

## INTERVIEW OF Ernie

INTERVIEWER: MAGGIE BEASLEY and JESS HUFFMAN

JULY 2024

**0:00:02.3 Jess Huffman** [REDACTED] The date is 24th July 2024, and I'm here with Maggie Beasley, who's doing the interviewing, and we're interviewing today [REDACTED] otherwise known as Ernie. My name is Jess Huffman and I'm here supporting Maggie with the interview. Maggie, over to you.

**0:00:33.5 Maggie Beasley:** Hello, I'm Maggie, and thank you so much, Ernie, for coming and talking to us. It's really good of you. Can I start with asking you what made you decide to leave the Republic of Ireland and come to England?

**0:00:51.9 Ernie:** Well, the reason really was that there was nothing whatsoever in Ireland at the time. As I told you in the past, they didn't ask you if you were going to England. They would say to you, 'When are you going to England?' It was an understood thing when you left school that you went to England.

**0:01:13.9 Maggie Beasley:** Did you have any work prospects to come to?

**0:01:16.9 Ernie:** No, just came over and hoped for the best.

**0:01:23.2 Maggie Beasley:** Did you come on your own?

**0:01:24.5 Ernie:** No, there was a whole lot of lads back on a holiday from England in Ireland, and I went with them.

**0:01:37.1 Jess Huffman:** Why was it that you assumed that you would end up living in England? What was happening in Ireland at the time?

0:01:44.4 Ernie: It was very impoverished. There was no work. There was nothing, really. It was just an understood thing, when you left school in Ireland, you went to England, and we were lucky really that we had England to go to, really.

**0:01:58.5 Maggie Beasley: Did you work in Ireland before you came to England?**

0:02:02.1 Ernie: Yes, I did a whole lot of different jobs with farmers and whatnot.

**0:02:05.8 Maggie Beasley: Oh, so mainly farming before you came.**

0:02:08.4 Ernie: Yes, mainly. Mainly farming, yes.

**0:02:11.3 Maggie Beasley: Can you remember anything of your foster parents?**

0:02:19.8 Ernie: Well, all I remember, really, is that the main thing was the cruelty that the foster mother was giving me, and that's why I ran away from home when I was 13.

**0:02:37.1 Jess Huffman: Don't worry.**

**0:02:37.5 Maggie Beasley: I don't know how to say this. Why were you in foster care? Do you know why you were with foster parents?**

0:02:47.6 Ernie: My mother was in the home in Dublin having the baby, when she was having me in the convent. Yes, and she would have looked after me for about three years, came to see me on the weekends. Well, after so many years, she had to get out, but she would still come to see me on the weekends and bring me a toy and whatnot, but one weekend she would come back when I was three years old. They had got rid of me, but they wouldn't even tell her where I was gone to, so I went to foster parents in County Donegal in Ireland.

**0:03:30.6 Maggie Beasley: You stayed with them, did you?**

0:03:33.1 Ernie: I stayed with them 'til I was 13, yes.

**0:03:36.0 Maggie Beasley: Yes, so that's ten years.**

Ernie: Can you imagine what it was like for her?

**0:03:39.8 Maggie Beasley: Oh, terrible.**

0:03:40.2 Ernie: Coming back, after looking after me for three years and all of a sudden, you're gone, and they wouldn't even tell her where I was gone. It was mainly to do with the coverup of religion, really.

**0:03:55.9 Maggie Beasley: Can you remember any feelings about that, or were you too young?**

0:04:00.5 Ernie: I was too young. I would love to remember something about it, and I can't. I just can't, but my foster brother was a few months older than me, and he remembers coming there to the foster parents, but I can't remember. I would dearly love to remember, but I just can't.

**0:04:22.2 Jess Huffman: So the group of young lads that you met, tell us a little bit about your journey and your decision to come to England. You must have only been 18, were you, when you came to England?**

0:04:36.1 Ernie: Yes, around about 18, maybe 19. That's about the age I came over, yes.

**0:04:43.3 Jess Huffman: Tell us a little bit about that journey and what England was like when you arrived.**

0:04:49.6 Ernie: Well, I had no intentions of going to England whatsoever. I was working on a farm, and I got it into my head, all these lads were going back to England, so I shot down into town, got myself a suitcase, and jumped on the bus along with them. I ended up in Newport in South Wales, but it took me a couple of years really to settle down, when my heart was still in Ireland. It still is now, actually. Then I was quite small. I was only six stone

in weight, and I had a hell of a job to get a job, but the contracts manager on the job, I kept plaguing him and plaguing him. Eventually he started me up, but once he found out that I was a good worker, I tried several times to get away and he gave me a rise in pay. He went on holiday. I was there for nine months for McAlpine's in Newport, on the Llanwern steelworks, and when he went on holiday, I decided I would go with a travelling firm. That was the cementation company that you've seen on the picture. I went travelling with them for 20 years, travelling all over the country, living in sheds and caravans, and working 12 hours a day, seven days a week.

**0:06:21.7 Maggie Beasley: Is that when you came to Honiton first?**

0:06:25.8 Ernie: Yes, we came on the drilling rigs, testing the foundations for the Honiton bypass. We were all over the place, a week here, a fortnight there, maybe a month in places, but we lived. I quite enjoyed it really, to be honest, even though we were living very rough. I told you, in the past, I went to the Thames Barrier site in London. I was on there for six months. We were working 14 hours a day, seven days a week for six months without a break, and it was hard, hard graft, but the money was colossal.

**0:07:04.8 Maggie Beasley: You told me earlier that you decided to make Honiton your main base, was that whilst you were travelling around, you would always come back to Honiton.**

0:07:15.4 Ernie: Well, in the early days, I was only about maybe two or three years with the firm, we came down and did the Honiton bypass, the testing for the Honiton bypass, and the town appealed to me a lot, because it was very similar to the town that I was brought up in in Ireland.

**0:07:34.0 Maggie Beasley: Oh, right.**

0:07:35.6 Ernie: The same population, local gossip, it was all the same as what they had in Ireland, so I got to like the place.

**0:07:46.1 Maggie Beasley: Is that when you met your first wife?**

0:07:48.8 Ernie: That's right. Yes.

**0:07:50.4 Maggie Beasley: Yes, so you did live quite a bit in Honiton.**

0:07:56.3 Ernie: Oh, yes, I used Honiton as my base then nearly all the time, right up 'til the time when my marriage broke up. I was married for 13 years, had 3 children.

**0:08:12.3 Maggie Beasley: What were your children? What sexes were your children?**

0:08:17.0 Ernie: My boy, Sean, and two girls. The boy was born first, but I decided that I would carry on travelling, because it was a very bad marriage. We just couldn't live together, really.

**0:08:36.5 Maggie Beasley: How did you feel about leaving the children?**

0:08:39.8 Ernie: I felt bad, really bad about it, to be honest with you, but the trouble really was that in a bad marriage, the kids are suffering a lot. Eventually, well, I still came back to see the kids, but eventually I decided that I would have to go, but it was just a very, very bad marriage that was taking effect on the kids badly, as well. I shouldn't be saying this, but she wasn't a very good mother.

**0:09:06.2 Maggie Beasley: Did you leave the children with her when you were travelling?**

0:09:09.3 Ernie: Yes.

**0:09:10.5 Maggie Beasley: Yes, that was sad.**

**0:09:14.8 Jess Huffman: Can I ask, Ernie, what was it like for you to have a family of your own after your experiences of growing up?**

0:09:21.8 Ernie: I was hellbent on having a family of my own, and I was so pleased when my first kid was born. It's just a shame that it didn't last, because I idolised the kids, totally idolised them, but I'm still in contact with them now, mind. No problem.

**0:09:42.4 Maggie Beasley: Oh, yes. That's good. Yes.**

**0:09:45.2 Jess Huffman: Ernie, I'm just going to jump back, because you mentioned earlier when you showed us the photo of you working on that, is it a drilling rig?**

0:09:53.2 Ernie: A drilling rig, yes.

**0:09:54.5 Jess Huffman: You said that that was the start of you having to lose your Irish accent. Can you just tell me a little bit more about why you felt the pressure to?**

0:10:07.8 Ernie: Well, what we had to do, I was in charge on the drilling rig, and we would maybe drill down maybe 20 feet. Then we would have to phone up the engineer in our head office, and he would give me instructions to go down another 20 feet or 10 feet or whatnot, and then phone up again, but that could happen maybe 6 times a day. The problem I had with my accent was they couldn't understand me, so I had to refine it a bit, to be honest, and eventually they could understand me. The thing is I was quite proud about being Irish, as well, you know what I mean? You don't notice you're losing your accent, but you try to correct yourself so as they'll understand you. The biggest problem then, years ago, there was no such thing as mobile phones, and then when in London, if you went to a phone box, you could maybe wait a half-an-hour before you can get in there, and all that time was being wasted when you could have been working.

**0:11:17.2 Maggie Beasley: Also, having an Irish accent, were you ever conscious of prejudice in this country when you first came, or didn't that happen to you?**

0:11:28.3 Ernie: Yes, well, it didn't. There used to be signs up saying no Irish can apply for different places, but I never let it get to me, really.

**0:11:37.4 Maggie Beasley: No, you seem well adjusted.**

0:11:41.9 Ernie: As in Rome, do as the Romans do.

**0:11:46.2 Maggie Beasley: Yes.**

0:11:47.5 Ernie: It was too busy working to concentrate on stuff like that, really, but there were times, especially up around London and whatnot. Then again, a lot of them made it bad for themselves.

**0:12:00.1 Maggie Beasley: Yes, I can understand that.**

**0:12:03.4 Jess Huffman: Were there other Irish people here in Honiton when you first moved here? Was there a community of Irish people?**

0:12:13.2 Ernie: I can't remember really, to be honest with you.

**0:12:16.6 Maggie Beasley: Apart from [?Jerry O'Brien 0:12:17.1].**

0:12:19.0 Ernie: Yes. Well, met Jerry over the years. Once you got speaking to Jerry, you always wanted to speak to him when you saw him, but he was a great man for making a conversation. His missus used to get fed up with him talking all the time, but he came over as a real nice chap. It's a shame he died, really, because he used to go to church every Sunday, as well. I still go to church now every Sunday.

**0:12:48.7 Maggie Beasley: That's the connection to your Irish past, is it, going to the Catholic?**

0:12:55.4 Ernie: Yes, that's possibly where I met Jerry, actually, but they all loved him up at the river station. He was up there for many, many, many years.

**0:13:10.5 Jess Huffman: Was it through the church that you met a community here in Honiton?**

0:13:15.4 Ernie: Well, yes, it would help, wouldn't it, a bit, but I've always tended to keep myself to myself, to be honest with you. I don't know why.

**0:13:23.7 Jess Huffman: Do you consider yourself a religious person?**

0:13:26.6 Ernie: No, I go to church. I go to mass every Sunday, because it was thrust into us as young people. When I go, I feel better for the fact that I go. It's very hard to explain even to my daughters. They can't understand it, but I don't class myself as a religious person whatsoever, but I still get satisfaction out of going to mass every Sunday. If you're getting satisfaction out of something, why not do it? It's only an hour every Sunday.

**0:14:01.8 Jess Huffman: You said earlier, which was lovely, you said your heart was in Ireland or it will always be in Ireland. What does that mean to you?**

0:14:10.4 Ernie: It's very hard to explain, really. The lifestyle in Ireland is completely different to what it is in this country, even though we're very close together, the countries are very close together. I used to love the singsongs and all that. Even when I went back on holiday, I used to really, really enjoy singing the songs, and I used to get up to sing myself, as well.

**0:14:36.6 Jess Huffman: Can you remember some of the songs that you used to sing?**

0:14:40.1 Ernie: Yes, loads. The 'Red River Valley'. The 'Wild Rover'. [Sings] I've been a wild rover. A lot of people know that in this country, don't they?

**0:15:03.8 Maggie Beasley: Yes, that's good.**

0:15:06.9 Ernie: Yes. When I'm in the house on my own, to keep myself company, I start singing, but I've been very busy all morning, actually. I listen to the radio a lot.



**0:15:23.4 Maggie Beasley: When you came back to Honiton, is this when you met your second partner?**

0:15:32.3 Ernie: Yes. Julie, yes. That's this one here.

**0:15:36.1 Maggie Beasley: Yes, and then you settled, and you had a...**

0:15:40.8 Ernie: I had two kids with her. We were together for 23 years. As I told you, when I came in, I just done it for... I had some great times with her, because she gave me a lot of love, which I never had. You know what I mean? I can understand her leaving. She explained why she left, and she would still love to come back now. It's hard to believe, isn't it? She regrets what she has done.

**0:16:15.7 Maggie Beasley: She was quite young.**

0:16:17.3 Ernie: Oh, yes, she was. When I met her, she was only 18 and I was possibly 39, 38/39, but the age made no difference whatsoever. We got on great. We really got on great together.

**0:16:34.1 Maggie Beasley: Perhaps she felt she'd settled down.**

0:16:37.7 Ernie: There was a lot of that. Possibly a lot of it might have been in her mind. The fact that I was a lot older than her, that could have been a factor, as well. I could imagine it being that.

**0:16:49.8 Maggie Beasley: The photo you've shown us of you and Julie, you don't look that much older. That photo, you could almost be a similar age.**

0:16:59.8 Ernie: Yes. We had some great times together. I don't run her down by no means to my family.

**0:17:10.7 Maggie Beasley: No, but you're in contact. You stayed in Honiton then with your children, did you, and she left?**

0:17:21.6 Ernie: I worked with Wimpey's for a short period, maybe about six months in Honiton here. They were doing the same type of work, drilling, so I went with them, and they asked me to leave Honiton and go down to Ipswich, and they would guarantee me £500 a week and whatnot. I decided then that I'd travelled enough, and I wasn't going to travel anymore, and I was still a young man, but I've seen what the boys that I was working with with Wimpey's, all old men, no marriages, no health, out drinking every night. I thought I could end up like that, so I decided that I would pack in travelling.

**0:18:02.6 Maggie Beasley: That's good.**

**0:18:05.8 Jess Huffman: Did you make it back to Ireland, Ernie?**

0:18:09.2 Ernie: Well, the firm that I was working with for 20 years used to pay my way every six weeks to go back to Ireland on the weekends, but eventually you just lose contact, don't you? Then you can speak to other Irish people. They'll tell you the same story, that because of having family and everything in this country, you just lose contact, really, but I didn't have any relations in Ireland anyway, so that possibly played a factor. I used to still love going back there. I had some very good friends that I used to stay with.

**0:18:47.5 Maggie Beasley: Did you ever meet up with your birth mother? Did you ever make contact?**

0:18:56.4 Ernie: After we met. When my birth mother, when we met at 90, but it was my son that got in contact with her, but she was very, very reluctant to see me, really. She was possibly wanting to forget about it. She lived in London. I worked, I did a job in London almost right beside where she lived, but I didn't know anything about it.

**0:19:20.4 Maggie Beasley: Oh, gosh.**

0:19:24.3 Ernie: When I met her, I found out that I had a sister, so I still write to the sister now. We're still in contact with each other.

**0:19:34.7 Jess Huffman: Does your sister live in Ireland?**

0:19:36.8 Ernie: No, she lives in Australia. Yes, well, the mother, I think my mother went to Australia to escape it all, to escape the past and whatnot, but what she'd possibly been through, she possibly wanted to get rid of the past, really. Then all of a sudden, my son writes and gets in contact, and it has all opened up again. She was very, very reluctant to see me, and I could understand why in a way, but my son got in contact with a social worker nun in Ireland, and she was able to make contact with my mother. So that's how we happened to meet, really, but she kept saying all the time that, 'There's no way in the world will she want to see you,' and then eventually she was getting her to come and see me. She came over to her brother's funeral in County Clare, and even then she was reluctant to see me, but she had to go into hospital because she had a kidney infection while she was at home. This social worker nun said to me, 'The best thing you can do is present yourself in the hospital to her.' I said, 'No way in the world.' I said, 'If that's the way I've got to meet my mother, I don't want to meet her.'

0:21:11.2 I said, 'I want my mother to meet me.' That was important to me, so eventually the social worker nun, she was strong, I'll tell you, but she eventually got her to meet me. Which, once she did meet me, we had a lovely meeting. Yes, she was quite happy about it. After we'd met, she used to send me some money back every so often, money she would send. Not a lot of money. A certain amount of money, and I've still got the money in my wallet now to remind me of her.

**0:21:44.5 Jess Huffman: Oh, how lovely.**

**0:21:46.9 Maggie Beasley: That must have been very emotional for you and for your mother, Ernie.**

0:21:52.2 Ernie: Not really, no. There were no tears or nothing, for some reason. I can't make it out, to be honest with you. There were no tears from her, and there were no tears from me, but I did enjoy meeting her, at least. There are a lot of people don't meet their parents, do they, so I was just very lucky that I got the chance to meet her. The hardest part I found about meeting her was that she was such a lovely woman, and what I had missed out on. She was an incredibly lovely woman, and you could understand why in

Ireland years ago, you would be better excused in Ireland if you shot somebody than having an illegitimate child. Yes, so it must have been terrible for her, really.

**0:22:41.0 Jess Huffman: Did you know much about your mother's upbringing and the family that she'd grown up in?**

0:22:46.3 Ernie: No. I could never get any information out of her whatsoever for some reason. I'd been admitted to hospital twice while I was in her care from the home, and I tried to find out why I was in the hospital, but she wouldn't answer any of them questions, and my sister eventually found a letter. I was hoping that she would find a letter that I was sending to the mother, because I was writing to her for years before the sister found out, but she found a letter that I had sent and found out that she had a brother. Then my sister, well, she would be my half-sister, she tried in vain to get some sense out of her, to find out, to get her to talk about the past and what happened, and she would not tell her a thing 'til the day she died. She kept it a total secret. Funny, isn't it?

**0:23:47.6 Maggie Beasley: So you never ever knew about your father.**

0:23:51.9 Ernie: No. The only thing I do remember, and I was hoping she wouldn't say it really, was when we met, she said, 'My God,' she said, 'You look like your father.' I was hoping she wouldn't say that, to be honest.

**0:24:06.0 Maggie Beasley: No, but she never told you anything about him?**

0:24:08.9 Ernie: No, no, she wouldn't. No, she wouldn't.

**0:24:10.5 Maggie Beasley: Why they didn't get together.**

0:24:12.5 Ernie: She wouldn't tell my sister either. She wouldn't tell my sister nothing, and my sister and her were very close, but she could get no information out of her whatsoever. It's funny that, but they do keep that secret to themselves. Can you imagine? She must have been so ashamed.

**0:24:33.8 Maggie Beasley: Quite an unusual thing, isn't it?**

0:24:35.7 Ernie: In Ireland. Yes, it was in Ireland. It was terrible. It's a common thing nowadays, isn't it? There are more one-parent families in Ireland now than there is in this country.

**0:24:47.6 Jess Huffman: Yes.**

**0:24:48.3 Maggie Beasley: I don't know.**

**0:24:48.8 Jess Huffman: The irony is that's probably true, and your mother, you said, lived to 108.**

0:24:55.2 Ernie: Yes.

**0:24:56.8 Maggie Beasley: Amazing.**

0:24:57.6 Ernie: Sad, isn't it? Sad age. I wouldn't want to live to be 108. She was in a home for the last maybe only four or five years.

**0:25:06.9 Maggie Beasley: Was that in Ireland or England?**

0:25:09.0 Ernie: No, in Australia.

**0:25:10.7 Maggie Beasley: Oh, Australia. Of course you did say that, yes. Yes.**

0:25:14.4 Ernie: My sister kept telling me that she was the heart and soul of the home that she was in. They all loved her. She never had dementia or nothing like that. She was just they all loved her. Funny, isn't it? Yes, she sent me a total of \$650 in different letters, but I've still got that money in my wallet now.

**0:25:44.2 Maggie Beasley: You just feel that gives you a link with your mother?**

0:25:47.0 Ernie: Yes. Well, I thought, well, I will cash it in if she passes away, but I've still got it! It was a link, definitely, yes.

**0:25:58.8 Jess Huffman: Earlier you said, Ernie, that you liked Honiton because it reminded you of Ireland. Tell me a little bit more about the things that you felt Honiton had in common with where you grew up.**

0:26:14.0 Ernie: Well, it's very hard to explain, really.

**0:26:15.9 Jess Huffman: It wasn't anything to do with the pub culture, was it?**

0:26:18.5 Ernie: No.

**0:26:24.4 Jess Huffman: You had the Catholic Church here.**

0:26:27.2 Ernie: Yes. It's very hard to explain, really. It just had this, the people seemed very, very similar in their way, talking about each other, and around the corner, and looking out the windows, and stuff like that. Same as what they did in Ireland, but as I said before, I just used to miss the singsongs, but I used to meet a few friends on a Sunday afternoon up in the pub, in the Dolphin, and we'd have a big singsong in there every Sunday afternoon. Some of the lads, these were local lads, mind, but they loved a good singsong. I started singing. I started singing in a pub, down in a pub called The Globe in Honiton years ago, and the bloke told me, he says, 'If you don't stop singing, we're going to bar you!'

**0:27:27.7 Jess Huffman: That's long gone, the Globe pub, isn't it?**

0:27:30.0 Ernie: Yes, right beside the police station. I actually remember that police station being built.

**0:27:36.4 Jess Huffman: What year was that?**

0:27:37.8 Ernie: Oh, dear, that was the early days. That was my early days, but I do remember it being built and all them big steel bars going in to stop people from breaking out. I don't know what year it was though.

**0:27:51.5 Jess Huffman: How does it make you feel to think that you've played such a role in building, to have been part of the structure of the bypass, which is a huge part of this landscape? I was born in the '80s and it has always been there.**

0:28:09.9 Ernie: We just took it from day-to-day, from one job to another. It never bothered us, but we were doing all the heavy, hard donkey work, really. We would take samples every five feet, and in London we used to drill down 100 feet, maybe mainly 100 feet, but we would take samples every 5 feet or a 1.5 meters, seal them with wax on each side, and put a label on what depth it was taken, the site address, send it off to the laboratories to be analysed, but we did all heavy hard dirty work. We were up to our eyes in mud nearly all day long, on a lot of the jobs. In fact, when I used to go and get the papers, sometimes in the morning, I would have to shout in the paper shop to pass me the papers. We'd so much dirt on us, and one of one of the lads, one of the paper men up in London, he said to me, 'Thank you very much.' He said, 'A chap came in here yesterday in the morning, and he destroyed my floor with muck and dirt,' and that was my mate!

**0:29:19.2 Jess Huffman: So were you working with other, I'm assuming it was probably predominantly men, was it, that you were working with on the site, and were they from all over the country?**

0:29:28.2 Ernie: Yes, different parts, all different parts of the world. Mainly English lads, really.

**0:29:39.4 Maggie Beasley: So no other Irish worked with...?**

0:29:41.9 Ernie: Oh yes, there were Irish lads working there. Yes, it was all nationalities. Mainly Irish and English, yes. Oh, yes, I worked with loads of Irish lads when I was on the drilling rigs, but a lot of them lads, they came from Northern Ireland. They used to go back every six weeks, the same as what I did years ago, because they were paying for it, so we

just did it. It was a good firm to work for, really, but you would have to be an animal really to do what we were doing. I think I would have made a good man in the army, to be honest. I loved living rough. Yes, but not that Thames Barrier site. We were working flat hours, 14 hours a day, seven days a week. No baths, no shower, no nothing. I was living in an old caravan. I had an old caravan that I bought. Little ten foot caravan. For me, it was home from home. Park up on the site, you're home straightaway, carry on working, but before I got the caravan we used to have to go around looking for accommodation when we landed on site, and that could be a nightmare sometimes.

**0:31:09.9 Jess Huffman: It wasn't always easy to find accommodation?**

0:31:13.4 Ernie: It wasn't. Well, what we used to do is mainly head for transport cafés, where they used to take the lorry drivers. That was the main place for us to go to, really. I was on one site up in London, and they used to leave the doors open all night, and if you went to the toilet, when you came back, somebody from the street's liable to be lying in your bed. I came home one weekend to Honiton, and I was watching the TV, and all of a sudden this came on the TV. This place where I was staying got burned to the ground and three people got impaled in the steel railings that they have outside the houses in London. Three people died in that, and I'd been there the previous night, so wasn't I lucky.

**0:32:13.7 Maggie Beasley: Yes, you were lucky that you came home. When you finally finished working in construction and you came back to Honiton, to your family, did you do any other work then? Did you get a job?**

0:32:32.6 Ernie: Well, I was on all different types of work, to be honest with you. Tarmacking, labouring. I was never out of work, really.

**0:32:44.4 Maggie Beasley: You mentioned that the last job you had was at Dunkeswell.**

0:32:50.1 Ernie: Yes, I worked at the nursery up in Dunkeswell. It was potting plants and whatnot for quite a lot of years. It was because my knees were so bad from the hard work I'd done, that I wasn't able to go on a building site, but with the nursery, I could sit down,



like I am now, and just pot plants all day long, or maybe stand up and pot plants outside when the weather was good. Any physical, hard physical work I couldn't do, because I had damaged my knees so badly. They're still bad now. Not sore, but very weak.

**0:33:30.4 Jess Huffman: Yes, it sounds like you might have pushed your body to its limits on that job.**

0:33:34.6 Ernie: It was very hard, heavy lifting. When you're young and fit, you don't realise the damage you're doing, really.

**0:33:47.7 Jess Huffman: You mentioned really early on, I think, to Maggie, the school of the Christian Brothers. What is that? Can you tell me more?**

Ernie: That's where I was educated. First of all, when I went to school, I went to the nuns, and eventually, after a few years, you went to the Christian Brothers. They were so cruel to the pupils and everything that they were disbanded in the end. They were very cruel. They had a big cane, and then one of them had a strap, and when he would smack you, it went right around the back of your hand, and you would be blue with the thing, but they were so cruel. The least little thing, they would come along and hit you on the head with this cane. That was why they were disbanded in the end.

**0:34:40.8 Maggie Beasley: Who banned it? Did you say?**

0:34:44.2 Ernie: The government disbanded them in the end, yes.

**0:34:50.1 Maggie Beasley: Yes, but you had completed your education by then, had you?**

0:34:55.2 Ernie: Oh, yes.

**0:34:55.9 Maggie Beasley: Yes, before it was disbanded. Yes.**

0:34:59.0 Ernie: I'm actually very, very surprised that I did so well at school, because of the way I was being treated at home. I left home when I was 13, but every night I wet the bed, 'til I was 13. After I'd left there, I stopped wetting the bed, because when I wet the bed, I got another beating for wetting the bed. Every morning I got a hammering, because I wet the bed, but they didn't understand.

**0:35:29.8 Maggie Beasley: That they were causing it.**

0:35:31.2 Ernie: Yes. Well, I didn't realise that at the time, but they were actually causing it, weren't they? It wasn't the father. The foster father was okay. It was her. She was a brutal woman. Terrible woman.

**0:35:45.7 Jess Huffman: There were other children in the family?**

0:35:47.0 Ernie: She had five of her own kids, and she had us because they were getting good money for keeping us.

**0:35:55.5 Jess Huffman: So they were all foster children?**

0:35:57.0 Ernie: No, no, no, they were all her own kids. Five of her own kids, but then she had two foster kids, which was me and that chap that you saw in the photo. They only had us for the money. Nothing else. No love, no love of any description, but there were more families than that. There was an awful lot of them. The same way, I mean, we were the slaves, me and that lad there. We were total slaves. We had to do absolutely everything. Whereas her kids had to do nothing, but it went on and on and on, because they were covering up. It was a big cover up in the Catholic religion years ago.

**0:36:41.2 Maggie Beasley: It's amazing that you're so well balanced and adjusted with what you went through. Do you ever think about it that way?**

0:36:50.2 Ernie: No. Not really, no.

**0:36:51.6 Maggie Beasley: You are, yes.**

0:36:53.0 Ernie: I tended to get on with life no matter what happened. It's the same as when I got the cancer. I just got on with life. Whatever happens, happens, I think. I think maybe what saved me is that I'm an extrovert. I think if I'd been an introvert, I don't think I would've survived, but whatever happened, I just got on with life. Which possibly was a good thing, possibly a saviour.

**0:37:21.0 Maggie Beasley: Absolutely.**

**0:37:21.8 Jess Huffman: I think so, yes, and it's lovely that you've got your family still here around you.**

0:37:28.2 Ernie: Yes, they all think the world of me, really, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**0:37:36.7 Jess Huffman: We've recorded that.**

0:37:38.3 Ernie: They're all good. They're all lovely. They all come to see me.

**0:37:44.5 Maggie Beasley: Yes. Well, Tammy has told me she thinks the world of you.**

0:37:48.5 Ernie: Yes, but she was the easiest one of the lot to look after, to be honest with you. She was very, very easy all along.

**0:37:58.2 Maggie Beasley: Was she the eldest with your second partner?**

0:38:01.3 Ernie: No, she was the youngest.

**0:38:02.1 Maggie Beasley: She was the youngest?**

0:38:03.3 Ernie: Yes, she was the last one. I was very reluctant to have her, really, because I was around about maybe 40 years of age at the time, and I thought that

wouldn't be right, really, to bring a kid into the world at my age, but the woman I was living with, she was hellbent on having another kid, so we decided we would have another one. That's how [REDACTED] arrived!

**0:38:29.1 Maggie Beasley: Of course, in modern times, that would be still considered quite young.**

0:38:33.7 Ernie: Well, yes, I suppose so. Yes.

**0:38:35.4 Maggie Beasley: Times change.**

0:38:36.1 Ernie: The thing was I was always very young for my age. Not now, but I was always quite young even when I was 70/75. I could do a hard day's work with anybody. No problem. I was just fortunate that there must have been good breeding there somewhere, because I was extremely fit. I mean, I was working with big lads a lot bigger than me, and I could work them into the ground all day long, and I was still very fit.

**0:39:09.7 Jess Huffman: Are your children interested in your Irish heritage?**

0:39:16.5 Ernie: Not really, no.

**0:39:22.9 Jess Huffman: Why do you think it's important that you tell your story, or you share your story?**

0:39:35.5 Ernie: How do I answer that?

**0:39:39.1 Jess Huffman: You mentioned earlier that you didn't feel like holding anything back. Why do you think it's important to not hold things?**

0:39:45.9 Ernie: Now I feel very open about it, and I feel relieved, really, to be able to talk to you and to Maggie here, and just tell you all about the past, even though it might bore you to tears.

**0:39:59.9 Maggie Beasley:** No, it's very interesting. We think you're incredible what you've gone through in your life. As I said, you're very well adjusted and well balanced.

0:40:10.2 Ernie: Yes.

**0:40:12.4 Maggie Beasley:** Lots of people don't have that, aren't that fortunate, are they? Lots of people would have very bad mental health problems if they'd gone through what you've gone through.

0:40:23.7 Ernie: Yes, I know what you mean. Yes.

**0:40:25.5 Maggie Beasley:** That's just my opinion.

0:40:27.1 Ernie: Yes, it never got to me, really. I just get on with life. Tomorrow's another day!

**0:40:35.1 Jess Huffman:** That's a great way to end it, I think, isn't it? Thank you so much, Ernie. Thank you, Maggie. It's a fascinating story, so we're really appreciative.

0:40:42.7 Ernie: Have you asked me enough questions, yes?

**0:40:46.9 Jess Huffman:** I'm sure we'll think of more. This is what often happens. We turn it off and then we think of more, but we know where you live, and you know where Maggie lives, so we can always find you.

**0:40:57.1 Maggie Beasley:** I think we've gone through, we've covered the majority of it, and you've answered beautifully all the questions.

**0:41:06.1 Jess Huffman:** Unless there's something else about your story that you think we might be interested in?

**0:41:11.0 Maggie Beasley: We haven't asked you, or you feel...?**

0:41:15.4 Ernie: Oh, no, I've told you more or less everything, haven't I?

**0:41:17.9 Maggie Beasley: Yes, because I wrote it all down.**

**0:41:21.8 Jess Huffman: Thank you, Ernie. Thank you, Maggie.**

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**