

TRANSCRIPTION

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CATHERINE MCGOOKIN (b. 1977, Paisley), high school student and part-time service worker, talks about her background on the mainland, her experiences in school, and the social life of teenagers on the island. What follows is a record of the gist of the interview, not necessarily a word-for-word transcription.

[Field project "Faces of Mull," University of California Research Expeditions, 1993; John Niles, director. Tape number 93CM-01, recorded on 9 July 1993 by Sharon Cameron and Linda Schmicker, at Timbertop holiday cottage, Tobermory.]

I was born in Paisley in 1977, then moved to the small town of Kilbarchan from 1982 to 1987. From 1987 to 1989 I lived in Renfrew, near Paisley, then moved to Mull in 1989. I have two jobs here: in the morning I work in a bed and breakfast called Harbor House; in the afternoon I work at the Captain's Table, a restaurant.

—Do you work year-round?

Just in the summer, mainly, but I help out if it's busy in the winter.

—Would you describe a typical day for you in the winter and one in the summer?

In winter, there are six classes a day in school. There is not much to do after school.

—What are the six classes?

It depends on what you choose. There are eight subjects but only six classes in a day, so you have to share subjects. I took home economics, office and information studies (which is keyboarding and typing), biology, chemistry, English, maths, French, and geography. You can also take art & design, physical education, Gaelic, or history. I didn't want to do them.

In the summer it's more interesting because if it's a nice day, the teachers let you go outside. You can play in the park or in a big field, or you just do work. You're meant to do work. After school it's better in summer because usually it isn't raining, so you can go downtown and sit on the benches and just talk to people and eat ice cream and stuff. Or else you can go to a restaurant or cafe and sit in there if it's raining. Apart from that there's not much to do unless you have a bike and can go cycling. You can also hire boats out from Tackle and Books and go out sailing. There's no cinema or swimming pool. There's a fund for the swimming pool but it isn't getting anywhere. No one seems to know what's going on with that, but we're all desperate for one, because a lot of people can't swim.

—Do parents influence the choices at school?

There are requirements for the first 3 years. You choose before the third year. My parents didn't really influence me, but if I'd signed up for something they didn't like, they'd have given me a row and said "No." I took classes because of my friends, but I didn't take Gaelic; I don't like Gaelic. It's hard to learn.

—How does the school system work?

I've just gone into the fifth year. There's six years of [high] school in Scotland. I have one year left unless I want to do a sixth year. The sixth year is a repeat of the fifth year if you fail exams; otherwise, you can go on to university.

—Do you plan to go to university?

Yes. I'd like to be a nurse. I don't know which university yet. It might be four or five years at Glasgow University; one of the years would be with a family. I want to work with children. I have work experience with school. I visited a geriatrics hospital in Oban, but I wouldn't like to work with old people. I don't dislike them, but I wouldn't want to work with them all day. I like children, and I babysit sometimes.

—What kind of guests come to Harbor House?

Always people on holidays. It tends not to get families; it's usually a young couple for a honeymoon, or older people. Sometimes they come with a baby, but not teenagers. They're all really nice people, mainly. I wonder about their personalities, but mainly they appreciate what you do. A lot are Germans or Austrians, but they can all speak English.

—Are the people who come to the Captain's Table a different group?

Yes. At the B & B I get to know the people. At the restaurant they don't talk to you; they just say thank you when you put the food down. In the morning at the B & B it's not so rushed.

—Will you come back after nurses' training?

Yes, definitely. My dad's a policeman here. We have a lot of friends here and he hates moving around, losing contact with friends. We're moving away next year because Dad only posted here for five years, but many people have offered him an invitation to stay with them. I'd come for a holiday, but I don't think I'd like to stay here and live here, because the main jobs are working in the B & B's, fish farms, and restaurants. There are enough doctors and nurses here. I'd like to work in a busier place where I'd have more to do.

—What size is your class this year?

This year was the biggest class: 35. You can leave school at age sixteen; there are about 30 in school now. There are about 200 in the school including primary, so everyone knows everyone; they all come from Mull. Students at the south end of the island board at Oban because that high

school is closer. They stay at a youth hostel [dorm] that's especially meant for them; it's nice. I would rather go to Tobermory school and see family and friends than board at Oban.

—What about school sports?

There is basketball and hockey. The basketball team goes to Skye, Tiree, Islay, Campbeltown. The hockey team is for adults who don't go to school; they also travel and compete. Visiting teams stay at the youth hostel down on Main Street; sometimes the hockey team would house the overflow. There are mixed sexes on the teams. The hockey team is about half boys and girls and some adults as well. The basketball team has more boys than girls, but it's not sexist at all. Most girls don't want to play basketball. Indoor or outdoor hockey depends on the weather. Boys do football, girls do hockey. There's rugby, gymnastics, basketball, badminton. There's volleyball, but the roof isn't high enough in the gym, really. We don't have a lot of equipment and a lot gets broken and stolen.

—What is the ratio of boys to girls in school?

Boys drop out earlier. No girls have dropped out this year; two boys dropped out already and another two at Christmas. There are now more girls than boys. Boys are now working on the fishing boats with their fathers or going to college. A couple are not doing anything.

—What do you like to do for fun?

Discoes, which are licensed for those over 18; dancing. Lots of times we just stand and talk to our friends. We usually meet on Main Street. We don't usually go to people's houses. We don't organize it, but sometimes we just phone someone and ask them to meet downtown. We usually collect a big group unless it's raining.

—Do you use the church for a meeting place?

No. I go to church because my family goes, but no youngsters go except for the minister's two children. The wee children go to Sunday school, but that's not really going to the church. No one's interested in the church, though they don't make fun of you for going.

—Are there any organized things to do?

In the summer there are barbeques at Calgary beach in nice weather. I am not old enough to drive [not 17], so I need to find a lift. Older people take us if they have a car.

—Tell me about licenses for driving.

Learners have to have someone else in the car. Once you pass your test you take the “learner” sign off.

—How does driving on Mull compare to driving on the mainland?

I don't know what they think when they get to Glasgow! [CM discusses city driving.] But if you learn to drive here, you can drive anywhere because the roads are so bad here. You've got to be an expert driver to pass your test up here. [*Laughter.*]

People spend most of their time on Mull because they can't afford to go elsewhere; they take summer holidays on Oban. Most people don't go to other islands. I can't be bothered because I have to go out on a boat. We have to pay too much. People go to Oban for swimming or to the cinema, or to go out for dinner or something.

—How would you describe Mull to someone new?

In the countryside there are beautiful views, flowers, not really ruined with weeds and litter and things. It's quite good up here. It's not that polluted; there are no factories. There are lovely views, especially if it's sunny. There is very little entertainment unless you're an adult and can go into licensed discos and pubs. There are ceilidhs and things like that. As far as the personalities of the people, my view as an outsider is that they really know you. You can't keep a secret from everyone. There is a lot of gossip and rumors, but people are nice. Because my dad's a policeman, the bad side is that if he arrests someone, they don't wave anymore. It's got nothing to do with me what my dad does. It's not my fault but it's not their fault, so I just have to take it, really. I've got two sisters and they just don't bother about it.

—What keeps your dad busy?

He tells me the story but won't tell who he arrests. Mainly it's drinking, stealing. Breach of the peace, fighting. Pubs at nighttime. Underage drinking. Nothing like murders.

—How about drugs in high school?

No, not in high school; not at all. The headmaster once thought they were all glue-sniffing, but it wasn't true. We couldn't go into the corner and do drugs because the school's not big enough to do that. Most people leave school at 17 or 18 and don't start when they're 14. I'm not sure about drugs on the street because people are hush-hush about that, in case it gets out and they get arrested.

—Would you raise a family here?

There are quite nice guys here. It wouldn't matter where you lived if you loved them, but I'd like to widen my horizons a bit, go somewhere else and try to meet some new people. I'd like to get someone from away from here. I don't think I'd like to live here for the rest of my life. I'd like to come up for holidays.

—Do boys and girls do things together, or are they separating off into couples?

At age 16 they aren't usually going out with each other, getting serious. We're just friends at this stage, unless someone asks you out. We hang around in a big group. It's quite good fun because it's girls and boys. If a boy likes a girl he will tell his friend and his friend will tell the girl's

friend, and the friend will tell the girl and the two will end up going out. It's quite funny, actually. Usually everyone fancies someone and everyone knows about it. It can't be kept a secret if you like someone.

—What would they do? [*Laughter.*]

They'd go off together. Kissing and something like that. There's actually lots of places you can go if you want to, what we say, “gettin' off.” I don't know if you've heard that before. [*Laughter.*] There are a lot of corners and things because no one goes out there.

—How old are girls when they start getting married?

Before they're 20. A lot of girls in my class want to get a career first. A lot of girls in my class feel that way, but the boys think, “Oh, I want to get married, and she can be a housewife.” But we're like, “No, we're not getting married to you, then.” A lot of girls want to go to Glasgow and get a job there and widen their horizons, so they can get a better view of the world and then get married. People born in Mull seem to stay in Mull and get married. Have you met any of the MacLeans? [*Discusses other families too.*] A lot of the MacLeans marry MacLeans, born and bred on Mull.

A lot of people aren't married. They live together and aren't married or are going out with each other and not even thinking about getting married.

—Are boys ready for girls with careers?

I spoke to one boy who said, “Yeah, I'll be a house-husband.” I was quite surprised, but a lot of them say, “No way, I'm going to get my wife to cook my dinner and clean my room and do the washing and ironing.” I think boys are slower about women having a career because they think women are made to be for the house. A lot of older males think that, because their wives are in the house. But now younger men are getting more used to women having jobs, because lots of women can get jobs if the man is unemployed.

—If you could travel beyond Glasgow, where would you like to go?

Because I like to work with children, I'd like to go to where children are not well. Not Ethiopia, but somewhere like that where children are deprived and need someone who will care for them. Somewhere like Romania, where the children are on the streets and some of them are not well, or have lost their parents.

—What are your favorite TV programs?

“Home and Away Neighbors.” I love it; I watch it every night if I can. On Monday, I'll watch “Take the Road.” At night, “The Bill”, a police program. “Taggart,” any films, a true story, comedy. If it's on from 8:00 until 10:00, my whole family will watch it. A lot of time we might do things. Because my wee sister, only 11, is not allowed to watch some of the things on television, we watch it another night when she's in bed. I like romantic stories; I don't like horror

ones. My dad likes to watch the films “Halloween” or “Aliens”, but I had to go out in the middle of it. We get videos as well from the video shop down in the town.

—What is your favorite musical group?

I like them all. I don't actually have a favorite one. I like Rave music; that's when you can't understand the words but the music's got a good beat to it. Radio Atlantic 252 plays all the pop music, up-to-date songs. It plays them over and over so you get to know them. Hardway, Abba, Madonna, Michael Jackson, all the rave groups. A lot aren't Scottish. I can't think of any Scottish groups. Runrig's a Scottish group, but I don't really like them. Too Scottish! Also the Proclaimers. I haven't heard one of their songs for ages.

I like sad songs. People in my class in school make up music tapes. One side has depressing songs on it, the other side has music you can dance to if you're happy. I like songs where you can understand the words; then we all learn the words and can sing along to it. Rave music is played at discos; it's good for dancing. There's also “classical-ish” music, slower songs, and kind-of love songs that you can listen to and think, “Yes, that has to do with me now.”

—Do you have a hero or heroine?

No. But I quite like Jody Foster, the actress in “Silence of the Lambs.” I admire her, because she's a really good actress. I also admire the actor Anthony Hopkins. They're not heroes or heroines to me though. Harrison Ford, Sean Connery.

—What's important to you?

What's important to teenagers. Who's going out with whom, and we want a swimming pool, and school if we don't like one of the teachers.

—Do the teachers live here?

Yes. Sometimes we think the school is totally disorganized. We've not got a stable French teacher. Teachers have left after a few months. The math teacher has gone, with rumors of a nervous breakdown. The building going on at school causes disruptions.

—What about friends' careers?

My best friend wants to teach languages abroad, or be a travel agent. Another wants to be a physical or occupational therapist. Another, a journalist; a marine biologist; a lawyer. A lot of the boys are working as garage mechanics or on a fish farm, or as joiners or builders.

—Does everyone think they'll be able to get jobs?

We've been told we're a good class with good grades, so I think everyone, especially the girls, hopes to achieve something. We've just had our fourth-year exams, which determine where we sit in fifth year for our highs, so we're getting results soon. It depends on our grades what we

can do. We think we've done well. You have to study for these exams, do work the first two years, then review. Biology and chemistry are my favorites, but I used to think they were too hard.

—When is school in session?

From 8:50 AM to 3:30 PM. It starts in August and goes through June. There are one-week breaks in October, Christmas, February, and Easter holidays. Sometimes there are in-service days when teachers go in and no pupils go in.

[End of interview.]