three-year period of green papers white papers discussions
I described it as like pulling a tooth with 10,000 roots
I also described it as a form of political
Necrotizing fascitis, which is what well necrotizing fascitis is a flesh eating disease
And if you remember the amount of political time in europe in england and ireland that was eaten up by the brexit the post
referendum discussions you couldn't discuss anything else
And that so for me that's what it was. It was like a disease that a runaway disease
So how did you feel and borris you asked me about don't call him borris mary
We don't call him borris on this podcast. We call him johnson. Mr. Johnson
I disbarred I disbarred I just disbarred of him
and um, I disbarred of lis truss their language of um, I I heard in their language the old language of disrespect for all things irish
That kind of elitist, you know upper class nastiness
We had lost all that it was gone. It had evaporated. We weren't the colonized any longer
You know, we were the next door neighbors free and independent
But what we heard in borris and what you heard in lis is oh my god
It's back to the empire. It's back to the colonies. They're treating us like, you know, we're with the servants around here
It's appalling. It was it was just the worst period. But anyway, thankfully
I have to say in fairness to rishi sunak the effort that he has put in since becoming prime minister
To redressing that and indeed dealing with the protocol and coming up through the with the help of the european union
You know who've given acres of space to this. I mean, I really didn't
I wonder didn't merit all of this space and quite frankly, but it was given willingly in order to help northern ireland
Blossom and the good friday agreement come again into its own because that's what the people want
I mean, you look at the I look at the referendum still for me
Funnily enough, it isn't the good friday, which was a great day
But the best day was the 22nd of june when the twin referenda were held north and south and we knew
With absolute moral certainty that almost everybody you met on the street
Thought the same thing about the peace and was prepared to compromise
They might have a different political ambition

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But they didn't want anybody dying over it and they were not going to kill people over it
And they wanted to embrace each other in a compromise. That was the best ever

Mary

I could have taught you all day. You could definitely talk all day guys. That is for sure

That's what my mother says

But honestly, that was it was absolute absolute joy to have enjoyed talking to you. It's been great
And thank you for what you do for mental health also because you know, it's it's the hidden one, isn't it?

Yeah, Mary. Thanks a lot. We'll see you soon. Thank you so much. Really enjoyed it. Thank you
You