

Christy Moore sings exclusively for **Dónal Lynch**, and talks about the family tragedy that informs one of the new tracks on his powerful new album, the addictions that nearly destroyed him, and being physically attacked after performances

# 'Sadness, exile, injustice and love, mixed in with madness and mayhem'

**Y**ou thought it would be just another November day, and then, like a school of dolphins coming into view from the prow of a boat, a wonder appears right in front of you. Christy Moore takes out his guitar and, just a couple of feet from my chair, begins singing 'The Dark End of the Street', just to me.

The whole world seems to fall away as his pure, intimate voice tells the story of a love that had to exist in shadows.

He tells me afterward that while singing he thought of the older Irish gay men for whom things like the marriage referendum, and the normalisation of gay life, came too late. Men who, as the song goes, had to "hide in shadows where we don't belong, living in darkness to hide our wrongs".

It's a rare privilege to see the great man up close in full flight and the performance seems to sum up so much about Christy Moore: the ability to connect with sadness and loss in song, his career-long

championing of the underdog and his facility for holding an audience in the palm of his hand.

There are front row seats and then there is this, I think. At the end, he opens his eyes again, and it's hard to know whether to clap, or simply stare dumbfounded.

The room where we meet – at the Sandymount Hotel in Dublin – is where he recently recorded his new album, *Flying into Mystery*.

The first single, 'Clocks Wind Down', is written by Jim Page, who contributed a number of songs to Moving Hearts (Christy's former band) back in the day. The lyrics refer to reason falling on "deaf ears" in the fight against climate change.

He also name-checks the young Swedish campaigner Greta Thunberg. And yet in singing it, Moore isn't preaching from the mount or presenting himself as some paragon of virtue on the subject.

"I think we're f\*\*ked," he says. "And

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*It feels as though we are past the point of no return. We can't stop. We are addicted to all these consumer things. And that depresses me*

Light and shade – Christy Moore connects with sadness and loss in song. Picture by Steve Humphreys



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I'm saying that now and I'd hate for my children or grandchildren to hear that, but it feels as though we are past the point of no return. We can't stop. We are addicted to all these consumer things. And that depresses me but I have to get on with my day. I have to get around by car. I'll be looking at my flatscreen TV tonight."

In many ways *Flying into Mystery* is a very representative Christy album. As it progresses, he wakes you up and then makes you laugh, and think.

There are meditative, atmospheric songs like 'Greenland' – for him about lockdown in Ireland "lost and sailing into the unknown". There are 'issue' songs like 'Clocks Wind Down' and 'December 1942' (written by Ricky Lynch), a harrowing track which deals with the nightmarish unloading of trains during the Holocaust. And then a song that casts a wry, nostalgic eye over the minutiae and mischief of the Ireland of yesteryear: 'Bord Na Móma Man'.

**His approach is a kind of musical method acting:** with each song there is a story, and a personal resonance that fuels his performance. There's a lot of his upbringing on 'All I Remember' (by Mick Hanly – previously recorded with Moving Hearts in 1982), and there's a line about how the Christian Brothers "made me for better or worse the fool that I am or the wise man I'll be".

"The nuns got me first," Christy recalls. "Aged four they started in on me with their 'fires of everlasting hell'. Then came the Brothers, some of them decent, a few of them savage, they tried to beat the love of God into us."

His parents, Nancy and Andy, did their best for him and his five siblings. Andy died in hospital after undergoing anaesthetic for an ingrown toenail, when Christy was 11. Nancy was widowed, left to raise six children alone. And she had more tragedy to face. Her only brother, who had left Ireland and settled in Sheffield, became a homeless alcoholic.

"He didn't show up until he died," Christy says. "He was my mother's only sibling. He left Ireland at around the start of the Second World War. After the war he met a beautiful lady and settled down in Sheffield and they had three children, my only first cousins."

"His life became tragic, he left the family home in Sheffield, and then disappeared. When he was found [dead] the only thing on him was his jacket with my mother's name and address sown into the inside. He was found on the streets, he had been staying with the Salvation Army."

As a young man Christy loved playing the guitar and singing: "I was always on the wild side of things... going to fleadh and things." After school he took a job in a bank but a strike gave him a kind of career break and he went to England to play music, first in Irish pubs and then eventually in folk clubs, "where people really listened".

At the first folk club he went to, the legendary English folk singer Anne Briggs was performing. "I was really taken by how the whole room was spellbound with her performance. I wanted to be able to do that."

And he worked hard at his craft. Bruce May, the manager of Ralph McTell, got him his first gigs but also gave him a tongue lashing: "He read the riot act to me. He pointed out that I was drinking and telling stupid jokes during the performance. He said 'you're like a stage Irishman'. And that was a wake-up moment for me."

He made his first album, *Paddy on the Road* (1969) and it became something of a rarity since only 500 copies were pressed. However, he was unhappy with what he perceived as the relative indifference of the musicians, and moved back to Ireland to collaborate with people who understood the songs he wanted to play.

He reconnected with his old friend, guitarist/bouzouki player Dónal Lunny, uilleann piper and whistle player Liam



An audience with... Dónal Lynch got the ultimate front row seat when they met in the Sandymount Hotel last week. Below left, Christy with Dónal Lunny on Dublin's Baggot Street in 1985 and, below right, with his wife Valerie



Christy with his collaborator and friend Declan Sinnott



Óg O'Flynn, mandolinist Andy Irvine and bodhrán player Kevin Connell to produce *Prosperous* (1972), an album that marked a turning point in Irish folk music.

It was also around this time he met his wife Val – in what he calls one of the happiest moments of his life – and they had two sons (one of whom, Andy, plays with him now) and a daughter.

The band toured heavily through the 1970s and Moore released two critically acclaimed solo albums. By the time the 1980s arrived the atmosphere in Ireland, and the world, had changed. It seemed to call out for the kind of politically charged music Moore was primed to make. He joined forces with Lunny, Declan Sinnott and other musicians to form Moving Hearts.

"We formed during the first hunger strikes. We played our first night in the Baggot Inn when the *Belgrano* (an Argentinian ship sunk by the British during the Falklands War) went down and Maggie Thatcher was going full steam ahead. That all became part of the atmosphere."

Not everyone was a fan of their political music. Former Taoiseach Jack Lynch's wife Mairín famously rang in to *The Late Late Show* to complain about Moore's performance of an anti-nuclear song – her

“The Valium came about because my poor mother introduced me to it. She said, this lad is great for the hangover. Valium was a devil to get off, but I got off it”



husband's government had planned a reactor at Carnsore Point in Wexford.

"I think when she heard it she thought 'f\*\*k this' and rang in and someone told a journalist. The following Monday it was on the front page of the paper: Taoiseach's wife slams folk singer."

**He recalls that incident with benign amusement,** but there were others who challenged him.

"There were musicians who took issue with me about the North. There was discomfort and I was questioned by other singers, particularly two Northern singers who I won't name. I didn't feel that I had to answer to them."

Morrissey – "or more likely some dog-sbody at his record company" – objected to his changing the title of the song 'America is Not the World' to 'America, I Love You'. And he recalls a few times when audience members got shirty. "I was physically attacked twice that I recall. Once in Port Glasgow in 1967, and once at a Folk Club in North Wales in 1968 – both times after the gig and there was drink involved."

"Another night in Virginia, USA, a guy went mad when I sang 'Hey Ronnie Reagan'. I still remember what he roared:

"You Goddamn c\*\*ksuckin mother-f\*\*kin commie pinko faggot – get outta my country."

"But this is overall not a bad return from 5,000 gigs. I can honestly say there were only a handful of gigs that I did not enjoy."

"Ninety Miles from Dublin" – inspired by the frustration he felt at Southern apartheid regarding the H-Block prisoners – was banned in 1981. His song about the Stardust tragedy, 'They Never Came Home', was also banned a number of years later, and the album on which it appeared, *Ordinary Man*, was removed from the shops.

"I felt the brunt of the legal system which treated me with arrogance and displeasure. But I had to endure that for a mere two hours. The Stardust families have been enduring it for 40 years," Moore says.

Perhaps surprisingly, he says he always felt "inadequate" – both with his place in the world, and, most especially, in comparison to the other musicians in Planxty and Moving Hearts. He was never a particularly prolific songwriter, and the virtuoso play of the likes of Sinnott and Lunny made him feel like he wasn't up to the "complexity" of the music at times.

**Soul brothers - Christy Moore with Planxty's Andy Irvine, Liam Óg O'Flynn and Dónal Lunny in London, 1973. Below, Christy today; picture by Steve Humphreys**



Recovering from that addiction involved, he says, "owning the things that had happened in my life".

"For instance you asked me a little while ago about my father. I had no idea the impact that had on me and why I ended up the way I was. I still remember the excitement of starting to drink when I was 14 – roaring, shouting on the banks of the Liffey."

"Later on when I was in the mad period of my life, I thought I was totally unique. It was only many years later talking to others who'd gone through something similar that I realised I wasn't the only one. And there was a great comfort in that."

Was the excess of those years something he felt he needed to get out of his system?

"For me it was more about getting something into my system," he says, wryly.

"I wouldn't have been able to stop without all the help I got. That help has, within its traditions, [involved] not breaking your anonymity and I choose not to do that. My brother pointed out to me that I had a problem. He led me to the help I needed and I've been getting it every day ever since. I will always be an alcoholic. I woke up this morning an alcoholic and I'll go to bed an alcoholic."

He dismisses talk of being an "icon" – the legends that sit alongside him on the famous mural in Temple Bar are not his own heroes, he says – but there is no doubt he is a national treasure and on Tuesday he'll receive a lifetime achievement honour at the RTE Radio 1 Folk Awards at Dublin's Vicar Street.

**Old age has brought with it contentment.**

"I'm wearing hearing aids; before I came in today my wife cut the hair coming out of my ears and my eyebrows and nostrils. I'm having a problem with my arm but thankfully with physical therapy it's not impacting my capacity to play."

"I have a really full life, a great family and I'm very happy at home. My wife and I are in a good place. My five siblings live on the island and we talk to each other every week. I had a heart attack 33 years ago which changed my life so I get checked up regularly." He says that "of course" at 76 years of age he thinks about the end of life.

"I just know one thing: when I die I'm going to go straight to heaven. And I know who's going to be up there to meet me: Luke Kelly, Séamus Ennis and Liam Óg O'Flynn."

And how does he know he won't be going the other way. "To hell?" he says, mock-aghast. "Well if they're down there I'll go down there too."

Christy Moore's album *'Flying into Mystery'* will be released on Friday

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# 'It is a weird experience to see magazine covers of your recent ex kissing his new girlfriend'

Minnie Driver talks to **Dónal Lynch** about the 'brutality' of the moment Matt Damon dumped her, Harvey Weinstein and Hollywood's toxic film culture, shooting in Ireland, and living with the death of her mum last year

It's Monday morning in London and Minnie Driver has had a rough night. She was crying on the phone to her partner, the filmmaker Addison O'Dea, who is many time zones away, in California. She misses him. She misses her son Henry, who is away at boarding school. That loneliness and the grief at the death of her mother – who passed away last year – all seemed to come together in one tearful phone call.

"I've got a huge amount of things going on," she says. "I've written a book, I'm just about to start filming a movie. And he [Addison] is making a documentary. But I just had this feeling of 'we're all scattered to the wind, so what's any of it worth?' I was thinking about my mother having died and it makes me feel like there's no point if we're not all together telling each other that we love each other every day. "And I said all this and he, so gently and so strongly, just said, 'hold on, hold on, hold on'."

O'Dea has always been "like a light-house" for Driver. They met in an extraordinary period at the end of 2017, when personal tragedy and natural disaster came together for her.

It began one night in December of that year. Her boyfriend at the time – an old friend from childhood – was lying asleep in bed beside her at her beachside home in Malibu, when the sound of a text message disturbed the peace. What followed was a dump of texts, sexts and photographs from a woman who this man was also having a relationship with.

It was "quite dramatic", Driver recalls.

"I mean, she [the other woman] is as mad as the March wind but she did me a huge favour. Even though it was awful, it's better to know, and I'm glad to know. I was about to buy a house for him and his children and my son to all live in together. It was awful but I don't think I'm that special, in that I think this shit happens to everyone."

She rang her sister for consolation and went back to work on *Speechless*, the sitcom she was starring in, feeling chronically incapable of playing anything for laughs.

Then, in the following days while she sifted through the rubble of the relationship, searching for retrospective clues, a friend called her and told her to turn on the news. A fire, which had started in nearby Simi Valley, had become an inferno which was roaring its way down the coast, toward her home. A mandatory evacuation of Malibu followed, but Driver, whose house had somehow survived the blaze, remained behind.

There was no electricity and no way to get proper food supplies to the house, unless they were brought by boat. The only person who she could think of who might be up to the task was Addison, who she had met a year previously, and who, with his experience filming in disaster zones, might be up to her "outrageous request".

A few days later he was guiding a boat laden with snacks across the water toward her home. That night she told him the whole story of the end of her relationship and they struck up a friendship, which turned into a relationship.

"There was the decimation of the relationship and then the decimation of my

**Open book – Minnie Driver is bracingly honest and reflective in both her new memoir and in conversation.**

Picture by Sophia Spring

home, potentially. Literally out of those ashes comes this other thing, which is a person who is like a beacon. And who is the complete antithesis of everything that I'd ever experienced, particularly around male relationships.

"It's a relationship unlike any other I've had. And so how can I fault all of that pain if it brings you this love and this knowledge? How can I say it was bad?"

**In conversation, and on the page, Driver is bracingly honest and reflective.** Hard-won knowledge is one of the main themes of her ferociously forthright and funny memoir, *Managing Expectations*, which deals with her childhood, her rise to fame, and some of the key moments from her life and career.

It's the story of a woman who faced down Hollywood ogres like Harvey Weinstein, had her heart broken in the white hot spotlight of international attention, and had a child on her own. It's also a kind of riposte to all those commentators who think she underachieved in a career arc that has run from leading lady to a respected, if no longer A-list, character actor.

"Don't you realise how unimaginative and toothless it is to call me what I am?" she writes. "You'd really do far more damage sneering at me for what I'm not – for all the things I have tried so hard to be and have so far failed at. Honestly, ask me like, three questions about myself and I'll give you proper ammo for a more interesting assassination."

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And so I begin by asking her about her peripatetic childhood – she was raised in Barbados until she was seven – and about the influence her mother, a model and fabric designer, and her financier father had on her.

The book begins with chapters which explore the breakdown of her parent's relationship, the tension she felt with her mother's new partner (which resulted in her being sent away to boarding school) and her father's girlfriend – she felt he had chosen "bikinis over blood".

Did all of this family tumult impact how she viewed herself and her relationships with men?

"I mean, it's the nature versus nurture question. It's hard to know how much I came into life with and how much was made. I was an articulate, truth-telling kid who would just never let anybody get any peace.

"I try not to spend too much time judging it because I know now I've been in all these relationships that didn't work. It is hard to judge. They were doing the best they could. And sometimes that wasn't that great, but it was the best they could do."

Performing, which she did even at school, was "all to do with filling these other holes I had in my life. I couldn't name what those cracks were when I was a little girl. It was a vocation too, though, a bread-and-butter. It fed me in such a specific way."

She went to drama school in London but was the only person in her graduating class without an agent. A friend blagged her a meeting with an agent and she began to make inroads as an actor, gaining slots in commercials – she memorably describes storming out of one where she'd been asked to recreate the orgasm scene from *When Harry Met Sally* – and her first major film role.

That film, *Circle of Friends*, was an adaptation of a Maeve Binchy coming-of-age story, which was filmed in 1995 in Killenny.

Driver recalls local women knitting her jumpers to cover up her ample chest. "I still have 10 of them. They were like, Oh God, love, here, cover up your chest. You're going to catch a chill and something worse. People were so worried about my apparent virginity."

The biggest star in the film was Chris O'Donnell and while Driver did a decent job of the Irish accent, O'Donnell delivered one for the bogus brogue hall of shame. Driver says this was down to their different experiences of Ireland.

"He was the big American star. He stayed at the golf course. We were all in the fantastic bed and breakfast outside Thomastown. The landlady would come to the door and be like: 'There's soda bread in the back and some soup. Help yourself to milk. We [she and O'Donnell] lived very different lives in that movie. And his accent was part of his whole golf course experience."

Her career gathered momentum over the following years. She starred alongside John Cusack in the black comedy *Grosse Pointe Blank* and voiced Lady Eboshi in Hayao Miyazaki's animated classic *Princess Mononoke*. Driver later said she was interested in "the challenge of playing a woman [Lady Eboshi] who supports industry and represents the interests of man, in terms of achievement and greed."

At the time, she was already in the process of being cast for *Good Will Hunting* and came up against the film's now notorious producer, Harvey Weinstein. She watched as women navigated the atmosphere around him.

"There were always girls on his lap. Girls that I knew. There was always a strange cat fight around the roles and vying for his attention. I wanted to say to them, 'don't play this game' and I did say that."

"There was a cabal around Harvey Weinstein. I was not, for whatever reason... I did



Driving force – clockwise from top left, Minnie and co-star Chris O'Donnell in 'Circle of Friends', 1995; awards season with filmmaker beau Addison O'Dea in 2020; with former flame Matt Damon in 1997; starring in sitcom 'Will & Grace'

not look the way that he thought a hot, sexy actress should look."

In fact, he called her "not f\*\*kable" but the director Gus Van Sant and co-writers and stars Matt Damon and Ben Affleck advocated for her and she got the part.

She delivered an incredibly affecting performance as Damon's love interest in the film and the famous, wrenching breakup scene was given added emotional resonance as life imitated art.

She and Damon fell madly in love on the set. She left her Irish agent in America – Clare woman Hylda Queally – to move to Damon's agent. Driver calls it "one of the top three mistakes of my life" and says she doesn't think Queally has "ever forgiven me".

And then, a little over a year later, after the film had come out, in their New York apartment, Damon asked Driver for some space. She flew to California and, while it has been reported that Damon "dumped" her by revealing he had a new girlfriend in an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Driver says she actually got the news from a magazine rack which featured rows of gossip titles with pictures of him kissing his new flame.

The media placed Driver in the role of "spurned woman", which would later be thrust on Jennifer Aniston. When it came to the 1998 Oscars – she had been nominated for Best Supporting Actress for her role in *Good Will Hunting* – the camera was trained on her face at the ceremony,

“There was always a strange cat fight around the roles and vying for Harvey Weinstein's attention”

hoping, she believes, for some crack in her smile. It was both the zenith of her career and the lowest point in her personal life.

"It was all just brutal," she says. "It is an astonishingly weird experience to walk down a supermarket aisle and for every magazine to have a picture of your very recent ex in a massive close-up, kissing his new girlfriend, who it turns out, he'd been with for a bit. The way that I look at it now, he was just doing what the fame was doing to him."

Was she angry at Damon?  
"He didn't behave kindly. But then again, he was, whatever, 26, 25. I think doing it all publicly was especially difficult. If it had just been in your normal life, you would've had your mate scream at them in the pub. You would've had a big barney, you would've all calmed down and everyone would be friends again."

"Then maybe you'd even get to know his new girlfriend or you just wouldn't ever see them again. And it would be fine."

"If you are famous, everybody knows about it. You don't get to do your folly in private like most people do."

"I loved him," she adds. "I really did love him."

Over the following decade her most memorable roles were on television, such as a recurring part on *Will & Grace*. But, as with Aniston, it was Driver's love life that preoccupied the press. An "occupational hazard" was "falling for actors", she says.

Family fortunes – Minnie and her late mother Gaynor and, below right, with O'Dea and her son Henry



In 2006 she was engaged to be married to *Avengers* actor Josh Brolin, Barbra Streisand's son-in-law, but broke it off. She doesn't write about it in the book because "it was too hard and personal", but she adds: "It made me realise I had to be by myself for a while, which is what I did."

Did it bother her that she missed out on a potential duet with Streisand? "Oh God. Yeah, the wedding. That would've been great. Me and Babs. She's amazing."

While working alongside Eddie Izzard on *The Riches*, a 2007 FX series about a group of Irish Travellers living the American dream, she began a relationship with one of the writers.

After they broke up, she found out she was pregnant and now has a 13-year-old son, Henry. She says Henry has a great relationship with his father and she's proud of the young man he is becoming.

"We just have such a laugh, me and Henry. He's exactly what I would've dreamed my son would be – which is kind and empathetic to his friends and the people around him, but with a super wry wit about the world and a curiosity and an independence."

She still turns in memorable performances – most recently in *Modern Love*, the John Carney-directed adaptation of the *New York Times* column of the same name – but the narrative that she somehow let superstardom slip through her fingers doesn't bother her.

"I would challenge any one of those journalists who

say that to go in and experience what it actually feels like to be in that crucible. To feel your career burning that brightly, that hard, is uncomfortable."

"I love acting and I've always found work that is meaningful to me. And I'd go and do 10 rounds in a ring with anyone who forces the idea that the barometer of success is that level of fame."

Her mother died last year after an illness that Driver says was mercifully short.

"A drawn-out, prolonged illness would've been her idea of the worst kind of hell. And yet it was very difficult for us to watch that and very frightening to watch it happen so quickly. There was a moment of extreme disbelief for her that it was happening that quickly."

She was with her mother right at the end and describes it as "a privilege and an atrocity watching someone you love die and being with them".

It was a painful moment in what has been, more broadly, a happy few years for Driver.

She will be reunited with O'Dea and Henry this summer and says she knows how to "figure out a way to be hopeful, even when I'm not".

She came across a poem recently which she's going to put on her desk. It's called 'To Be Alive' by Gregory Orr: "To be alive: not just the carcass/ But the spark/ That's crudely put, but... If we're not supposed to dance/ Why all this music?"

These days, 20 years after she first lit up Hollywood, Driver has a more enduring kind of spark.

'Managing Expectations', published by Bonnier, €21, is out now



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# Culture queen is back on the scene

At the heart of Manhattan during the golden age of magazines, Tina Brown – former editor of *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker* – has seen it all. She tells **Dónal Lynch** about working with Harvey Weinstein, raising her special needs son and coping with the death of her editor husband Harold Evans

There's something exhilarating and terrifying about meeting Tina Brown. As an editor who ruled New York in the 1980s and 1990s, she could make or break the careers of journalists with a nod. She was a tastemaker, an impresario, and the reigning monarch of glossy magazine publishing, during a glorious heyday of blank cheques and unfettered access to A-list stars.

But those days are long gone; the industry has been eaten alive by the internet and social media. The big celebrity interview, which she all but invented, has been declared "dead" by the *New York Times*. And Brown has left it all behind.

These days she is the writer rather than the editor; she's written a new and fascinating book about the UK royal family, and, though her own regal bearing remains, the intimidation factor is gone.

On a publicity tour to promote *The Palace Papers*, she cuts an understandably wounded figure. We meet at her old stomping ground Soho Works on Dean Street in London – fittingly, Harry and Meghan had their first blind date just next door – but, 40 years after she left, it's not a city that Brown really recognises.

Despite being regarded in America, her adopted home, as a sort of national spokesperson for all things English, she feels like "an outsider" here and deplors the fact that there are now more publicists than journalists in the city.

"It's just awful, they suck the blood – and the air – out of everything."

And it's been a lonely few days, filled with nostalgia and reminiscence. This has been her first trip to London since her husband, former *Sunday Times* editor Harry Evans, died in 2020.

"It's been hard. Just all of the memories of him here and meeting people who knew him. I don't know if it will ever get easier."

Harry died a few months after she began working on the book. There was a small private funeral in New York.

"After that I took off to LA, and I didn't want to be around our house in the country where we [she and Harry] had spent so much time together. So we rented a house and I went with the two kids, and we really had a good four months in the sunshine. I was working all the time, and it was a good thing to do actually, kind of soothing. And my daughter adopted this wonderful bulldog for me, who has become the love of my life."

She met Evans in the 1970s when she was regarded as the enfant terrible of

English journalism. A bright, wilful girl, she had already been expelled from several schools for "crimes of attitude" when she went to Oxford and fell for what she once called "the frenzy of closing a magazine on deadline". She wrote pieces taking the piss out of the piss-takers-in-chief – the editors of *Private Eye* – and wrote freelance pieces for the *New Statesman* and *Punch*. Evans, then editor of the *Sunday Times*, took notice, and soon she was writing for the paper.

Despite the fact that he was married at the time, they began an affair. "Certainly now I look back and think, 'Wow, what were we thinking?'" she says. "But at the time I was 25 and just madly, madly in love. It was a coup de foudre on both our parts. You know? And I guess when you're madly in love, you do things that you wouldn't do otherwise."

**At just 25 she also became editor of *Tatler***, where she conducted "a forensic study of the upper classes", but she soon felt "professionally listless".

When Si Newhouse, the billionaire CEO of Condé Nast, which bought *Tatler* in 1982, dangled the prospect of reviving the then-defunct *Vanity Fair*, she jumped at the chance, but watched in dismay as he allowed her only a consultation role and appointed two dud interim editors in succession. She eventually gave him an ultimatum – the editorship or nothing – and in the winter of 1984 he finally gave her the reins.

When she arrived in JFK airport she took a taxi to Manhattan, and on the way listened to Dr Ruth purvey advice about sex on the radio. "You tek it in the mouth und move it slowly, slowly up und down," Dr Ruth instructed. And Brown knew she had arrived in another world. It was one she felt was "too big, too rich, too driven". America, she felt, "needed editing". And so she got to work.

At *Vanity Fair* she brought intellectual heft to the celebrity froth by keeping the "original DNA" of the "fairly lightweight" 1920s magazine but bolstering

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*I've a very long leash for people who are talented but a very short leash for people who are not*

it with serious journalism. She looked most especially for "writers with ideas and something to say; it wasn't enough to simply be a prose stylist".

And she found that in the likes of Dominick Dunne, whom she had the prescience to coax into journalism – his account of the case of Claus von Bülow, a socialite accused and then acquitted of the attempted murder of his wife, is considered a classic – and the late Gail Sheehy, whose famous profile of Hillary Clinton she recently reread. "It was unbelievable; Gail sitting beside Hillary while she [Hillary] shouted at Bill Clinton about the scandal with Gennifer Flowers. Who would ever get that kind of access today?"

Her formula was: "Celeb cover to move the newsstand, juicy news narrative... A-list literary piece, visual escapism, revealing political profile, fashion. If we nail each of these per issue it's gonna work."

Work it did, and as the readership grew – six-fold in just a few years – so did the advertising, and the egos with which Brown had to deal.

"I have a very long leash for people who are talented but a very short leash for people who are not," she says. "Brilliant people are often very demanding. Annie Leibovitz, for instance, was not easy to manage. There was a question of how I would deal with that. But in the end I valued her so much, and she brought so much to *Vanity Fair*, that it was worth it."

By 1985 she was married to Evans (the guests at their wedding included Nora Ephron and Ben Bradlee). That same year she was pregnant with her son Georgie and briefly considered giving up her career to be a stay-at-home mother, but didn't. She would go on to have a daughter, Isabel, who is now 32.

Soon after Georgie's birth she went back to Oxford to research a piece on the death of heiress Olivia Channon, when she encountered "a young fogey with a thatch of blond hair and a plummy voice" who grew up to be Boris Johnson. He fed his girlfriend what Brown says were false details of their meeting, which the girlfriend subsequently wrote up in a piece for the *Sunday Telegraph*. Brown says that, looking back, the whole episode was telling.

"He was wildly entertaining but with no moral compunctions, that's what I saw that time, and that's the way he's turned out to be," she says now. "He has no rectitude of any kind, but he has sizzle. He has star power."

She left *Vanity Fair* in 1992 to edit

*The New Yorker* and brought a newsiness and a playfulness to its august pages. Under her editorship the magazine gained readers and improved its bottom line every year.

But essayist George Trow, who had been with the magazine for almost 30 years, was among those who accused her of "kissing the ass of celebrity". Others deplored her management style.

"A lot of people would have said I was so scary, I think," she says. "Jamaica Kincaid called me 'Stalin in high heels'. She was probably right about that. There were plenty of people who thought that I was like that. I think focus is frightening in a woman. People feel intimidated, women are supposed to disguise their focus by being more conciliatory."

The full picture was, of course, more complex than the martinet caricatures. She was a woman of contradictions, a self-confessed "introvert" who nonetheless felt compelled to throw parties where she could watch "the high and the low of society" at play.

Her newsreader visage, the blonde hair and pearls, were a mask. And she wrestled with the guilt of leaving her son with a nanny, all the more so when she learned that he had Asperger's Syndrome. She says that the challenges presented by this have not lessened as he has grown older.

"It's very, very difficult because he can do a lot of things – he can drive a car, he can order an Uber – but he's always going to need help. He needs assistance, and finding the right method for him to be happy, it gets harder and harder actually."

**In some ways the challenge of a special needs child made her ambition all the more remarkable.**

Her dream was to branch out of magazines. She envisaged a New Yorker-branded media empire, which would also include TV and movies. Condé Nast wasn't so keen – and so, in 1998, she joined forces with a man who seemed to share her multi-media vision: Harvey Weinstein. She founded *Talk* magazine with him in 2001.

with a launch party that was attended by Madonna, Salman Rushdie and Demi Moore.

But from the off there were problems. Weinstein, with his film background, was used to a situation "where you throw everything, financially speaking, at the movie and then if it doesn't work, that's it, you cut off the funding and you move on to the next thing".

He didn't understand that magazines needed consistent support and greater patience to be successful. Besides that, there was his abrasive management style.

"He would shout constantly, berate, yell. And he was also just so impossible because the thing I hated, which he did the most, was that he would just run around town, offering assignments to people he basically wanted to keep on his good side. Because as was later revealed, he had so much to hide that he was always trying to co-opt the press."

"That was a particular nightmare, because I'm so much in control of what I do, there's no way I'm going to publish bad pieces, just because Harvey Weinstein wants to consider some gossip columnist that he wants to keep away."

She never experienced any

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Jamaica Kincaid called me 'Stalin in high heels'. She was probably right about that... I was scary

unwanted overtures from him.

"I certainly wasn't his type. I mean he liked beautiful, young, starlets, so I was never in danger of that."

She never heard the rumours about Weinstein (who is now serving a prison sentence for sexual assault and rape); they worked in different buildings, she points out. And it was commercial reality rather than personal animus which ended their alliance. Despite achieving very respectable sales – around 670,000 per issue – *Talk's* advertising fell off a cliff after the September 11 attacks and publication ceased at the beginning of 2002.

It was her first professional failure but, looking back, she remains proud.

"The whole idea of an across-the-board content company was 20 years ahead of its time. Look at *The New York Times* [and its multimedia content]; they're all doing it now."

She founded news and comment website *The Daily Beast*, which is named after the fictional newspaper in Evelyn Waugh's novel, *Scoop*, in 2008. One of its first big stories was on Jeffrey Epstein, the financier and convicted sex offender.

"We were the first to write the story about Epstein and the sweetheart deal that he had with the district attorney, and how he got [his prison sentence] reduced and so on."

Two years later, in 2010, she perhaps missed the scoop of her life when she turned down an invitation to the so-called "Predators' Ball", the dinner that Prince Andrew was said to have thrown for Epstein after he was released from prison. Woody Allen was another guest.

"As a journalist I'm now kicking myself that I didn't go. But in another way... I also am glad I wasn't on that list. I mean, because it was a reprehensible affair. I just could not face being at that table with him [Epstein], Andrew, and Woody Allen."

But it would have made a great chapter in a book."

**Not that she's been short of great material.** Since leaving *The Daily Beast* in 2014, she has written two books, *The Vanity Fair Diaries* – a fascinating account of her time at the magazine – and now, *The Palace Papers*.

Given her great skill at blending high and low culture during her magazine career, I wonder where she feels the royals fit into that spectrum. Are they a serious subject, to be garnished with gossip – or are they state-sponsored Kardashians, whom we pretend represent important issues of nationhood?

"They're a serious subject with moments of sizzle," Brown responds, using that beloved word again. "They are colourful and they are human, but they mean something too."

For all her delectable morsels – did you know, for instance, that Charles had another mistress, who wasn't Camilla, in the 1980s, or that Andrew once called Fergie "a fat cow"? – it's the moments of statesmanship, she says, that stand out. "That's why the Queen's trip to Ireland, to me, was a very important highlight of the last few years and of the book, because it reminds you of what the Queen is for and what she can do, and what the soft power of the royal family, when deployed right, can achieve."

Mary McAleese's mouthing of the word "wow" when the Queen spoke in Irish was "a little bit of a teenager moment", says Brown, even though speaking the local lingo was at McAleese's prior suggestion.

This is Brown's second book on the family – she also wrote *The Diana Chronicles* in 2007 – and the "papers" are figurative, not a literal tranche of leaked documents.

There are some who have said her narrative of the "good" royals – like Kate, who has "a Mona Lisa quality" – and the "bad" royals, the "almost comic" Andrew, the grasping Meghan, who couldn't resist leveraging her new celebrity – might be something close to the authorised palace narrative.

But, despite the fact that she interviewed Thomas Markle – Meghan's estranged father – Brown says she has been "more compassionate" to Harry and Meghan than most of the press. The idea that Meghan poisoned him against his family is false, she says. "I felt, from my reporting, that Harry was destined to leave anyway. And people close to him surprised me by telling me that, saying that they'd actually often said to one another, 'He's going to go.'"

Brown will herself leave Britain again soon after we speak, to go back to the US, focus on taking care of her son and working her way through her grief; a big memorial service is planned for Harry on June 9.

But first there is the matter of hosting one of her famous parties in London tonight.

"Will you come?" she asks, but this being 2022 rather than 1984, I have to get back to the airport quickly. It's a shame, it would have been something to see her in her element, working the room, mixing the high and the low of society, like in those good old days.

"It's been nice to have something to look forward to finally," she says, a half smile creeping across her face for the first time. "I hope I can still get satisfaction from life. I'll get through this time. And we'll see how I do in the next act."

*"The Palace Papers: Inside the House of Windsor – the Truth and the Turmoil" is published by Century, €20, and out now*

White hot – Tina Brown is a media trailblazer. Picture by Ed Miles

