

Oral History Project	Achill Oral Histories
Oral Historian	Mackenzie Kelly
Interviewee	Alison Moncrieff-Kelly
Track No.	1
Date and Time	Monday 8th June 2026 2:40pm
Location of Interview	Alison's House in Slievemore Holiday Village, Achill
Running Time	00:56:54

- 1
- 2 00:00:34 Mackenzie
- 3 It is Monday, June 8th.
- 4 00:00:36 Mackenzie
- 5 It is 2.39pm and I'm Mackenzie Kelly and I'm here with Alison Moncrieff Kelly.
- 6 00:00:43 Mackenzie
- 7 So how's your day today?
- 8 00:00:44 Alison
- 9 Good, thank you.
- 10 00:00:45 Alison
- 11 Yes, very good.
- 12 00:00:47 Alison

13 Always sad if it's the last day of my stay because it's, you know, mini bereavement, but there we
14 are.

15 00:00:53 Alison

16 I'll be back soon.

17 00:00:54 Mackenzie

18 Yeah.

19 00:00:56 Mackenzie

20 So just to get into some of our questions and stuff, so can you just tell me about your childhood?

21 00:01:02 Alison

22 Okay, so I grew up in, I was born in London and I grew up in London and I was raised by two
23 professional musicians.

24 00:01:10 Alison

25 My father was a pianist, my mother was a cellist.

26 00:01:14 Alison

27 So I had a sort of rather bohemian background.

28 00:01:18 Alison

29 It was certainly not conventional.

30 00:01:21 Alison

31 We, I don't know, I can't really sum it up in a few words but I would just say that it was never

32 00:01:30 Alison

33 There was never a quiet day in my household.

34 00:01:32 Alison

35 It was always full of music and there were always people in the house and it was an area of
36 London that was full of artists and writers and musicians and actors.

37 00:01:44 Alison

38 And my parents were both Scots but I do have, there is an Irish thing going on here because
39 surely with a name like Kelly.

40 00:01:54 Alison

41 But also my father was adopted and we're sort of tracking him back and

42 00:01:59 Alison

43 It's fairly obvious there's something going on there with Irish roots.

44 00:02:04 Mackenzie

45 For sure.

46 00:02:05 Mackenzie

47 Did you have any siblings?

48 00:02:06 Alison

49 Yes, I have an older sister, Catriona who is 2 years older than me, who is not a musician.

50 00:02:13 Alison

51 She's an academic, so she's professor of, she was professor of Russian at Oxford and then
52 she's diversified into sort of Russian history and

53 00:02:25 Alison

54 A lot of her writing in the last five or 10 years has been around cinema in all the former Soviet
55 republics.

56 00:02:33 Alison

57 So that would include places like Armenia.

58 00:02:37 Alison

59 Not that was a republic of Soviet sort, but you know what I mean.

60 00:02:40 Alison

61 It's those kind of areas of Eastern Europe.

62 00:02:45 Alison

63 And so we do very different things.

64 00:02:50 Mackenzie

65 So just a little bit more about your connection to Achill.

66 00:02:54 Mackenzie

67 So did you come here a lot growing up?

68 00:02:56 Alison

69 This is a very good story.

70 00:02:57 Alison

71 In fact, Edward King said, 'you must remember to tell them about how your mother found the
72 cottage in Achill.'

73 00:03:04 Alison

74 So my mother was reading a magazine called 'The New Statesman', which is a very unlikely
75 magazine for her to read.

76 00:03:11 Alison

77 It's a very left-wing kind of political thing.

78 00:03:15 Alison

79 And she was a liberal, but she certainly wasn't left-wing.

80 00:03:20 Alison

81 But anyway, she was reading this magazine and in the back page there were small ads and one
82 of them said, cottage for rent, remote Irish island, no amenities, stunning views.

83 00:03:36 Alison

84 And on the strength of that she thought, that's a great idea, I'll take my two children aged 5 and
85 7 to this place.

86 00:03:44 Alison

87 And you have to bear in mind that in 1966

88 00:03:50 Alison

89 this was not row ferries.

90 00:03:52 Alison

91 I mean, they were old-fashioned ferries where your car was craned onto the ferry.

92 00:03:57 Alison

93 So coming to Ireland, particularly this part of Ireland, was a real mission.

94 00:04:02 Alison

95 I mean, it took two days from London.

96 00:04:05 Alison

97 And it was a real drama because my father, I think, was away playing somewhere and he was
98 due to fly out to Dublin and get a train to Westport and join us later.

99 00:04:16 Alison

100 But we had started the journey

101 00:04:20 Alison

102 and had arrived in Dublin, started driving west and our car broke down somewhere in
103 Roscommon.

104 00:04:28 Alison

105 And there was, as a child, I sort of remember visions of our bright red Triumph Herald stranded
106 and we were just in the middle of this country lane, because there's no motorways in Ireland of
107 course.

108 00:04:43 Alison

109 And then some bloke walked past and my mother said, oh, can you help us?

110 00:04:46 Alison

111 And he said, oh yes, now I'll go to the

112 00:04:49 Alison

113 I'll go to the garage and send someone along.

- 114 00:04:52 Alison
- 115 You can call him Paddy Riley.
- 116 00:04:54 Alison
- 117 He's like, oh, okay, we can call him that.
- 118 00:04:56 Alison
- 119 What's he really called?
- 120 00:04:58 Alison
- 121 Anyway, this bloke turned up and fixed the car and we set off.
- 122 00:05:05 Alison
- 123 But we were of course very delayed.
- 124 00:05:06 Alison
- 125 So we arrived in Achill in August.
- 126 00:05:10 Alison
- 127 It was dark.
- 128 00:05:11 Alison
- 129 It was pouring with rain.
- 130 00:05:16 Alison
- 131 We were renting from a family called the Boydells who still actually have family on the island.
- 132 00:05:22 Alison
- 133 You may have come across them.

134 00:05:25 Alison

135 And they were letting us the cottage for this three weeks.

136 00:05:30 Alison

137 And they had said, the man who looks after the cottage and has the key is called Major Devere

138 White.

139 00:05:36 Alison

140 And you don't have to let him know you're coming because he's always there.

141 00:05:39 Alison

142 He never goes out.

143 00:05:40 Alison

144 So guess what?

145 00:05:42 Alison

146 He was out.

147 00:05:43 Alison

148 So there we were, pouring with rain.

149 00:05:45 Alison

150 We were by this stage, small kids, very tired, very fed up.

151 00:05:51 Alison

152 And his cottage is one of the ones on the Dugort Road, so quite near to Pure Magic.

153 00:05:57 Alison

154 It was pulled down and rebuilt, but there is a place there on that side.

155 00:06:02 Alison

156 So we sort of started the journey back towards Keel.

157 00:06:08 Alison

158 And what is Pure Magic now was a hotel then called McDool's.

159 00:06:13 Alison

160 And my mother got out of the car and said, do you have rooms for myself and my children?

161 00:06:20 Alison

162 And they said no.

163 00:06:21 Alison

164 And they weren't terribly friendly.

165 00:06:24 Alison

166 She was quite unforgiving, my mother, and she never forgave them for that.

167 00:06:28 Alison

168 She never went in that hotel ever again.

169 00:06:30 Alison

170 I mean, when it got taken over in the 1980s, it was fine.

171 00:06:34 Alison

172 She went back, but she never forgave them.

173 00:06:37 Alison

174 Anyway, so we then drove into Keel and we arrived at

175 00:06:41 Alison

176 The Amethyst Hotel, which not the building it is now, it was an old building then and it was run
177 by a woman named Thea Boyd and she came out and she was very friendly and helpful and
178 she said I'm sorry I don't have rooms but I can try and put you through to Major Devere White.

179 00:07:01 Alison

180 So it was one of those Bakelite phones that was sort of stuck to the wall and you wound it up
181 with a handle and she

182 00:07:09 Alison

183 put the receiver towards my mother and said, you'd better hold it.

184 00:07:13 Alison

185 If he's there, he won't talk to me.

186 00:07:15 Alison

187 So you take the phone.

188 00:07:16 Alison

189 Anyway, he wasn't there.

190 00:07:19 Alison

191 And so Mrs.

192 00:07:20 Alison

193 Boyd then said, well, what I'll do is one of my waitresses, Bridget Gallagher, her mother does
194 B&B, so I think they might have a room

195 00:07:32 Alison

196 And that's what happened our first night.

197 00:07:34 Alison

198 We ended up staying in this B&B sort of right next to what is now our cool view, the one that's

199 right opposite the beach kind of thing, just a couple of doors down from the Kelvey's Butchers.

200 00:07:50 Alison

201 And it was one of the things you never forget really, I think is the first time you see Achill when it

202 isn't raining and the sun is out.

203 00:07:58 Alison

204 We woke up in the morning and pulled back the curtains and there was Minaum

205 00:08:03 Alison

206 And it was just like a moment you never forget.

207 00:08:05 Alison

208 I mean, I was 5.

209 00:08:08 Alison

210 And we sort of given this amazing breakfast and then thought, right, well, we'll go back to Major

211 Devere White and see what

212 00:08:18 Alison

213 What's going on there...

214 00:08:19 Alison

215 And of course he'd, for the first time in 10 years or something, had gone out to the theatre that
216 evening and he'd been in Castlebar.

217 00:08:28 Alison

218 And there he was and met us.

219 00:08:31 Alison

220 He's a character worth saying something about if that's of any interest to you.

221 00:08:37 Alison

222 He had landed up in Achill.

223 00:08:40 Alison

224 He was from a very pucker Anglo-Irish family in Limerick.

225 00:08:47 Alison

226 It's one of those very sort of big posh families.

227 00:08:54 Alison

228 But he'd been in the British Army during the war and had been a prisoner of war with the
229 Japanese on the Burma Road.

230 00:09:03 Alison

231 So he'd been horribly abused and tortured and like many of those people had suffered so
232 appallingly that he really wasn't quite

233 00:09:15 Alison

234 sort of, when I say he wasn't quite right, I never saw him anything other than perfectly delightful,
235 but you could ask many people, including Edward, who would tell you some stories.

236 00:09:27 Alison

237 Anyway, he had come to live in Achill, I think probably after the war, and like a few people
238 who've ended up here, they're sort of life refugees.

239 00:09:39 Alison

240 You know, they're running to the ends of the earth and this is about as far as you get really.

241 00:09:44 Alison

242 And he

243 00:09:45 Alison

244 was always totally lovely to us, unbelievably kind, but he'd fallen out with just about every other
245 living soul on the island.

246 00:09:54 Alison

247 And you would sometimes, I think, not even know what you'd done.

248 00:09:57 Alison

249 I mean, the Boydells did it by saying, oh, he's always there, he never goes out.

250 00:10:01 Alison

251 He never spoke to them again because they'd presumed something.

252 00:10:05 Alison

253 They had taken him for granted.

254 00:10:07 Alison

255 So he never spoke to them again.

256 00:10:10 Alison

257 Anyway, that was our first sort of introduction.

258 00:10:12 Alison

259 But while we were here during that three weeks,

260 00:10:15 Alison

261 of the first visit, he told us, Major Devere White told us that the cottage was actually for sale.

262 00:10:25 Alison

263 So the Boydells from whom we were renting it were actually themselves renting it from a man in

264 Pollagh called Mick McNamara who used to own, there was a little newspaper and ice cream

265 shop next to the church in Pollagh and we

266 00:10:44 Alison

267 discovered he was selling it for the vast sum of 500 pounds.

268 00:10:51 Alison

269 And so this was very typical of my mother because she liked a good sort of secret or a

270 conspiracy.

271 00:11:00 Alison

272 She kind of got into this thing where she started to communicate with Major Devere White sort

273 of without telling my dad because she wanted to surprise him.

274 00:11:10 Alison

275 And she did all the negotiating.

276 00:11:12 Alison

277 And in those days, it was very difficult to buy a property in Ireland.

278 00:11:15 Alison

279 You had to have permission from the Irish government if you weren't Irish.

280 00:11:19 Alison

281 And it was long-winded and it took a lot of bureaucracy and red tape.

282 00:11:26 Alison

283 But anyway, she did it all by using one of our neighbors as the address for all the
284 correspondence.

285 00:11:32 Alison

286 And Major Devere White loved it.

287 00:11:34 Alison

288 I mean, he'd fallen in love with us as a family, actually.

289 00:11:37 Alison

290 So I think he was kind of really delighted at the idea.

291 00:11:40 Alison

292 And he bought into the kind of, you know, secrecy of this project.

293 00:11:45 Alison

294 And my mother then said, when it was all kind of done and dusted, she said to my father, I've
295 got something I want to tell you.

296 00:11:52 Alison

297 And he said,

298 00:11:53 Alison

299 you haven't bought that lovely Irish cottage, have you?

300 00:11:55 Alison

301 And she had.

302 00:11:59 Alison

303 So that would have been, I guess, 67 before we actually got the cottage to call our own.

304 00:12:06 Alison

305 And we then sort of became regulars here.

306 00:12:11 Alison

307 I mean, we were visiting, usually Easter and summer, not usually in the winter.

308 00:12:21 Alison

309 And it was like that for

310 00:12:25 Alison

311 things changed a bit during the Troubles because, although we have this very strong sort of

312 Irish name and we're a Catholic family, this was a very, very strongly Republican area and there

313 were times when we would drive into Newport.

314 00:12:46 Alison

315 and there would be slogans drawn across the road saying, 'Brits out'.

316 00:12:50 Alison

317 And if you're driving a car with a British number plate, there were moments where we felt
318 perhaps we needed to be sensitive to, the home country, as it were, because things got very
319 bad in the early 70s.

320 00:13:05 Alison

321 But anyway, I mean, it didn't change our fundamental relationship with Achill at all.

322 00:13:11 Mackenzie

323 So you've been coming here regularly ever since?

324 00:13:14 Alison

325 Yeah.

326 00:13:15 Alison

327 So then, I mean, sort of giving you the back end of the story, when my mother, my father died in
328 1996 and my mother, as she got older, didn't feel sort of able to manage the property.

329 00:13:32 Alison

330 So she

331 00:13:33 Alison

332 My sister doesn't have children and I do, so we just sort of decided that it would be easier if she
333 took on ownership of Kelly's Cottage, which is up at the graveyard on Slievemore.

334 00:13:45 Alison

335 And I continue to come, sometimes staying there, sometimes renting, sometimes staying at the
336 Burvy's, sometimes staying at McDoogle's after it had changed hands.

337 00:13:58 Alison

- 338 You know, I must have rented one of every one of these cottages on this particular estate.
- 339 00:14:02 Alison
- 340 I mean, over the years, loads of them.
- 341 00:14:07 Alison
- 342 Different parts of the island.
- 343 00:14:10 Alison
- 344 And then I bought this cottage myself four years ago because I just thought, this is ridiculous,
345 this is actually home.
- 346 00:14:19 Alison
- 347 So that's it.
- 348 00:14:21 Mackenzie
- 349 Very cool.
- 350 00:14:21 Mackenzie
- 351 Have you seen a change in Achill since you first started coming here when you were little to
352 what it looks like now?
- 353 00:14:27 Alison
- 354 Yes, a huge change.
- 355 00:14:30 Alison
- 356 I mean it's multiple changes actually.
- 357 00:14:32 Alison

358 I think there's a change in, when we first arrived here it was a very old-fashioned sort of society.

359 00:14:42 Alison

360 It wasn't, I mean you've got to bear in mind we were in London so you know it wasn't that we
361 were sort of hip and trendy people but to give you an example,

362 00:14:53 Alison

363 If you went to church on a Sunday, all men were one side and all women were on the other.

364 00:14:58 Alison

365 I mean, that was, I don't remember that in my entire lifetime in London.

366 00:15:03 Alison

367 So there were lots of social norms which were completely different.

368 00:15:08 Alison

369 On the whole, pubs and so on were not anywhere that you would take women or children.

370 00:15:14 Alison

371 I mean like now you've got all these places like Gielty's or whatever and they're big family
372 places.

373 00:15:19 Alison

374 That was not the case then at all.

375 00:15:22 Alison

376 I think there were places where men went.

377 00:15:25 Alison

378 And the sort of people that we would have socialized with would have been Major Devere White
379 who was an educated man and very literate.

380 00:15:35 Alison

381 I mean you know he liked reading, he liked talking about

382 00:15:40 Alison

383 things that would have been sort of outside his immediate environment.

384 00:15:47 Alison

385 Thea Boyd, if you haven't encountered her name yet, I mean she was an extraordinary Achill
386 personality because she came to Achill I think in the 1940s and she was from Dublin but her
387 husband was from Ulster and she set up the Amethyst Hotel which she bought from Liz

388 00:16:10 Alison

389 Barrett's family, Liz is the Burvy.

390 00:16:13 Alison

391 And her mother, I think, sold the Amethyst to Thea and Robert Boyd.

392 00:16:20 Alison

393 And what Thea had was a kind of real gift for attracting interesting literati, artistic...

394 00:16:30 Alison

395 I mean, Graham Greene stayed there.

396 00:16:31 Alison

397 were all these terribly kind of interesting people who fetched up at the Amethyst.

398 00:16:37 Alison

399 Somewhere

400 00:16:39 Alison

401 there is an amethyst visitor's book which must be priceless.

402 00:16:46 Alison

403 Her son Rory is around.

404 00:16:50 Alison

405 In fact I saw him and his wife for dinner last night.

406 00:16:52 Alison

407 They have the cottage at Crumphorne which Theo and Robert built after they retired from The
408 Amethyst.

409 00:16:59 Alison

410 But they were a kind of community of, that was a hub of interesting people.

411 00:17:05 Alison

412 But it wouldn't be like sort of going down into Keel and having shops that sold nice clothes like
413 at the Beehive and there certainly was no tradition of good food.

414 00:17:15 Alison

415 It was just very basic.

416 00:17:19 Alison

417 The cottage we had no electricity, no running water.

418 00:17:23 Mackenzie

419 Oh wow.

420 00:17:25 Alison

421 It was literally a stone tent really.

422 00:17:29 Alison

423 And it got electricity under the rural electrification scheme but that was 1970.

424 00:17:35 Alison

425 I mean, you're looking at, or in the 70s, I mean, you're looking at a completely different social
426 demographic from anything that we knew about or experienced.

427 00:17:47 Alison

428 We were very respectful of the fact that we were, visitors.

429 00:17:52 Alison

430 We weren't, part of the sort of Achill tribal thing.

431 00:17:58 Alison

432 which I think is still a strong thing.

433 00:18:02 Alison

434 I mean, they're all these families, aren't they?

435 00:18:04 Alison

436 The O'Malleys, the Gallaghers, the Lavelles and the Sweeneys who basically run the show.

437 00:18:09 Alison

438 Not a lot's changed, but there are just more people.

439 00:18:16 Alison

440 The other thing that was very noticeable was how many men were not here because they were
441 working.

442 00:18:20 Alison

443 They were all building the roads in the UK.

444 00:18:24 Alison

445 And you don't have to listen to too many Christie Moore songs to know about that.

446 00:18:29 Alison

447 And there's terrible stories of what happened to those people and what a hard time they had.

448 00:18:32 Alison

449 And it came about once a year, had another child and went back, you know.

450 00:18:37 Alison

451 That was sort of how it was.

452 00:18:38 Alison

453 I think it was run by women in the whole island.

454 00:18:43 Alison

455 And there was a sort of, there were various people who you encountered.

456 00:18:49 Alison

457 There was

458 00:18:51 Alison

459 Where Maggie and John McCue live, Maggie Morrison, the artist, and John McCue, they lived at
460 Aberchongy down in Dooagh.

461 00:18:59 Alison

462 That used to be some sort of a knitwear factory.

463 00:19:02 Alison

464 I remember being bought an Aran jersey there, for example.

465 00:19:05 Alison

466 But it all felt very much more local.

467 00:19:09 Alison

468 Like if you went to Kieran Sweeney's shop in The Sound to buy an Aran sweater, it would come
469 from somewhere in Donegal or Galway.

470 00:19:16 Alison

471 But in those days, there were actually people who made that stuff on the island.

472 00:19:20 Mackenzie

473 Wow, that's fascinating.

474 00:19:24 Alison

475 And I remember the man who did the cottage, he did it up, he put in new window frames and he
476 was a local builder called Paddy Graylis and I think he lived in Dooniver.

477 00:19:38 Alison

478 And we went to see him one evening.

479 00:19:42 Alison

480 This sticks in my mind for obvious reasons.

481 00:19:45 Alison

482 He and his wife were hugely hospitable.

483 00:19:49 Alison

484 So I'm thinking by then I was probably about 6 or 7 and my sister was about 8 or 9.

485 00:19:55 Alison

486 And it would have been probably late afternoon and they invited us in and there was this thing

487 about a wee cup of tea in your hand, which meant the entire table covered in food.

488 00:20:08 Alison

489 My parents were given whisky.

490 00:20:10 Alison

491 We were given port, which, you know, that was, I wasn't reluctant, I must say, but it's just, it was

492 an unusual thing,

493 00:20:19 Alison

494 But the hospitality when you found it was just remarkable.

495 00:20:23 Alison

496 The generosity.

497 00:20:24 Mackenzie

498 Wow, that's amazing.

499 00:20:26 Mackenzie

500 Going back to how you said that the cottage you were staying in had no running water

501 electricity, was that something that you were able to appreciate at a young age or did you kind

502 of have to like

503 00:20:38 Mackenzie

504 adjust to that.

505 00:20:42 Alison

506 I think children accept anything.

507 00:20:46 Alison

508 And my mother was a very practical woman.

509 00:20:50 Alison

510 My parents came from completely different social backgrounds.

511 00:20:53 Alison

512 So my mother came from sort of Scottish aristocratic roots and my father came from completely

513 the other end of it.

514 00:20:59 Alison

515 He was from very much the working classes.

516 00:21:02 Alison

517 His adoptive father was a coal miner.

518 00:21:05 Alison

519 And ironically, she was the practical one.

520 00:21:09 Alison

521 And he was one who was absolutely hopeless with anything other than playing the piano.

522 00:21:12 Alison

523 But he was a fantastic, brain and person, but it was just he couldn't do anything practical.

524 00:21:19 Alison

525 And so for her, having grown up during the war and having got used to life surviving those
526 difficult times, and she would often say, well, I was a girl guide.

527 00:21:31 Alison

528 And so she had many practical skills.

529 00:21:35 Alison

530 The thing that people always laugh about, and in fact my brother-in-law always quotes this, was
531 that she bought us each a whistle, big sort of like gold whistle things, and put them round our
532 necks on a piece of string and just said, right, off you go, up the mountain, play, and off we
533 went.

534 00:21:52 Alison

535 And she said, if you get into difficulties, blow the SOS on this whistle, and she showed us how
536 to do it.

537 00:21:57 Alison

538 And we just ran up the back of Slievemore and just ran wild on that mountain.

539 00:22:03 Mackenzie

540 Did you ever have to use the whistle?

541 00:22:04 Alison

542 The only time I remember was once my sister got stuck trying to climb down from the field onto
543 the sort of bank of the stream and she just panicked about a thing and I couldn't really help it
544 because she was bigger than me anyway.

545 00:22:20 Alison

546 It wasn't a big problem but you know the whistle did get blown.

547 00:22:25 Mackenzie

548 The whistle was used.

549 00:22:26 Alison

550 The whistle was used, yes.

551 00:22:28 Mackenzie

552 Oh wow.

553 00:22:29 Alison

554 Those whistles are still hanging on the wall in my sister's cottage.

555 00:22:33 Mackenzie

556 Oh my gosh, that's so special.

557 00:22:34 Alison

558 Yeah, I know, it really was extraordinary.

559 00:22:37 Alison

560 And you know, because we'd grown up in London, to have that amount of freedom and sort of, I
561 mean, these days people would worry about everything.

562 00:22:46 Alison

563 They'd worry about the ticks, they'd worry about falling down the hole, they'd worry about, and
564 they'd be right to.

565 00:22:51 Alison

566 I'm not saying it was necessarily safety on wheels, but it was just freedom.

567 00:22:58 Mackenzie

568 Wow.

569 00:23:00 Mackenzie

570 Have you seen more of like a tourist draw to Achill in the past few?

571 00:23:06 Alison

572 I think I've seen a different sort of tourist.

573 00:23:09 Alison

574 This is probably going to get a bit controversial but you see when we were coming here there
575 were always a lot of people I think from Dublin who came here and strangely enough in the 60s
576 there were a lot of Germans and that's partly I think there was this Heinrich Boll connection

577 00:23:28 Alison

578 They weren't always terribly popular is my memory because they used to put fences up and in
579 those days the fences weren't really common on Achill.

580 00:23:37 Alison

581 And there was a certain kind of, I mean I don't know where it came from because the relation
582 between Ireland and Germany was different from the one of the UK to Germany.

583 00:23:48 Alison

584 But my memory is that there were certain kind of slight reservations.

585 00:23:53 Alison

586 I think there were some Dutch but it was mainly people from Dublin.

587 00:23:58 Alison

588 Not that many people from the UK.

589 00:24:03 Alison

590 What I'm seeing now with tourists is that I think it's the usual stuff, isn't it?

591 00:24:07 Alison

592 It's the internet, it's social media, it's camper vans and it's a lot of water sport people who turn
593 up and a lot of people who came during the pandemic when we were allowed out.

594 00:24:24 Alison

595 And suddenly a lot of people were arriving and seeing it for their particular enthusiasm, whether
596 that was the water sports or the camper van thing.

597 00:24:38 Alison

598 But it's become much busier.

599 00:24:41 Alison

600 I mean, I love Achill most during the winter when you can drive around and you might not ever
601 see anybody.

602 00:24:49 Alison

603 I find it's quite quiet at the minute and that's fine, but in August it can get absolutely overrun I
604 find.

605 00:24:59 Alison

606 And the one thing about, one of the reasons I chose this place is because you can retreat here
607 and nobody knows you're here and you don't know anybody else is there.

608 00:25:07 Alison

609 But that sort of feeling of Achill being, you know, for life fugitives, you sort of lose that sense of it
610 when it's crawling with

611 00:25:17 Alison

612 tourists to me.

613 00:25:19 Alison

614 But yet I completely get the fact that it survives because of tourism.

615 00:25:24 Alison

616 So it's a really difficult dilemma, this.

617 00:25:26 Alison

618 It's how to look after a place without losing its integrity, I think.

619 00:25:31 Mackenzie

620 Because do you think like sometimes some of the draw is because it's such a more peaceful,
621 serene area, but then that's kind of the contradiction of how...

622 00:25:43 Alison

623 There is a contradiction, you're absolutely right.

624 00:25:45 Alison

625 I think

626 00:25:49 Alison

627 I mean, I think this is probably true of most tourist spots worldwide.

628 00:25:56 Alison

629 I've seen always in this place kindness and respect and pleasant behavior.

630 00:26:04 Alison

631 You can tell a lot about people from the way they drive and these roads are not built for big fat,
632 what we call Chelsea tractors in London.

633 00:26:15 Alison

634 or kind of the big camper vans.

635 00:26:17 Alison

636 And it's when people start being aggressive on a road that's kind of three feet wide, you have to
637 think, do you know what, we never used to get this.

638 00:26:27 Alison

639 And I'm trying to think of specific examples and I'm failing, but there's a certain change in the
640 kind of emotional temperature at certain times of year, I think.

641 00:26:37 Mackenzie

642 Yeah, that's interesting.

643 00:26:38 Mackenzie

644 It's very interesting.

645 00:26:40 Alison

646 Because I mean, I would generally say, for example, when I turn up, I don't always say to
647 people, oh, I'm arriving on Tuesday, but I can pretty much guarantee that if I go into Sweeney's
648 on my way across the bridge, having landed at Knock 2 1/2 hours earlier, by the time I get to
649 Keele, someone will say, oh, I heard you were here.

650 00:27:01 Mackenzie

651 Yeah.

652 00:27:02 Mackenzie

653 Oh, that's very interesting.

654 00:27:06 Mackenzie

655 So kind of moving into your music career, music life.

656 00:27:11 Mackenzie

657 So when did that start, your interest in music?

658 00:27:14 Alison

659 Oh God, it was there from the beginning.

660 00:27:16 Alison

661 I was born effectively under a piano, I think.

662 00:27:20 Alison

663 So I think it's one of these things.

664 00:27:24 Alison

665 If you come from a musical family, it's probably either do or die.

666 00:27:30 Alison

667 And I always wanted to play.

668 00:27:33 Alison

669 And I started the piano when I was six, and everybody, as long as I can remember, had said to

670 me, Oh, you're the one that's going to play the cello.

671 00:27:43 Alison

672 And I remember thinking, I don't like playing the piano.

673 00:27:47 Alison

674 Anyway, everybody always used to say, Oh, you look so like your mother.

675 00:27:50 Alison

676 Anyway, so that was how it sort of started.

677 00:27:53 Alison

678 And then my cello, I started on a quarter-sized cello when I was nine, I think.

679 00:28:03 Alison

680 I never wanted to be anything else except a musician.

681 00:28:09 Alison

682 I went to a very academic school in West London, but school was a bit of a necessary evil for
683 me.

684 00:28:20 Alison

685 I loved elements of it, and I was at school with some

686 00:28:24 Alison

687 Joy interesting people.

688 00:28:25 Alison

689 Let's thank Nigella Lawson was in the year above me.

690 00:28:30 Alison

691 Hugh Grant was at the boys school.

692 00:28:31 Alison

693 My sister played Juliet to Hugh Grant's older brother as Romeo.

694 00:28:36 Alison

695 Oh my gosh.

696 00:28:37 Alison

697 Hugh Grant had a tiny part in it, saying something like, your carriage and weights.

698 00:28:41 Alison

699 Yeah, it was a very sort of lovey, you know, it was West London, there were lots of loveies
700 around.

701 00:28:49 Alison

702 So there was a lot of that kind of stuff going on in the background.

703 00:28:53 Alison

704 And I got a scholarship to go to the Royal Academy of Music when I was 17.

705 00:29:00 Alison

706 And that was when my father was a professor.

707 00:29:04 Alison

708 That was interesting.

709 00:29:06 Alison

710 difficult going to the same place with your father as a person doesn't leave a lot of time for
711 personal growth however he was great I mean he was such an incredible kind of personality he
712 was the head of keyboard at the Royal Academy of Music and I was still playing the piano and
713 he said he wanted me to go to him for lessons

714 00:29:31 Alison

715 And they were a bit suspicious about it and said, that's a bit unusual.

716 00:29:35 Alison

717 Why would you, you shouldn't teach your own daughter?

718 00:29:37 Alison

719 And he said, no, I'm going to teach Alison and it'll be fine.

720 00:29:40 Alison

721 And they obviously found this kind of concerning that anybody would get on well enough with
722 their child that they would want to do this.

723 00:29:49 Alison

724 But it worked out fine.

725 00:29:50 Alison

726 And at the end of my first year, I was going upstairs to a room to do something in the building
727 and he came out of his room and said,

728 00:30:01 Alison

729 just come in here a minute.

730 00:30:02 Alison

731 I'm just writing your confidential end of year report.

732 00:30:06 Alison

733 I'm going to read it to you.

734 00:30:07 Alison

735 And it said, Alison is innately musical.

736 00:30:11 Alison

737 She takes after her mother.

738 00:30:16 Alison

739 In those days you could write stuff like that.

740 00:30:18 Alison

741 You wouldn't get away with it now.

742 00:30:20 Alison

743 But anyway, I was there for four years and then I studied for a further year in London and got
744 money together

745 00:30:30 Alison

746 to apply to study with a cellist called Pierre Fournier in Geneva.

747 00:30:37 Alison

748 And he had actually also taught my mother in the 1940s when he lived in Paris.

749 00:30:42 Alison

750 So there was a sort of connection.

751 00:30:45 Alison

752 And what happens in those days was different to what would happen now.

753 00:30:51 Alison

754 Life is terribly changed for the arts in the UK, partly the Brexit thing, but partly that

755 00:31:00 Alison

756 nationally the British don't support the arts in quite the way that the Europeans do.

757 00:31:07 Alison

758 But in those days there were more opportunities and I got playing with people and started
759 getting out and performing and made my debut in London and did a lot of playing actually in
760 those days, mainly chamber music.

761 00:31:25 Alison

762 And I had my lessons in Geneva with Fournier.

763 00:31:30 Alison

764 And then you sort of suddenly find years are flying by and you're doing a mixture of things and I
765 always had a great interest in teaching.

766 00:31:40 Alison

767 I find that very interesting and it's important beyond belief that you get people to play properly
768 from the posture point of view and from the sort of

769 00:31:54 Alison

770 holistic health point of view, people need to be able to do it properly and look after their hands
771 and their arms and not get injuries and that kind of thing.

772 00:32:03 Alison

773 So that always really motivated me.

774 00:32:07 Alison

775 So I've done a mixture of stuff teaching wise and a mixture of ages, all sorts of different things.

776 00:32:16 Alison

777 And I also work as an examiner for a board that does exams all over the world.

778 00:32:21 Alison

779 So at one point I was travelling

780 00:32:23 Alison

781 internationally a lot to do you know like China weeks on end sort of listening to millions of
782 children playing instruments and marking them and I've recently started writing music as well so
783 I do stuff with an English composer who is much younger than me but we kind of connect in a

784 00:32:48 Alison

785 creative way and we've brought out our first book and we've got a three book deal so the other
786 two books coming out in the next year or two.

787 00:32:57 Alison

788 So the thing is to keep reinventing yourself as a musician because like many things it is now
789 very much a culture of youth.

790 00:33:08 Alison

791 But there is a thing called experience.

792 00:33:12 Alison

793 And there is also a thing about I think

794 00:33:18 Alison

795 If you, I'm a great believer in there's a space sort of for everybody, but you've got to manage
796 your expectations and realize that, for example, if people say to me, do you think I should take
797 up music?

798 00:33:32 Alison

799 I will say no.

800 00:33:33 Alison

801 And they look at you with surprise.

802 00:33:35 Alison

803 I say, well, if you're asking the question, then you're having a doubt.

804 00:33:38 Alison

805 Never go into this unless you are absolutely convinced that there's nothing else.

806 00:33:44 Mackenzie

807 Yeah, it's interesting.

808 00:33:46 Mackenzie

809 I was wondering,

810 00:33:49 Mackenzie

811 It could sometimes get difficult for people having their career be something that is a hobby or a
812 pleasure.

813 00:33:56 Mackenzie

814 Like how have you found that balance of enjoying what you're doing and not making it feel like
815 work?

816 00:34:04 Alison

817 That's a really interesting question Mackenzie and the answer is that it isn't a hobby of course
818 and so for me I think the closest thing I can compare it with although I don't have

819 00:34:16 Alison

820 empirical experience of this is training to be an athlete.

821 00:34:20 Alison

- 822 I mean, so much more about it is physical.
- 823 00:34:24 Alison
- 824 Learning where to put your fingers.
- 825 00:34:25 Alison
- 826 I'm learning a new piece.
- 827 00:34:26 Alison
- 828 Where's my finger go?
- 829 00:34:27 Alison
- 830 Hours and hours of learning the space between 2 notes on the fingerboard, practicing stuff.
- 831 00:34:34 Alison
- 832 What's my boat doing here?
- 833 00:34:35 Alison
- 834 It's completely to do with drilling yourself physically, getting the muscle memory,
- 835 00:34:44 Alison
- 836 actually getting it into your head what the music is.
- 837 00:34:49 Alison
- 838 People, I think, and I'm not saying you think this, but I think there are people who think that
- 839 being a musician is something, airy, fairy and creative that we sit around kind of in frilly dresses
- 840 going, lol.
- 841 00:35:01 Alison

842 And actually it's much, much, much harder work than people realise and a lot of it is immensely
843 boring and very

844 00:35:13 Alison

845 very dispiriting and draining.

846 00:35:14 Alison

847 I mean you've got to be incredibly strong mentally to get over that fact that you could spend 4
848 hours playing one piece to try and get bits of it right and still get to the end of the four hours and
849 really want to throw things, you know?

850 00:35:29 Mackenzie

851 Yeah, for sure.

852 00:35:31 Mackenzie

853 Where do you find the motivation to keep going?

854 00:35:35 Alison

855 It's an interesting thing that I think in the old days it used to be, when I say the old days I mean
856 I'm 64 now so I'm thinking about when I was in my 20s, I just wanted to play.

857 00:35:46 Alison

858 I wanted to play, I wanted to be out there.

859 00:35:48 Alison

860 I've always loved performing because it's a communication thing and it's about, to me it's not an
861 ego trip and it's not about showing off and it's not about applause, although that's nice when you
862 get it.

863 00:36:00 Alison

864 It's about communicating something

865 00:36:03 Alison

866 through the conduct of whatever your instrument is.

867 00:36:07 Alison

868 Now for me the cello is like the king of instruments because it's the nearest you can get to

869 singing without having a voice and you know it's got such a multiplicity of timbres and kind of

870 voices and qualities and

871 00:36:26 Alison

872 I think one of the things that I feel luckiest about, I mean I'll tell you a story if you're interested,

873 about the first thing I got paid to do.

874 00:36:34 Mackenzie

875 Yeah for sure.

876 00:36:35 Alison

877 Okay well the first two things I got paid to do when I left the Royal Academy were just

878 completely left field.

879 00:36:47 Alison

880 You may not have heard of a DJ called John Peel but if I just explain to you that he was the

881 most famous

882 00:36:56 Alison

883 a DJ in the UK who, I mean, we're not talking DJs sort of, like doing things with vinyl.

884 00:37:02 Alison

885 We're talking about a person choosing records.

886 00:37:05 Alison

887 And what he was terribly famous for was finding groups, sourcing new talent.

888 00:37:11 Alison

889 So for example, the Undertones, who Fig or Sharkey, he's from the North, famous now for
890 taking on political causes.

891 00:37:22 Alison

892 But you know, that was a really sort of

893 00:37:24 Alison

894 They were kind of broadly punk, I guess, and they were found by John Peel.

895 00:37:28 Alison

896 So that's an example of the sort of thing that he did.

897 00:37:31 Alison

898 And he had a show, I think, nightly in the UK.

899 00:37:35 Alison

900 Anyway, the phone rang and in those days it was a plastic phone with a cord on it.

901 00:37:41 Alison

902 And I happened to answer it and it was a manager of a pop group saying to me, I've been given
903 your number, I think by the Royal Academy, who said that you might be somebody who would
904 come along and play

905 00:37:53 Alison

906 for a group that have got a John Peel session booked.

907 00:37:57 Alison

908 And I was trying to imagine how the cello was going to...

909 00:38:01 Alison

910 Anyway, I said, oh, lovely, yes, thank you.

911 00:38:05 Alison

912 And the first thing that they said was, do you belong to the musicians union?

913 00:38:08 Alison

914 And I said, no.

915 00:38:09 Alison

916 And I said, well, you have to join because it's a closed shop and the BBC won't record anything
917 unless you're a member.

918 00:38:16 Alison

919 So that was an eye-opener.

920 00:38:17 Alison

921 I was like, oh, okay, be in a union.

922 00:38:22 Alison

923 Then they said you need to go and meet this group for a rehearsal before the session recording.

924 00:38:28 Alison

925 And it was a rehearsal, it was booked for 9 o'clock at night in a studio somewhere in the London

926 Bridge area.

927 00:38:37 Alison

928 Now London Bridge is now hip and trendy and has Borough Market and it's the place where if

929 you buy an apartment it's probably going to cost you 2 million.

930 00:38:48 Alison

931 In those days, it was dark and dangerous.

932 00:38:51 Alison

933 And 9:00 at night was not a time you wanted to be trucking around there.

934 00:38:55 Alison

935 And I had a tiny little car, a Fiat 125, which is, think of a Fiat 500 and then get smaller, just big

936 enough for me to drive it.

937 00:39:05 Alison

938 And if I laid the passenger seat down, my cello lay next to me like a dead body.

939 00:39:11 Alison

940 And I went to this place on a wharf in London Bridge and I just remember thinking,

941 00:39:18 Alison

942 What am I doing here?

943 00:39:20 Alison

944 I don't even know what I've got to do.

945 00:39:22 Alison

946 And it was a sort of ancient black building and I could sort of hear boom, boom, boom coming
947 out of this building from a distance.

948 00:39:31 Alison

949 So I went up to the door and opened it.

950 00:39:35 Alison

951 And this is 1983, so you know, we're still punk.

952 00:39:40 Alison

953 And there's a girl sitting behind the reception thing and she had a Mohican which was sort of
954 pink and blue.

955 00:39:48 Alison

956 a number of piercings in her face and she looked to me fairly terrifying.

957 00:39:53 Alison

958 Anyway, she looked up at me and she said, are you here for Becky *****?

959 00:39:58 Alison

960 And I said, no, definitely not.

961 00:40:03 Alison

962 I was there for this group called Zera One, who curiously enough were Irish.

963 00:40:07 Alison

964 They were all from Dublin.

965 00:40:09 Alison

966 And they were a sort of post-punk band who had been given this

967 00:40:15 Alison

968 this recording.

969 00:40:17 Alison

970 I mean, I think they were out doing gigs and stuff, but this was a big breakthrough for them.

971 00:40:21 Alison

972 So they had this three track session.

973 00:40:27 Alison

974 So learning curve started right there because they looked huge and terrifying and they were all

975 wearing leather, but they were actually delightful.

976 00:40:39 Alison

977 And I said, okay, so what do you want me to do?

978 00:40:41 Alison

979 And they said, well, play.

980 00:40:43 Alison

981 And I said, but what?

982 00:40:45 Alison

983 do I play?

984 00:40:45 Alison

985 And they said, no, just play.

986 00:40:47 Alison

987 I said, but what?

988 00:40:49 Alison

989 And then it of course dawned.

990 00:40:51 Alison

991 They didn't read music and I'd never done anything, just improvising.

992 00:40:57 Alison

993 But there we were and the recording was like tomorrow.

994 00:41:00 Alison

995 So we had to work it out and we did.

996 00:41:03 Alison

997 I mean, that made me absolutely conscious that you, as a musician, you have to be able to do

998 anything.

999 00:41:12 Alison

1000 anything at that moment.

1001 00:41:16 Alison

1002 And it was really strange because they wanted me for one track, which I have on my other
1003 recording of it actually.

1004 00:41:23 Alison

1005 It was very long and it was like a sort of weird ballad.

1006 00:41:27 Alison

1007 And this man was singing and he was playing chords on the piano.

1008 00:41:30 Alison

1009 And he wanted me just to play these long notes.

1010 00:41:33 Alison

1011 I knew nothing.

1012 00:41:34 Alison

1013 I mean, they made me overdub chords and do different...

1014 00:41:37 Alison

1015 You're meant to be paid for every overdub that you do.

1016 00:41:39 Alison

1017 I should have been paid four times.

1018 00:41:41 Alison

1019 I didn't know any of that, did I?

1020 00:41:42 Alison

1021 But I learnt a lot and because my name had gone onto the list of people used by independent
1022 sort of groups and things, I got asked to do other stuff like that and kind of really picked up a lot
1023 about working in a different way, working with the ears and not with the dots.

1024 00:42:08 Mackenzie

1025 That's amazing.

1026 00:42:09 Alison

1027 And the other one which I was just going to tell you about because that came up in the same
1028 month was the Royal Shakespeare Company have, I think they probably don't anymore, but
1029 they did then.

1030 00:42:19 Alison

1031 They had musicians, they had their own band of musicians.

1032 00:42:23 Alison

1033 And I played in Cyrano de Bergerac with Derek Jacobi who was, you know, the hottest actor in
1034 town at the time because he'd just done

1035 00:42:34 Alison

1036 I, Claudius, which was a long, you know, Robert Graves book turned into a TV thing.

1037 00:42:40 Alison

1038 And in that particular thing I had to appear on stage in a crinoline with my cello.

1039 00:42:48 Alison

1040 And I had to be, I mean it was a real learning curve again because you have to be in and out of
1041 costume and up and down stairs and on and off the stage and all these things.

- 1042 00:42:56 Alison
- 1043 Nobody teaches you that at music college.
- 1044 00:42:58 Alison
- 1045 No, I would imagine I.
- 1046 00:43:01 Alison
- 1047 And I thought, oh God, this is going to be so serious.
- 1048 00:43:03 Alison
- 1049 I mean,
- 1050 00:43:04 Alison
- 1051 I'm in the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Barbican on stage and they're all going to be so
- 1052 into their art.
- 1053 00:43:09 Alison
- 1054 We're in there and it's a crowd scene and somebody came up and said, oh, you're new here.
- 1055 00:43:15 Alison
- 1056 Serious and into their art.
- 1057 00:43:17 Mackenzie
- 1058 Oh my gosh.
- 1059 00:43:19 Mackenzie
- 1060 At your time at the Royal Music Academy, did you find that an adjustment at all?
- 1061 00:43:27 Mackenzie

1062 learning music in that kind of academic sense.

1063 00:43:31 Alison

1064 It wasn't really academic.

1065 00:43:32 Alison

1066 I mean the course I did was called the performance course and I mean those things don't exist
1067 anymore.

1068 00:43:39 Alison

1069 All of them now are integrated into Bachelor of Arts kind of degrees and you would have to do a
1070 lot more of the academic stuff.

1071 00:43:48 Alison

1072 In those days we had a first study instrument cello for me and a second study instrument piano
1073 for me

1074 00:43:57 Alison

1075 and you did harmony and aural and you did, a lot of it you made-up yourself, you could get into
1076 groups of people and learn stuff and it was completely unstructured.

1077 00:44:10 Alison

1078 So no, it wasn't a surprise to me and I'd grown up with my dad teaching and my mother to, she
1079 taught at, there's a thing like Oxford and Cambridge, the Royal Academy and the Royal College,
1080 so he taught at one and she taught at the other.

1081 00:44:24 Alison

1082 And so I'd seen generations of their students kind of coming and going.

- 1083 00:44:29 Alison
- 1084 I kind of knew how the cookie crumbled.
- 1085 00:44:31 Mackenzie
- 1086 Yeah, that's nice.
- 1087 00:44:33 Mackenzie
- 1088 It's nice to kind of get into that.
- 1089 00:44:39 Mackenzie
- 1090 So I did see that in anticipation of the Heinrich Boll summer concert, you mentioned how it was
- 1091 an opportunity for those who play in the classical discipline to get close to Irish musical
- 1092 traditions and learn from them.
- 1093 00:44:55 Mackenzie
- 1094 So can you tell me a little bit about your experience as a classical musician and how one can
- 1095 learn and draw inspiration from Irish triad music in classical?
- 1096 00:45:05 Alison
- 1097 Yeah, well it's not unlike John Peel actually.
- 1098 00:45:09 Alison
- 1099 Well I had given, because that's a concert I did in 2022, but I had given 4 concerts here before
- 1100 that, all at St.
- 1101 00:45:18 Alison
- 1102 Thomas's.
- 1103 00:45:19 Alison

- 1104 But Edward King, who's sort of
- 1105 00:45:24 Alison
- 1106 Big Wheel in the Heinrich Boll committee had said to me, what about a concert?
- 1107 00:45:29 Alison
- 1108 This would have been in 2021.
- 1109 00:45:31 Alison
- 1110 He said, what about a concert next year?
- 1111 00:45:33 Alison
- 1112 And I said, well, I'd like to do something different.
- 1113 00:45:35 Alison
- 1114 I'd like to do something that involves the local traditional musicians.
- 1115 00:45:41 Alison
- 1116 I'd like to kind of do something that's a bit more adventurous.
- 1117 00:45:47 Alison
- 1118 And we'd had COVID, as you know, and in
- 1119 00:45:52 Alison
- 1120 the 2021-2022 year, Mayo County Council were awarding grants to people to kind of resuscitate
- 1121 the arts basically.
- 1122 00:46:05 Alison
- 1123 And so John McCue had come to me and said,

- 1124 00:46:10 Alison
- 1125 Edwards mentioned, I mean everybody was really worried.
- 1126 00:46:13 Alison
- 1127 They thought I was completely mad.
- 1128 00:46:14 Alison
- 1129 I mean, because there'd be this sort of, I wouldn't say suspicion, but this idea that respectfully
1130 we were all on very different sides of the line.
- 1131 00:46:22 Alison
- 1132 And I was like, no, I think you'll find that actually we'll just make music and it'll be okay.
- 1133 00:46:29 Alison
- 1134 Actually, I was terrified inside, but it was an interesting journey.
- 1135 00:46:34 Alison
- 1136 So what I did was I put together an idea which came...
- 1137 00:46:38 Alison
- 1138 Kieran O'Malley, who's Mr.
- 1139 00:46:40 Alison
- 1140 Salt at the...
- 1141 00:46:43 Alison
- 1142 Achill Sea Salt is a fantastic piper and I had a chat with him.
- 1143 00:46:48 Alison

- 1144 He and I had tried playing just for the fun of it to see what would happen.
- 1145 00:46:53 Alison
- 1146 And I had discovered that, a lot of Irish music, they all play the same tune at the same time.
- 1147 00:46:59 Alison
- 1148 So the instruments are all playing not in harmony, but just like it comes out sounding a bit like
1149 harmony because they're all in different registers.
- 1150 00:47:07 Alison
- 1151 But that was the sort of thing I'd never really thought about.
- 1152 00:47:12 Alison
- 1153 So the first thought I had was we could do something here to provide some harmony.
- 1154 00:47:18 Alison
- 1155 because you don't see cellos in traditional Irish music.
- 1156 00:47:21 Alison
- 1157 So that's an obvious lead in here.
- 1158 00:47:25 Alison
- 1159 And it involved me in, it was very like the John Peel thing.
- 1160 00:47:28 Alison
- 1161 I had to start learning a few tunes, you know, and I mean, Irish kids grow up, I think, learning all
1162 these things like Eleanor Plunkett and I knew none of these.
- 1163 00:47:37 Alison

1164 Well, obviously I knew Danny Boy and I knew the Minstrel Boy because one of our neighbors at
1165 Slievemore used to practice that all the time on his backside.

1166 00:47:48 Alison

1167 But it was a question of thinking, how could this concert be scripted to kind of make it work for
1168 everybody?

1169 00:47:54 Alison

1170 So in the end, I got a friend of mine who's a classical violinist who lives in Dublin and a pianist
1171 from Dublin.

1172 00:48:02 Alison

1173 And I said, let's do, there's a trio, piano trio by Dvorak called The Donkey, which is based
1174 around gypsy kind of Czechoslovakian folk themes.

1175 00:48:16 Alison

1176 And I said, I think if we play that as a trio and make that the opening, and it's got 3 movements.

1177 00:48:23 Alison

1178 So it's a sort of substantial piece.

1179 00:48:25 Alison

1180 And then the traditional musicians should have their session, like in the middle.

1181 00:48:31 Alison

1182 That'd be the third, the second bit of it.

1183 00:48:33 Alison

1184 And then the third of the thirds would be all of us playing together.

1185 00:48:36 Alison

1186 And then the question was, but what are we going to play together?

1187 00:48:40 Alison

1188 Anyway, that was a lot of that came from Kieran.

1189 00:48:43 Alison

1190 He said, here are some tunes, have a think about that.

1191 00:48:46 Alison

1192 So Anne-Marie and I went away and learned these tunes and then we all met up in the August.

1193 00:48:54 Alison

1194 Mayo really put their hand in their pocket.

1195 00:48:57 Alison

1196 They paid 9 grand for this.

1197 00:48:59 Alison

1198 They sponsored the whole thing.

1199 00:49:00 Alison

1200 I mean it was an incredibly, you would not get that in the UK.

1201 00:49:05 Alison

1202 And I mean I was, it was one of the most nerve-wracking things I've done because I thought this

1203 has to work.

1204 00:49:11 Alison

- 1205 And I have no idea whether the audience will like it.
- 1206 00:49:13 Alison
- 1207 I mean, we're trying something completely different here.
- 1208 00:49:16 Alison
- 1209 So we've got piano, cello, violin joined onto concertina, pipes.
- 1210 00:49:23 Alison
- 1211 We had two traditional fiddlers, so that was Junod and Julie.
- 1212 00:49:30 Alison
- 1213 And then we had Kieran on the pipes and Noel playing there.
- 1214 00:49:35 Alison
- 1215 Oh, and John Hoban, who's the most wonderful.
- 1216 00:49:38 Alison
- 1217 musician and singer and just general everything and he sang a song and it actually it was sold
- 1218 out and everybody loved it including us.
- 1219 00:49:51 Mackenzie
- 1220 Have you done anything like that since?
- 1221 00:49:53 Alison
- 1222 No, we'd like to.
- 1223 00:49:55 Alison

1224 I mean the thing is it's difficult because there were nine of us and if you're asking people to do
1225 things these days you have to be able to provide a fee and it was

1226 00:50:07 Alison

1227 Brilliant that Mayo had produced that fee because then we didn't have to think about it.

1228 00:50:12 Alison

1229 But all of those guys will be busy.

1230 00:50:16 Alison

1231 And you're back to that question you asked me about what's it like doing something which some
1232 people do as a hobby.

1233 00:50:22 Alison

1234 I mean I think this is a common misnomer in life which is people think you're happy to play for
1235 nothing.

1236 00:50:29 Alison

1237 I mean in theory wouldn't that be great but unfortunately we do have bills to pay.

1238 00:50:33 Mackenzie

1239 Yeah.

1240 00:50:34 Alison

1241 That's the thing.

1242 00:50:35 Mackenzie

1243 Yeah for sure.

1244 00:50:37 Alison

1245 But actually Edward did ask me the other day if we'd like to do another one.

1246 00:50:39 Alison

1247 So maybe he can find some funding.

1248 00:50:41 Alison

1249 I don't know.

1250 00:50:42 Mackenzie

1251 Yeah, that would be amazing.

1252 00:50:44 Mackenzie

1253 So what people or experiences have been the most influential or transformative kind of looking

1254 back at everything you've achieved up to until this point?

1255 00:50:56 Alison

1256 Oh my word.

1257 00:50:57 Mackenzie

1258 It's a big question.

1259 00:50:59 Alison

1260 I think it probably would have to be my parents because

1261 00:51:04 Alison

1262 I had such an unusual background, I mean, whether it was being sent up the mountain with the
1263 whistles or just the fact that we were always treated like kind of mini adults from the minute we
1264 arrived.

1265 00:51:18 Alison

1266 And I mean, there were disadvantages to that, but there were also incredible advantages, this
1267 sort of feeling that you kind of were never patronized.

1268 00:51:32 Alison

1269 and my family had an extremely strong sense of, my father with his students, they were always
1270 invited into the home and he was incredibly generous and warm to his students.

1271 00:51:50 Alison

1272 I don't think nowadays you're allowed to do that because of safeguarding, which is a real
1273 shame, but people used to come to the house at the weekend and just

1274 00:51:59 Alison

1275 hang out and have their lessons and they would always be asked to eat with us and that's a
1276 very strong kind of ethos which in a funny sort of way I think I value that and I've tried to extend
1277 that in my own family I have two children I haven't mentioned them at all which is interesting but

1278 00:52:24 Alison

1279 I would say that there's another sort of influence you get, which is the one you were handed and
1280 the one that you develop when that other part of your family arrives.

1281 00:52:33 Alison

1282 I mean, my children are the biggest part of my life these days.

1283 00:52:39 Alison

- 1284 Both my parents are dead.
- 1285 00:52:41 Alison
- 1286 My longest relationship with anyone is my sister.
- 1287 00:52:44 Alison
- 1288 So that's a very important thing.
- 1289 00:52:45 Alison
- 1290 And her husband, who's effectively a Kelly, he would say that.
- 1291 00:52:50 Alison
- 1292 He said when he met my family, it was
- 1293 00:52:53 Alison
- 1294 and he's an academic, he's a medical academic.
- 1295 00:52:56 Alison
- 1296 But he said when he met my family, he kind of, it changed his whole life.
- 1297 00:53:00 Mackenzie
- 1298 It's that Kelly Charm.
- 1299 00:53:04 Alison
- 1300 It was a very big thing, but I think when my children arrived, you know, that handing some of
- 1301 that on is actually also a big thing for me.
- 1302 00:53:13 Alison

1303 And what is important to say, actually, thinking about Achill is that it was very important to me
1304 that they came here.

1305 00:53:21 Alison

1306 And they both have this incredibly strong sense of relationship to this place.

1307 00:53:27 Alison

1308 I mean, they're both educated in England.

1309 00:53:30 Alison

1310 They're both in the science world.

1311 00:53:35 Alison

1312 But both of them, I mean, my daughter's getting married in July and John, had to come to Achill
1313 to be tested that, you know, you have to pass the Achill test.

1314 00:53:46 Alison

1315 And the kind of

1316 00:53:51 Alison

1317 sense of belonging here I think is really important.

1318 00:53:56 Mackenzie

1319 Yeah, for sure.

1320 00:53:58 Mackenzie

1321 So when did you, did you also bring your kids here?

1322 00:54:01 Mackenzie

1323 Like as soon as they were kind of old enough to.

1324 00:54:04 Alison

1325 Yes, I did.

1326 00:54:07 Alison

1327 And interestingly, Rory Boyd, because I was talking about Thea Boyd, Rory's her son and he's

1328 here at the moment and I was visiting him and his wife at their house yesterday

1329 00:54:19 Alison

1330 And he was reminding me that when my daughter Millie was about, probably only about 8, she

1331 wrote something at school.

1332 00:54:28 Alison

1333 They were asked to write about somewhere special and she wrote about Achill.

1334 00:54:31 Alison

1335 And I must have sent it to him and he's never forgotten it.

1336 00:54:35 Alison

1337 was a really beautiful little bit of prose actually.

1338 00:54:38 Alison

1339 But I think both of them would have felt, I remember my son is mad about mountains, you know,

1340 so Christmas two or three years ago we were all here

1341 00:54:49 Alison

1342 on Boxing Day and it was a day not so different to this really, but colder.

- 1343 00:54:55 Alison
- 1344 And what did he do?
- 1345 00:54:55 Alison
- 1346 Walked up Slievemore.
- 1347 00:54:58 Mackenzie
- 1348 Casually.
- 1349 00:54:59 Alison
- 1350 Yeah.
- 1351 00:54:59 Mackenzie
- 1352 As one does.
- 1353 00:55:00 Alison
- 1354 Yes, that one does quite, yes.
- 1355 00:55:02 Alison
- 1356 Not with his whistle.
- 1357 00:55:05 Mackenzie
- 1358 Wow, that's amazing that you've been able to extend that onto your...
- 1359 00:55:09 Alison
- 1360 Well, it's very important to me as well because
- 1361 00:55:13 Alison
- 1362 I was saying to Angela about being a blow-in, that expression about being a blow-in.

1363 00:55:18 Mackenzie

1364 I've heard, yes.

1365 00:55:20 Alison

1366 And you can be here, I think, all your life and still be some kind of a blow-in.

1367 00:55:24 Alison

1368 But I mean, I would say that to people here and they'll go, no, you're sure you're not a blow-in.

1369 00:55:30 Alison

1370 And we all know that I am, but you know, I am a blow-in of 60 years, which is quite a significant

1371 one.

1372 00:55:37 Alison

1373 It doesn't mean I'm important, it just means that I feel like I have roots here.

1374 00:55:43 Alison

1375 And the interesting thing for me is the sense of community here is so strong in a kind of, in a

1376 way that is completely visceral.

1377 00:55:54 Alison

1378 So I moved back to London three years ago, but before that I was living out in East Kent, which

1379 is on the southeast coast.

1380 00:56:03 Alison

1381 And I was in an area which is very beautiful.

1382 00:56:08 Alison

1383 You know, on a good day I used to be able to see France.

1384 00:56:11 Alison

1385 And I

1386 00:56:13 Alison

1387 In theory, it was lovely.

1388 00:56:14 Alison

1389 And then we had the pandemic and it was, I mean, I don't think I've ever experienced loneliness

1390 like it, actually.

1391 00:56:20 Alison

1392 And people said to me, well, why are you leaving?

1393 00:56:22 Alison

1394 And I said, it's just so remote.

1395 00:56:25 Alison

1396 And the people looked at me and said, but you go to Achill.

1397 00:56:27 Alison

1398 What do you mean it's remote?

1399 00:56:29 Alison

1400 And I said, I don't feel on my own in Achill.

1401 00:56:33 Alison

1402 I can walk into the Beehive and see five people that I might start talking to

1403 00:56:41 Alison

1404 and I might not know them, but there's just something about this place where people just start

1405 talking.

1406 00:56:47 Mackenzie

1407 Yeah, it's amazing.

1408 00:56:50 Mackenzie

1409 All right, well, I think that's it.

1410 00:56:52 Alison

1411 Wow.

1412 00:56:53 Mackenzie

1413 Yeah, very good.

1414 00:56:54 Mackenzie

1415 Thank you.

1416

1417

1418