

## INTERVIEW



# What I went through was a garden variety tale of an addict

In his most honest interview ever, Colin Farrell opens up to **Barry Egan** about addiction, fear, sacrifice, excess, God, fatherhood, sobriety, and the demands of "not knowing as a man what to do in a male-dominated society that puts high value on alpha behaviour"

**S**OME movie stars, when their multi-million dollar budget film comes out, have a glass of Chardonnay and enjoy the moment. In 2004, when Oliver Stone's epic *Alexander* was released, Colin Farrell received such a critical mauling for his performance in the title role that he got drunk out of his mind and vanished on a plane to Lake Tahoe. More than that, the young Brando from Castleknock — whose illustrious career was unravelling in front of the eyes of the world — hatched a plan, as he told the *New York Times* last week, to deal with the public humiliation: he not only got blind drunk, but he put on a ski mask so that no one would recognise him. "Where can I wear a ski mask and not actually be put against the wall by a bunch of SWAT cops?" he told *Cara Buckley* in *New York Times* of his Lake Tahoe degradation.

Thirteen years on, Colin Farrell has no need to hide from the critics ever again. Following on from director Yorgos Lanthimos's *The Lobster* two years ago, he has just made one of the best films of his life (and of the year) with the spookily compelling *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*, also by Lanthimos. In it, heart surgeon Steven Murphy (played with a chilling detachment by Colin) finds himself faced with a choice of killing a member of his family after being cursed by 16-year-old Martin (played by Barry Keoghan) whose father died on Colin's operating table a few years previously.

Instead of filing a malpractice claim, Martin brings horror to the idyllic middle-class home of Steven and his equally detached wife Anna (played by Nicole Kidman) instead. It transpires that Steven had a couple of drinks before he performed the open-heart surgery on the boy's father that resulted in his death.

"You should never have a few drinks when you are doing heart surgery. I think we can all agree on that!" Colin laughs. "He is a very proud man. Having had an understanding that Martin's curse on the

whole family is actually taking hold, he says a surgeon can never kill a patient. 'An anaesthetologist can kill a patient, a surgeon never can'. Later on, his anaesthetologist friend says, 'A surgeon can kill a patient but an anaesthetologist never can'. I think those two lines, rewritten by each character to relate to their own individual perspective, represent the pessimism that people are in it for their own good; that people are looking out for number one. And I'm not saying that the director (Yorgos Lanthimos) believes that as a blanket rule."

Does Colin believe that people are only out for themselves? "I don't, actually. I believe the majority of the time, yes, but I think there are always exceptions. I don't think there is one rule over every single person on the planet. I think choice comes into it. I do think that people act from altruism and if somebody acts from altruism and they feel good about it, well, then the more cynical amongst us will go: 'Ah, they didn't do it selflessly!'"

Colin's character kills, or sacrifices, his son. Does Colin see *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* as a modern take of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, in the Bible?

"Yeah. We have always looked for context in mythology, and the Bible to me is one of the great mythological books that has ever been written. I see it as allegory. The idea of sacrifice has always been a huge theme in the human experience, and there is no greater sacrifice than in this case the father taking the life of his child in the belief that there would be some resultant purification. That's where Martin's heart very much is. He is a very prideful man. He carries himself as if he is a God. He feels every day that he is erasing the creation of human life, the human heart, so that he can perform surgery. He is like Alec Baldwin in another film [*Malice*] where he plays a surgeon and says: 'Do you think I'm God? Let me tell you, I am God!'"

Is Colin religious? "I don't align myself with any particular religion, or any particular philosophy on it," Colin says, and he is searching for

"even a proximity with regard to what our purpose in life may be. I have a mishmash of this and the other. But I tried very hard years and years ago to be an atheist, because I thought it was more interesting or I thought it had more intellectual validity or worth — and I couldn't quite cross the bridge." Colin says of atheism. "I couldn't quite make it to the other side, I do believe in something that is bigger than us. To someone who is atheist they would say that is a cop out. But I think there are other realms. I think there are greater things than the eye can see or the brain can even comprehend, especially when we are only using 10pc of the brain's capability. So we can only comprehend what we can comprehend," Colin adds. "You know, our evolution as sentient beings? I am completely fine that there are complexities and mysteries that are way beyond the understanding of any human being. Having said that, I don't find science and religion to be a dividing force. I think they can go hand in hand."

"I don't know what I am," he says returning to the original question of religious belief. "I struggle with it."

## 'I've yet to meet a person whose sobriety has made their life worse'

In terms of his artistic, rather than spiritual evolution, does Colin feel he has gone through a transformation with indie movies like *The Lobster* and *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*?

"No. From the inside of it, it is really not so much [that], he explains, meaning it is reductive to see his career as action hero box office hell to salvation in indie hipsterdom. ("Hitting bottom after a string of macho roles in major movies, the actor has found fulfilment, and the best reviews of his life, in oddball films," wrote one critic.)

"I feel that I am doing work that is more challenging to me as an actor and to me as a man. The work

I am doing now is less physical. It is deeper. From the outside looking in, I see the results of the sculpture. But for the sculptor, who is creating the sculpture, it happens bit by bit, step by step. You arrive wherever you arrive as a result of a thousand choices and happenstances. So for me it is like the grandmother not seeing the grandchild for five years. 'Oh my God! The size of you!' But if you see the grandchild every day it wouldn't be hugely dramatic. I don't see the change that you have asked me about as such," he says meaning metamorphosis.

Did you need to kill Colin Farrell, the big movie star, the big action movie star, in order that Colin Farrell could live?

He laughs. "I think the box office killed that for me, man! I rose very quickly through the ranks and had a lot of commercial success very early and couldn't make head nor tail of it. I did a couple of big films that didn't work. Then there wasn't the opportunity to do big films and it sort of forced my hand and it took me to involve myself in a scale of work and intimacy of work that I do find fundamentally more interesting. Truly fundamentally," he says.

"Even through the years when I was doing big films or more commercial films, or action films, I was still doing *Intermission* [in 2003] or *A Home At The End Of The World* [2004] and still trying to do smaller films and sometimes it didn't work that way. I was working with the likes of... Martin McDonagh is an extraordinary director obviously," he says.

After the multi-million dollar global flop that was *Miami Vice* in 2006, McDonagh approached Colin to play hitman Ray in *In Bruges* in 2008. I'd heard

that Colin (after the critically beating of *Miami Vice* and *Alexander* in 2004) believed his presence in *In Bruges* would be a negative one and, as such, didn't want to do it. Is that story accurate?

"I always wanted to do *In Bruges*," he says. "I was feeling low enough on myself to allow that internal malaise to result in me saying to Martin, [despite] what I thought was an act of generosity [from Martin] and [despite] loving the material: 'Look, man. People are going to come into the cinema — if they come in, that is; they might stay away! — with a load of baggage from the last few films I've done,'" Colin revealed what he said to the *In Bruges* director. "You have a relationship with your audience as an actor, whether you're in a theatre or in film or on television." I ask Colin what was his relationship like with himself at that time. He said in a 2009 interview in *GQ* magazine looking back on the deeply troubled period after *Miami Vice* and *Alexander*: "I didn't want to die. But I didn't want to live!"

How did he get his belief back as a human being, not as a movie star? "We all talk about that you can't live in the past but there is a trap in that as well, especially if, like most of us, no matter what your individual story is, or however beautiful or hard it is.

It certainly benefited me to go back. To reverse the clock a little bit. 'So, OK. Hold on a second. I did that. Hold on a second. Where was I? What was I doing when I was a kid? Why did I do that? I kind of went through my whole life just to see where I made some choices and choices were based on fear; and how confused I may have been and I was trying to pretend that I wasn't confused. All that







Colin Farrell says that when he ditched drugs and alcohol, he took up running to let off steam. Below left, with *'The Killing of a Sacred Deer'* co-star Nicole Kidman. Below, with sister Claudine

kind of jazz," he explains.

All that fear and all you went through is pretty normal, I say to him, except you did it in front of the eyes of the world.

"It is certainly not abnormal what I went through, sadly," Colin says. "It is pretty much a garden variety tale of an addict, I suppose. And having an addiction and not knowing as a man what to do in a male-dominated society that puts worth and high value on emotions of alpha behaviour and pack mentalities and such."

And where vulnerability becomes something to laugh at, I say to him. "And it becomes carcinogenic," Colin says. "You know, if we as men don't know how to deal with fears then it becomes carcinogenic. It results in violence and all sorts of madness. So, I had a look back and it was very garden variety stuff and I started dealing with it. That's all. It was in the past, I was in a bit of a fog. When I met Martin [McDonagh] I was in a bit of fog and I had to understand myself and have a relationship, I suppose, with my own discomfort."

Why did Colin decide to enter rehab after *Miami Vice* finished filming in 2000? "I had just had it, man. I was done. For a long time I put the brakes on. For a long time, I could go mad for three, six months, and then I could pull back for a few months to try to re-enter the atmosphere. I couldn't find the handbrake."

In 2000, after Joel Schumacher cast him in *Tigerland*, and then *Phone Booth* in 2002, the young Irish Brando from Castleknock (who after studying at the Gaiety School

of Acting went on to appear in *Bat: L'Assange* in 1998 after mercifully missing out on *Boyz n the Zoo*) was suddenly one of the biggest box-office draws internationally. The brooding bad-boy of Hollywood was soon, inevitably, bent on self-destruction — he was swimming in a movie-star pool of booze, class A drugs, beautiful women and self-loathing and endless black-outs. He seemed like a young obituary, like Heath Ledger in 2008, waiting to happen. Farrell didn't believe in self-censorship (he once told *Playboy* magazine in an interview that "heroin is fine in moderation") or anything remotely self-nurturing.

Is it true that when he came out of rehab, in the months afterwards, his mother kept expecting to get a phone call saying that her son was dead? "No. I don't think that was when I came out of rehab. When I came out of rehab that was the best sleep she had in 15 years!"

With neither drugs and alcohol in his life, how does Colin let off steam?

"Run around. Whatever. Go up on hikes. I go into nature a lot, man. I go into nature a lot. I find nature pulls the steam out of you and f---s it over its own shoulder. I go on road trips and go to the cinema and hang out with my kids," he says. (Colin has his two sons. His first son, James Padraig, was born in 2003 — James's mother is the model Kim Bordenave — his second son, Henry, with his ex, Alicia Baelede-Curus, is eight years old.) "I put on a bit of music. I just live. I just live it without being poison the way I was poison for years." Is it difficult to have that kind

of self evolution in a town like Los Angeles where he lives? "No, I think Los Angeles is a good place for it, actually. I am not talking Hollywood. Hollywood is a state of being and also a zip code. But Los Angeles is a very forgiving city. You can be whatever you want. It is actually a good place to reinvent yourself. Los Angeles is an incredible place and there are incredible support groups. There are alternative ways of looking at things. There are people from all over the world. So there is not one particular behaviour that's followed."

Is that as it may, is the industry that Farrell works in not difficult sometimes because Hollywood is more likely to push someone towards self-oblivion, rather than nurturing themselves? "Everything in life, every industry is hard, especially

with the potential for the amount of money that is on the table. And if people think they can make a dime from you they will lavish you with great praise and gifts — and if the moment comes where they don't, they will f--- you out the door without a second's thought and without any concern for you. That is very, very prevalent."

Colin said a few years ago that he realised that he had entered an indus-

try where money was the priority and that you would get a phone call on Saturday night to tell you what the box office opening was on Friday night and that it was all "Aaaaaahh".

"Yeah," he says, now, "but I am sure I wouldn't have been saying that if the phone call I got on Saturday night was saying that the film was number one! I have to call myself out on that! Look, in every aspect of life, no matter what you do, whether you are coaching a football club or you are the head of a *Fortune* 500 company or what people might refer to as a movie star — whatever you may be — you just have to try and figure out what the true value of living is; and to have a fulfilling and decent life. I am not saying I'm there, by the way."

How close is he? You sound closer than some of us, I say to him. "Not at all," he says, dismissively. "Cancel this whole interview if it leads you to think that I am all over the shop!"

But he is less all over the shop than he was, presumably?

"Ah, yeah. That is for sure. That's all you can do. If you move in the right direction, however slow you move, once it is the right direction that is a good thing." Did sobriety make

him a better dad? "Oh God, yeah. I can't imagine I have yet to meet a person whose sobriety has made their life worse. I have yet to. But I am open to it."

"If you find some one please get in touch with me because I would love to have a chat with them and ask them a couple of questions. I have yet to meet a person whose sobriety didn't make a better father, a better friend..." And a better actor?

"No idea. I am truly not pulling your leg. I have no idea."

His beloved big brother Eamon's husband Steven Mannion was recently diagnosed with skin cancer.

"Steven has been through the wringer," Colin says, concerned. "About six weeks ago Steven got some tests done on a mole on his back. It had started to bleed and like a lot of Irish lads, myself included, he said, 'Ah, it's grand, it's nothing.' Then he went in and they did a biopsy and he was told that he had stage one cancer melanoma. Then they did more tests and they found out that it had gone to his lymph nodes. He is only 53 or 54. He had his surgery yesterday and they removed his lymph node. He is in great shape but he is in a lot of discomfort. I think they got it early enough. There is a bit of work ahead for Steve."

And a bit of work ahead for the not-so-young-Brando of Castleknock — like the rest of us on the planet — too perhaps out in La La Land. There are worse curses.

*The Killing of A Sacred Deer* is out on November 3.





## DEATH OF A LEGEND

# Dolores, the war is over, I hope you have found peace

Dolores O'Riordan was one of Ireland's greatest ever singers with millions of fans across the world. **Barry Egan** remembers his brilliant, beautiful friend who died far too soon

*"If you, if you could return  
Don't let it burn  
Don't let it fade" – Linger.*

**A** WEEK last Wednesday she emailed: "Love to meet up." I was going to go down to Limerick and have lunch with her later this month. That lunch will never happen now.

Heartbreaking to imagine Dolores O'Riordan's short, brilliant life is truly over. Heartbreaking to think that she is gone forever, this beautiful young woman with more talent in her little finger than a dozen Beyonces, this voice of a generation who could sing like an angel with a damaged wing soaring over Mount Olympus.

This forever lost soul, who was finding her way back after maybe wandering off the path in life, as we all do sometimes.

"I'm happy in Limerick now," she emailed a week last Wednesday. I was happy for her because I loved her and because I knew she had been through a personal hell over the last decade. So Dolores, more than anyone perhaps, deserved happiness. She had her troubles. They were well documented. She was human, just like the rest of us. We were friends for almost 17 years. Whenever she wanted to confess something to the world about herself, however shocking, I was her confessor in the *Sunday Independent*. I would have helped her any way I could. Sometimes, sadly, it was like that Elvis Presley line from *Heartbreak Hotel*: "They been so long on Lonely Street, they'd never get back". We talked via email during the last week of her life. She said she needed to have goals to look forward to and how she was feeling a lot better now. She said she had stopped looking back. It was great to talk to her.

Whenever I emailed her, she would reply, sometimes within the hour, to say that things were going positively in her life and that her counsellor thought she was making great progress. I was absolutely delighted for her. "Making music and looking forward is important," she said. "Lots of love, Dolores x".

"I have to stay positive and

healthy," she said cheerily, adding that she was going to go for a swim in Limerick. "Keeping up the exercise is important.

"Keep in touch love. Much love! Dolores." She said that she would pass on my love to her mother.

The superstar who, as *The Guardian* put it, spent most of her adult life seeking a balance between depression and anorexia, was found dead at the Hilton hotel in Park Lane, London, last Monday morning. She was 46. Less than three decades earlier, her life changed when at the age of 18, she got a job with a Limerick group called The Cranberry Saw Us. She sang a version of a song she had written, a plaintive piece de resistance called *Linger*. The song, released in 1993 with the renamed Cranberries, became a giant hit globally, remaining in the *Billboard* Hot 100 in America for 24 weeks.

There was no one quite like her. Nor will there be again. One of her earliest memories was being about five at school in Limerick when the headmistress took her out of the class and up into the sixth class where the 12-year-old girls were.

she sat Dolores up on the teacher's desk and told her to sing for them. The five-year-old loved it – singing was something she had "that could win people over". That much is true of Dolores, a bona fide genius who could stand on a stage and win over any crowd, anywhere in the world. Lady Diana attended one of Dolores's concerts in September 1995, in Modena, Italy. She was in tears by the end of Dolores's heart-rending performance of *Ave Maria* with Pavarotti. Diana later explained to Dolores that the reason she cried earlier at her performance was because her mother Frances loved *Ave Maria*.

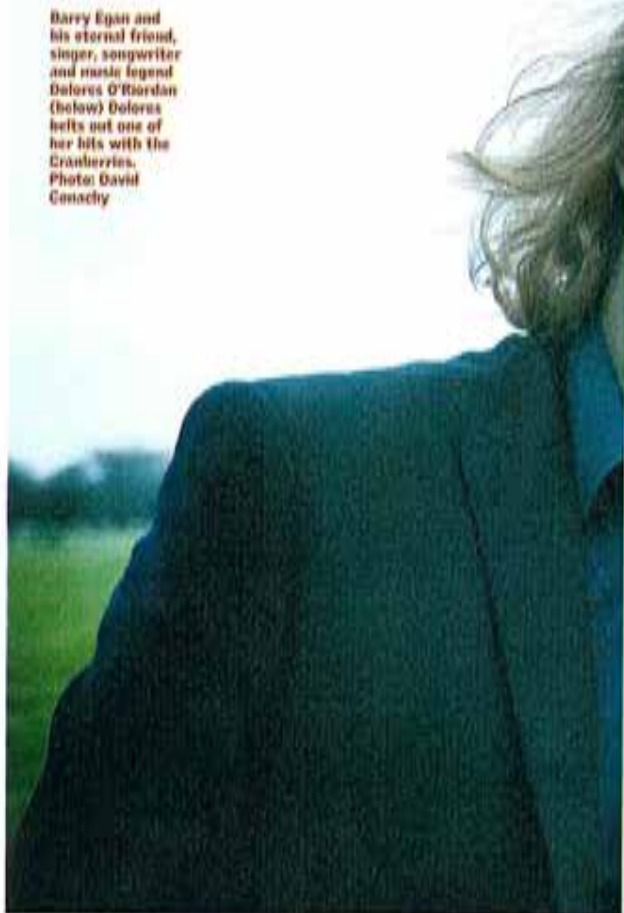
Like Lady Di, Lady Dolores died before her time. Like Lady Di, Lady Dolores's sorrows weren't a secret from the world, her troubles known to her millions of fans.

Dolores O'Riordan's wounds weren't visible on her elfin-like body but they were deeper and more painful than anything that bleeds. Mental pain – the constant rattle in the brain – is harder to bear than physical pain. Dolores knew that better than most, after all she had been through in her life. You didn't need to be Freud to see that her heart possessed more scar tissue than positive life experience. Elizabeth Wurtzel wrote in *Prozac Nation* that "a human being can survive almost anything as long as she sees the end in sight. But depression is so insidious, and it compounds daily, that it is impossible to ever see the end".

In amongst the loneliness, and the moments of depression that maybe compounded daily, I would like to think that Dolores O'Riordan always believed that there was lots of hope for her (she had great support from her mother Eileen and her brother PJ) and that the future was never less than bright. Hence one of the last emails she sent to me, saying: "I'm happy in Limerick now."

Born on September 6, 1971, Dolores Mary Eileen O'Riordan was the youngest of seven children. From the age of eight, Dolores endured years of rape and sexual molestation by a person known to her family in the Limerick area. It is hard to even begin to fathom the effect, both emotional and psychological, this would have had on her. When people toss out phrases like "Dolores was dealing with her demons", they should try

Barry Egan and his eternal friend, singer, songwriter and music legend Dolores O'Riordan (below) Dolores belts out one of her hits with the Cranberries. Photo: David Conachy



to understand the hellish reality of what she actually went through as a young child: from the age of eight to 12, she was raped.

"For four years, when I was a little girl, I was sexually abused. I was only a kid," Dolores told me in the *Sunday Independent's LIFE* magazine in October 2013 at her then home with her husband Don Burton and their children in Abington, Malahide.

How could Dolores ever be normal again after those experiences as a child, her innocence robbed from her in the most evil way? The dirty secret the child-Dolores buried inside her for most of her adult life. It came out in nervous breakdowns, in depression, in suicidal thoughts (there was an attempt to take her life in 2013), in panic attacks, in mania, in anorexia.

In Rome at Christmas 2013, (she was in the Eternal City to sing at the Vatican for the Pope and took me with her) Dolores told me she had Googled anorexia and "studied" the condition. She found out it was a common pathology that develops later on in life. "So I was putting on this charade, this perfect face. I had anorexia, then depression, a breakdown."

I told her that anorexia was a form of suicide: you want to make yourself disappear.

"I knew why," she said in reply.

"I knew why I hated myself. I knew why I loathed myself. I knew why I wanted to make myself disappear. It was something that I noticed manifested itself in my behaviour and the pathologies I began to develop in my early adult life, such as my eating disorder, depression and eventually the breakdowns. I think I am getting stronger for sure. But I'll always be a bit of a train wreck. Nobody's perfect. Those people who pretend they are perfect aren't perfect."

Three months prior to that, in the summer of 2013, she had told me in an interview with the *Sunday Independent's Living* magazine: "I tried to overdose last year. I suppose I am meant to stay here for the kids. It is just about acknowledgement for me now – not revenge. I'm not that type but it will free me to go into group therapy as I go on with my life and I can be a better and stronger mother."

Her father Terence had a bad bike accident in 1968, three years before Dolores was born, "which left him invalided with permanent brain damage", and he "was never the same again". He died in November 25, 2011, at home in Ballybricken, Co Limerick, after having been ill with cancer for seven years. Dolores knew that she might see the man who abused her at the funeral in Limerick. "I had nightmares for a year before my father's death about meeting him,"





she said, referring to the man who raped her. At the funeral, he "came over and cried and said: 'Sorry'."

"My father would have killed him [the abuser] had my poor father not been 'retarded'," she told me.

You could argue that when her marriage to six-foot-plus Don Burton — whom she married in virtually her knickers in Holy Cross Abbey outside Tipperary in 1994 — ended in mid-2014 after over 20 years, Dolores lost her protector against the world; and that Dolores's life unravelled out of control from there on. (I always liked Don. I always thought he was great, even essential, for Dolores. She needed him as much as a father figure as a husband in her life.) After the separation, the children lived with Don in Canada while Dolores bounced around the world, seeking sanctuary but sadly never truly finding it.

In November, 2014, she was arrested on an Aer Lingus plane at Shannon Airport after a troubling incident on flight EI-110.

Ten days after the incident, I got a phone call from Dolores to meet her at a house she was staying in on the Adare Manor estate. It was the worst I had ever seen her. She was clearly ill, clearly in need of urgent help. She was distressed and disoriented. She and I recorded a video of our interview. Her speech was

so rambling and her eyes so full of mania that we decided not to use it.

When I suggested to Dolores that dreadful day in Adare that she should go to see someone, she replied, irritated: "Sure, I am a counsellor. Aren't I counselling the world? Aren't I after healing billions of people around the world? I talk to myself. I talk to myself in the mirror!"

When I asked her what she said to herself, she answered: "That it is not your fault. And I love you. Be nice to yourself. And slow down. Because I am not going to live that long. I'm 49. If I see 50, I'll be happy," said Dolores, who was 46 when she died last Monday. "I mean that. People look at you and see a product. They don't see a soul, but an empty hole."

I was hugely concerned about her mental health. I also genuinely feared for her life.

A month later, two weeks before Christmas, I got another phone call from Dolores, asking this time to come and visit her in hospital. It was a typically surreal day. I visited her with two members of her new band, Jetlag NYC — bassist Andy Rourke (formerly of the Smiths) and DJ Ole Koresky, with whom she had developed a romantic relationship. She played her guitar on the bed and showed me a picture she had painted. We then got a taxi to my house where we put REM on the CD

player and had a bit of a bop with Ole. We all went to dinner in Locks in Portobello until midnight before Dolores went back to hospital.

I gave her a Christmas present of a book of John Lennon's drawings. I wrote in it: "Merry Xmas Dollie, the war is over."

Dollie's internal war was just beginning, it transpired. I knew she couldn't go on like she was. It was shocking and sad in the extreme to see her go downhill like this — even more shocking now that she seemed to be turning her life around finally — because, once upon a time, Dolores O'Riordan, despite her troubles, was one of the coolest, the wittiest, the warmest girls on terra firma...

Cut to Milan, 2003:  
The Dr Martens-shod superstar from Limerick is in the sanctuary of her own dressing room — a world of scented candles, sumptuous cushions and coming colours. It is in here that Dolores disappears.

Before a show, she has a routine of reiki, massage and yoga. However, beneath all that Eastern calm, Dolores is desperately missing her two children. She's chartering a private jet to be home for her son Taylor's birthday on Saturday. Thirty thousand euro. Worth every cent. Giant balloons are being inflated and clowns hired. "He'll never be five again. I don't care about the money,"

she says. "I'm a mother more than I'm a rock star." She adds that she wants to try acting next year. Guitarist Noel Hogan says he was running the London Marathon in April.

"And I..." begins his brother, Cranberries bassist Mike, "...I'm going to have another sex change next year."

"I can just imagine you in a wig and women's underwear!" says drummer Fergal Lawler.

Dolores doesn't have to imagine. She can recall the early days of the Cranberries when the Hogan brothers would break into her room, liberally applying her make-up before helping themselves to their singer's undergarments.

Like two Gaelic Danny La Ruess, Dolores recalls, Noel and Mike would then appear on the tour bus imitating the two girls, young Dolores and her good friend Breda.

## 'I told her that anorexia was a form of suicide: you want to make yourself disappear'

"They used to bust my bras and knickers all the time!" Dolores says.

Dolores remembers the early days of the Cranberries when she was dating ("nothing serious") Liam O Maolaid of the Hothouse Flowers, and the times the unknown Limerick quartet played the support slots to the then hugely popular Dublin band, Starving, the male members of the Cranberries would pester Dolores into getting food from her boyfriend's band's dressing room. "The Hothouse Flowers have very nice cheese," Mike, Noel, and Fergal would say. "Get us some!"

"Leave me alone!" she would reply. "I'm not scoring cheese off my boyfriend for you!"

"We were the bumper opening act," Fergal remembers. "We had nothing. No food. No drink. No prospects. And no cheese!"

Cut to Howth, 2007:

High up on the hill of Howth, in a sprawling mansion fit for an iconic rock star, Dolores tosses the salad while husband Don watches over the steaks and jumbo prawns on the grill in the Edenic splendour of their garden.

Her mother Eileen has two-year-old Dakota in her arms. Dakota's big sister, six-year-old Molly, is watching *Peppa Pig* on the television. Dolores brings me into one of the big bedrooms where 10-year-old Taylor is playing *Star Wars* on his computer. She puts on the Darth Vader mask and walks around the room, pretending to be the former Jedi Knight who turned to the dark side.

Later that night, Dolores takes me into her and Don's bedroom, where Molly is tucked up in bed, refusing to go to the dark side. She wants the light left on. Dakota has long since gone to her bed, after an exhausting day in the garden.

Coming in from the barbecue, Don, 10 years Dolores's senior, brings the surf 'n' turf into the dining room, while his wife dutifully pours the wine. "When you're famous so young, become a millionaire overnight, people think you're going to crash and burn and be such a mess. I have my kids and Don," she says, pouring yet more red, red wine. "Before, if the gig

didn't go too well, I'd be depressed; and if the press wrote something critical of me, I'd be depressed. You lose all sense of yourself if you take yourself that seriously. I'm completely calm now. I meditate a lot and I have my family."

Back during her low of 1995-96, when she was suffering from "serious depression," Dolores had "out-of-control anxiety attacks. I wasn't sleeping. I wasn't eating properly."

Dolores ate like a horse that night. She couldn't get the prawns into her mouth quick enough.

In April, 2014, Dolores and the true rock in her life, her mother Eileen, took me for lunch at the Bake House Bistro in Bruff, Co Limerick.

"They just saw me as a commodity, as a cash cow," Dolores said of her experiences in the music industry, which made her extraordinarily wealthy, but sucked the blood out of her, like a particularly ferocious vampire. "I was very, very lonely."

Eileen added: "I remember my own mother — who was 92 when she died in 1997 — saying to Dolores one morning: 'You'd have been better off if you'd kept your little job in Cassidy's in Limerick!'"

"I worked there part-time when I was in fifth and sixth year," remembered the multi-millionaire singer. Courtesy of her group, the Cranberries, selling over 40 million records worldwide, Dolores had plenty of money — not that the wealth mattered. "Because," as Sylvia Plath wrote in *The Bell Jar* of depression, "whenever I sat — on the beach or at a street cafe in Paris — I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air."

Again, it wasn't always thus for young O'Riordan.

The path to fame is not always an easy one. Those whom the gods wish to destroy are granted fame and fortune at a dangerously early age, they say. And the Cranberries were but babies. They survived where others before them had perished.

"When you become famous very young — when you become a millionaire almost overnight — people expect you to be screwed up," Dolores told me in Milan 15 years ago. "So it makes you more determined to keep your life together. It makes you more determined to make the simple things in life right."

Like?

"Like a good marriage. Having children," she answered. "Being a good parent. Keep your marriage together. Staying loyal, and seeing the big picture."

Later that night, while Dolores held 20,000 Italians in thrall for two hours, her devoted husband Don took me onto the side of the stage where he gushed with the praise of the truly in love: "That's my wife! And she's the greatest singer in the world!"

I would like to think I did my best as a friend to protect her in life.

And so I hope in death this tribute will show the world the real person Dolores O'Riordan was — and more than that, how Dolores truly felt she was getting to a place of happiness and peace before her untimely passing.

Hence, to repeat, one of the last emails she sent me said: "I'm happy in Limerick now."

Whatever about her beloved Limerick, the divine Dolores is in peace now in heaven.

She will linger, sternly.



## THE BIG STORY

# Don't look back in anger

In his only Irish interview, Noel Gallagher tells **Barry Egan** about Bono, fatherhood, his mother loving Jeremy Kyle, his youngest son wanting a Lamborghini for his seventh birthday — and why he thinks his brother Liam is 'not well'

**T**HE caterpillar-on-cocaine eyebrows appear to move to the rhythm of his voice. This is just as well, as Noel Gallagher tells a pretty good story. There's the one about his world tour with U2 this year, where the hangovers were monstrous. He has a foggy recollection of arriving at Bono's house, where he was staying, at 6am after the after-show party at the Croke Park show on July 22. The next thing Noel remembers is the phone going like something out of Hitchcock and being in a place that he doesn't know. It's the even-more-famous-than-Noel owner of the house on the phone, enquiring after his health: "Oh, you're alive. Where are you?" Noel was, in fact, in a guest house at the bottom of Bono's garden.

The U2 lead singer continued: "Everybody's here waiting for you." To which a bleary-eyed and slightly bemused Noel said: "What for?" To which Bono, clearly used to this sort of home entertaining, said: "For the lunch I'm throwing in your honour. The 75 guests have arrived."

When Noel insisted that he had only just got out of bed, Bono told him that "The President of Ireland's just arrived and you're sitting next to him. So hurry up."

Noel quickly showered, got dressed and rocked up at the quasi-Presidential, quasi-State lunch in his honour at chez Bono. It started at 8pm. It finished at 4.10am. The next day, Noel stirred again in Bono's palatial guest house at the end of the garden overlooking Killiney Bay. He was supporting U2 in Paris that night and so rang his tour manager to make the necessary arrangements. The conversation can be summed up thus: "Neil, you've got to get me out of this place. I can't do it any more." "Get your bags, I'll pick you up at 11.45am."

Not unlike The Eagles' *Hotel California*, Bono's gaff appears to have a similar aura: once you arrive you are never able to quite leave again. Or so it almost proved for Noel. "As I'm kind of walking," he was met by Bono "in his dressing gown, with two beers under his arm, eating scrambled eggs, listening to opera..."

"Where you going?" he then asked his guest. Noel answered that he was, in fact, going to Paris to support U2 on The Joshua Tree tour that very night and he needed to catch his plane. Bono would hear none of

commercial transport: "Stay here and come on a private jet."

Later that afternoon, Noel and his host et al got on the private jet, where there was yet more liquid refreshment. Upon landing in the French capital, Bono tells Noel that he has an appointment and that he will see him later at the hotel. Noel thinks to himself that once he's out of sight, "I'm going straight to rehab, this is too much for me."

A somewhat worse-for-wear Noel is then driven to his suite at the hotel, whereupon he flops on the bed and orders a hangover-helping bacon sandwich, perhaps relieved that he has escaped Bono's fiendish libertine clutches for the time being.

Twenty minutes later, Noel almost drops his bacon sandwich when he turns on the television and sees "Bono doing a live press conference with the Prime Minister of France about Africa. And I know what we've been up to the previous three days, and I'm going — He's not real!"

A 50-year-old father of three, Noel Thomas David Gallagher is definitely maybe real. John Lennon's quintessential working-class hero on the dole, he grew up in "the rough area" part of Manchester, the middle child of Irish Catholic parents Peggy and Thomas Gallagher, to become a spokesperson for his generation with timeless classics like *Don't Look Back in Anger*, *Wonderwall*, *Champagne Supernova* and *Live Forever*. His precious ma was one of 11. He has estimated that seven of that 11 all moved to Manchester from Ireland

and that they "congregate around a five square-mile area." Despite having two fabulously wealthy sons (the other one being Noel's younger brother, Liam), Noel says his mother still lives in the same small council house in the same rough part of Burnage he grew up in. Someone got shot in the face outside her house last year. "My mother doesn't give a f\*\*\*!" he laughs in his management's office in London recently. "As long as Jeremy Kyle's on, and she's got tea in the pot! She goes swimming. She goes to the shops, she comes back. She puts her feet up and watches the telly."

Is it true that all she got was a new gate from Noel? "Yeah! And a new gold number five!"

Would he not give her the publishing rights to *Live Forever*?

"I bought her the place in Ireland!" he laughs.

Noel lives in leafy Maida Vale with his wife Sara MacDonald (who he married in June, 2011) and their two young sons, Donovan and Sonny, and sometimes his grown-up daughter Anais, by ex-wife Meg Matthews (who he married in 1997, lived with in party central Supernova Heights in North London, before they divorced in 2001), in a well-appointed mansion fit for the king of existential Brit rock.

"I live on the same street as Adam Clayton. Five doors away from him. He came to my house recently, and our cat Boots came walking in. Adam went: 'So, that's your cat?' I asked him, 'How do you know that cat?'"



Bono and Noel on Noel's 50th birthday last May. Photo: Twitter/@Bonojour



Noel Gallagher. Photo: Lawrence Watson

He said, "That cat is always at my f\*\*\*ing house!"

"My youngest lad Sonny is seven and he is very funny," adds Noel, who is not unfunny himself. "His birthday is coming up and he loves *Top Gear*. I think he is aware that he is a funny lad. I asked him what he wants for his birthday and he went: 'Dad, can I have a Lamborghini?'"

"I said to him: 'A Lamborghini? You're seven?' He said, 'We could keep it for a while!'"

Noel can remember when he first moved out of his parents' house not being able to afford carpet, and the abject social humiliation of bringing lucky ladies backing to his flat — only for them to muse aloud: "You've got no carpet?"

Noel can also remember coming to London for the first time and people having no carpet on the floor and saying to his mother: "You know in London, they don't have carpet on the floor? What they've done is polished the floorboards." It's impossible not to warm to Noel Gallagher, or his brilliant new album with his band High Flying Birds, *Who Built the Moon?* Its imminent arrival next week was given due status with Noel on the cover of the new *Q* magazine with the headline: *The Emperor Strikes Back*. He started writing *Who Built the Moon?* in Belfast in the studio with his co-conspirator David Holmes in 2014. Is it more difficult to write songs when he is no longer in a carpet-less bedsit and instead is flying in private jets — with Bono — with a settled marriage and kids?

"The way my song-writing works, it all depends on the tune. The lyrics were always, always, the last. It's always about the melody and the tune."

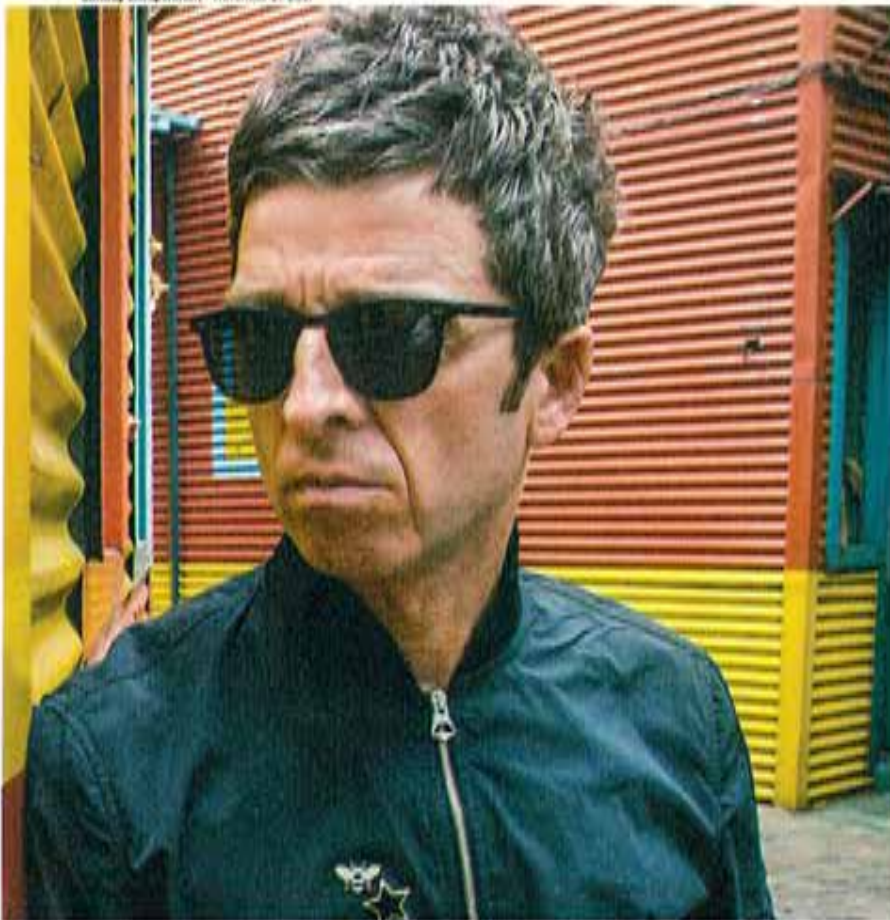
He seems to always find the melody easy enough, I say.

"It's a piece of p\*ss. Well, I am first generation Irish. We have the music in us. I find the most difficult thing about songwriting is the first line," says Noel who was, of course, the principal songwriter with a band who sold 75 million records and played to millions of fans around the world (Oasis' two concerts in August 1996 at Knebworth were to over 250,000-plus people.) "If me and David [Holmes] are in the studio," he adds, "and we hit a wall, we go: 'What would Bowie do here?'"

Noel once said that his passion had gone with Oasis. How did he get that passion back after he eventually left Oasis in 2009? "I was thinking about this recently. People think, or they might think, that it was the first time that I had hit a creative wall. But I didn't know what that was, because it had never happened before. In the same way that I didn't know that *Definitely Maybe* was a peak because it had never happened before. I started to chase it and when you start to chase it, you start forcing it, and when you start forcing it, it is not natural. I listen back to *Be Here Now*, not that I listen back to it, I just think, it's trying too hard. I should have f\*\*\*ing taken another five years off! It comes back by letting it find you. The one piece of advice [Paul] Weller ever gave me was, 'Don't f\*\*\*ing chase it. If it comes back, great!'"

Did Noel ever think it wasn't going to come back? He shakes his head. "No." Was he walking around the house with his wife racked with angst? "No. I'm not that insanely f\*\*\*ing driven. I actually don't take other people's opinions at all, when I'm writing. Because you know what? I f\*\*\*ing wrote *Live Forever* and *Wonderwall* and *Don't Look Back*





### *in Anger.*

I ask Noel is that enough for him. "It would have been back then. If I never wrote another song from this point onwards, I would genuinely, with my f\*\*\*ing hand on heart, think: 'Out of all the people, I f\*\*\*ing smashed it more than 99pc of the people who write songs. I am up not there with the f\*\*\*ing greats like Dylan, Springsteen, McCartney — but after that!'"

Does he think the first two Oasis albums, *Definitely Maybe* in 1994 and *(What's the Story) Morning Glory?* in 1995, were his heyday? "In terms of record sales, clearly, but I think now with this record," he says, referring to *Who Built the Moon?*, "I'm at a peak. Some kind of peak. And peaks are only relevant to the troughs, right? So you're down here one minute and up here the next. So I'm at some f\*\*\*ing kind of peak. How high that peak is, I don't know, but it is the first time in my life that I feel that I have come to that conclusion, and how I react to it from here on in is going to be fascinating," he adds.

His childhood was scarred, owing to the alleged abusiveness of his father, from whom Noel is long since estranged. Did he channel that pain into song-writing?

"They do say there's something in it, your upbringing. So it must be. But I've got to say it has never made it into my songs. Like 'my abusive childhood': I suppose, if anything, it made me when I got the chance and I met Alan McGee [Creation Records boss] and we were going to get this record deal [in 1993], if anything my upbringing led me to realise that you only get one chance, and nobody is going to f\*\*\* it up for me."

"And," he says, "I am going to do

all that I can not to go back and live on the dole. So maybe that. But the parental thing, not really..."

Did Noel worry when he became a dad to Anais, Sunny and Donovan that he didn't have a role model as a father growing up?

"Of course," he says.

I say to Noel that he didn't instinctively have the tools to be a father.

"Men don't," he replies. "Whatever people say about being a dad, women have nine months to get used to this thing growing inside them. So they have accepted it. You get 10 minutes as a guy because you think it is all going to go away and then you wake up and go, 'No, it's actually real. Especially if it is your first one. You don't know how you are going to react. For some people it is the making of them; for some people it can go f\*\*\*ing off the rails. I was lucky in a way. I don't really sit and analyse my role as a dad. My wife thinks I'm an appalling dad. And rightly so. Because I let my kids away with murder."

I ask him why he walked out on one of the biggest bands in the world — Oasis — on the infamous night of August 26, 2009, in Paris?

"I had had it. I sat in the car for five minutes. There was silence until my security guard's walkie-talkie was crackling and he said, 'Are we staying or going?' And I said, 'We're going.' Once I had said those words, I thought, 'That's it'. But, you know, I felt I had done enough. I felt that I, personally, had done enough. I felt that this was just going to go around in circles, forever. It is easy to sit there and pick up the cheque, travel in separate aeroplanes, separate dressing rooms, go onstage at opposite sides of the venue, and do the gig. 90pc of those big hands do

it. U2 don't do it because they are big f\*\*\*ing mates." With Oasis, he adds, it's like, "You arrive and you leave separately. And you have written all these joyous f\*\*\*ing songs."

Did Noel fear his creativity was being killed by being in Oasis? Or did he fear that he and Liam would kill each other?

"I never fought with Liam at all. Liam was fighting with himself. Right now, he is picking a fight with himself somewhere. I don't suffer fools in any f\*\*\*ing sense at all, but I suffered him more than maybe I should have done. I felt maybe,

**'I couldn't bear the fighting and the shouting with Liam any more. U2 don't do it because they are big mates...'**



Liam and Noel as young children

looking back on it, that the stadium rock thing wasn't me any more. At the time, it wasn't a musical decision. It was literally a case of I can't bear the fighting and the shouting and the firing people for no reason."

Noel once said that he felt Liam's anger came from the fact that he was doing interviews with the press about songs he hadn't written (and Noel had written). Noel wrote all the songs. Liam is now writing his own songs but Liam still seems just as angry. "I don't know where that comes from because we had exactly the same upbringing..."

So it is not, as Liam alleged in the recent documentary *Supersonic*, that their animosity is all about Liam as a teenager once urinating on Noel's stereo in his bedroom growing up?

"Who knows what's inside the mind of a village idiot?"

Most of the things Liam has said about his brother have been pretty juvenile fare. What Liam said about Noel performing at the We Are Manchester benefit in September at Manchester Arena — in response to the 22 innocents murdered on May 22 — went beyond sibling rivalry. On Twitter, Liam dismissed it as a "PR stunt" and claiming his brother "doesn't give a f\*\*\*."

"I will say this — and this is all I will say about it," Noel says, "I don't think that he [Liam] is well. I think it says more about him than it does about anything else. I honestly don't think he is well."

Does their mother ever get involved? "I was out with her, in Manchester, a couple of weeks ago and she never said a word. You know what Irish mums are like."

Noel grew up in Burnage where, for most of the young men, life consisted of two things: football and beer. Noel used to venture into Manchester to go to gigs. Why does he think he was different? "I do not know because I do not come from a musical family at all."

Noel's big brother Paul said he was a military genius as a kid because he had a lot of Action Men?

"I could well have been a military genius, if I had been born at the turn of the century!" he laughs, "or been in the Second World War! I had a lot of Action Men!"

His mother once said about him that, as a boy, he was a very good storyteller.

"A good bullshitter." The songs he has written, the ones that will be remembered for decades to come like *Don't Look Back in Anger*, clearly illustrate that Mrs Gallagher was onto something about her son's knack for telling a good story.

There was something in Noel he was trying to get out to the wider world. "Clearly. And I have been doing this since I've been 20-odd."

Was he as miserable as he appeared after the *Be Here Now* album in 1997?

"Very far from it!" he laughs. "I was having the time of my life!"

But he was in a band that he no longer seemed to be happy in. Presumably he was unhappy with the Oasis songs from that period? "Some of it. *Go Let It Out* is pretty good. But I had nothing left to write about. I had this ability, in the early days, before I became a rock star, to articulate the universal truths. Like love and loss. So, once you become an extremely famous and successful songwriter you have nothing left to write about.

So I spent quite a few years making shit up for the sake of it, to go on tour, and then it came back."

Noel is a Manchester City fanatic. We spend 10 minutes when the interview ends discussing his precious team's mercurial manager Pep Guardiola. Do Noel's two sons *have* to be Man City fans? "They didn't have to be, but it was in their interests if they were. I said to both of them: 'I genuinely would love you to support City but there are two teams you are not supporting. And that's f\*\*\*ing Man United and Arsenal. Liverpool would have been a close third.'"

Other than Man City, does Noel have any other religion? God has popped up in his songs over the years. "Logic leads me to think otherwise. I just can't get my head around God. I definitely believe in destiny. But religious people say, this is God guiding you. When really in the modern age you are looking at the religious Armageddon that we have in the world and you think: 'Well, if God is a real f\*\*\*ing thing, wouldn't now be the right time for you to show yourself... not through f\*\*\*ing nonsense like a banana shaped like the Hail Mary?' On the other hand, I absolutely kind of envy people who have the faith."

Does his beloved mother still have the faith? "No. But my in-laws have it a great deal," he says, "and I envy them because it makes them feel better about things. I don't have that. I respect them more because they are just hoping for the best. Whereas it is the out-cases who will f\*\*\*ing kill you if you don't believe in God."

I say to him that love over hate is almost the theme of *Who Built the Moon?*

"If you listen to *Holy Mountain*, I don't care who you are, when you play that to a suicide bomber on the way to the train, he won't detonate his bomb. Because it is so f\*\*\*ing joyous and it is about beautiful things in life. Women. Drinking. Life. All the great things in life, you can crystallise it down into that one song. It is the same with *Definitely Maybe*. It is a joyous album about melancholic things. I think it is an Irish thing."

How does Noel's Irish side come out? "It comes out more when I'm around Irish people. You know, when I was on tour with U2, Sara [his wife] was kind of thinking: 'Let's just f\*\*\*ing move there! You feel so comfortable with U2, with Irish people. Because they remind you of your upbringing.'"

Dubliners are like Mancunians in a way.

"Yeah. You feel comfortable with the sense of humour. You know the reference points that all the young 'uns that followed the tour [The Joshua Tree]. They remind you of your cousins growing up. And all the other people are like your aunts or your uncles. So I feel very comfortable with it. Sara and I go over there, where Bono lives in Killiney. When I'm driving there, I go: 'I could see myself living here.'"

And?

"And then," Noel Gallagher laughs, "you think: 'I would literally become an alcoholic!'"

Noel Gallagher's *High Flying Birds* play The 55k Arena, Belfast on May 9th & 3Arena, Dublin on May 10th. Tickets are on sale now via [www.ticketmaster.ie](http://www.ticketmaster.ie) The new album *Who Built the Moon?* is out on November 24.