

Mark Cagney Part 1 Fin Mix

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SPEAKERS

Mark Cagney, Sabina Brennan



Sabina Brennan 00:51

We couldn't call each other friends we don't know each other, actually, really the occasions we've met is I'm normally in the chair that you're in. So you've interviewed me a few times on a few occasions for Ireland AM. TV show that you led for 20 years. And then more recently, you've interviewed me on the radio on Newstalk. But remotely, because we're in lockdown. Your voice is unique. You have a wonderful voice for radio, I remember back, I'm of that age. I remember pirate radio stations. For listeners who are quite young here, you might not be aware, but sort of when I was growing up, you had the boring sort of RTE, the national radio station. And then you could tune into radio Luxembourg, for the charts to hear some pop music. And then there was suddenly this explosion of pirate radio stations, which was, it just was so anarchic. At the time, it was just really, really exciting to be hearing this, it just felt so new. And this is back at a time where we didn't have internet, we, Ireland was very much a small island, nobody came to do pop concerts here. You know everything we ate up everything that Well, I certainly did, in terms of music from magazines, or you know, other channels. And this was really new, and you were one of the first.



Mark Cagney 02:19

Yeah, it's an interesting, culturally, the country is so different, it may as well be another planet, Sabina, it's very hard to explain. I mean It's hard to explain to our kids now what life was like before smartphones, to explain to them what it was like before satellites and

multi channel TV. It's like trying to explain to somebody who has never seen a black and white photograph what it actually is, but without being able to show them. If you were a child of the 50s, as I was born in '56. Obviously, I didn't live through the birth of rock and roll. But I would have been aware of it. And more importantly, I would have been aware of the effects of what it did, culturally to kids, it was a total rebellion, against their norms, in terms of the music, in terms of the fashion that went with it in terms of the literature and the writing that went with it as well. So we thought about the world and our place in the world in a totally different way to the way that our parents would have and our parents would have had their lives pretty well mapped out for them by their parents and our parents, parents were Victorian, would have been born in the late 1900 (sic), early part of the century. And again, even with the benefit of history it's very hard for us to understand what that would have been like but Ireland, and I suppose the world, but also later than most other parts of it because we are basically a rock, a remote rock off the west coast of Europe,. Technicolor came to us quite late. And we were getting it in dribs and drabs. We were getting it in magazines. We were getting it in radio stations, like Luxembourg or radio North Sea and it would waft in and out and depending what the weather was, you might get it or not. So you read about this Technicolor world of youth and music and fashion and all that went with it. You had very few physical examples of it. So I came from, I came up through that generation, then obviously, people on the east coast of Ireland had BBC and a bear in mind that

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Sabina Brennan 04:14

We had. So I was born in '62. So a few years, you know, but it's around the same sort because as you say, it was kind of slow, slow happening, a slow boil in Ireland. And growing up, we could get HTV,

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Mark Cagney 04:27

which was Harlock. Yeah, and it was Welsh. Welsh TV

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Sabina Brennan 04:31

It was ITV but we could just pick up the Welsh TV and I was the youngest of five. So I had to stand with the rabbit's ears to try and get them. You know, because people got it through aerials or whatever. And

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Mark Cagney 04:43

Try explaining that to kids now



Sabina Brennan 04:44

it's pretty incredible to see the insular way we grew up and you were very much, So like. I totally identify with what you're saying. So my parents generations My dad was 42 when I was born, so he was born in 1921. They were of their generation, which was was that they were just lucky to be alive. And they were lucky to have a job. And they just followed that. They didn't question. They didn't think outside the box as to how their life was to be lived. I don't think they realized there was choice or



Mark Cagney 05:17

as I get older, I do realize that I did have this conver., these conversations. My father, eventually, they had exactly the same questioning and rebellious feelings that we did. But they had no context in which to express them. You know, my father was a jazz musician, and he grew up



Sabina Brennan 05:33

Wow, I didn't know that. That was he was a professional musician. I know. He did other the things as well. He was, also he was in UCC, electric electronics, etc, etc. He was a brilliant Mercurial man, smartest man I've ever met bar, his father, my grandfather, a mind that was like Quicksilver and almost impossible to pin down, he could put his, turn his hand to anything, had his papers as a mechanic because he wanted to be able to fix cars properly. Also got his papers as a welder. So he had two trades, right, as well as having gone to college to do electronics. But he was actually a musician first and foremost. And rock and roll used to be called the devil's music, but in actual fact the first devil his music was jazz. He was every bit as rebellious and his generation had they had all the same rebellious feelings and thoughts. They didn't want what has gone before, but they didn't have either the outlet or the conditioning. I think we're conditioned in another way. Well, they were conditioned not to question



Mark Cagney 06:27

when we were as well. But I have to say, Well, my father was quite, you know, he was a very, we had very bohemian house give you an example of how he.. things were, right. I lived at the top Patrick Hill in Cork? Yeah. And all my friends lived, you know, kind of halfway down the hill. And we were lucky because we had these two huge playing pitches, open green spaces. So during long summer evenings, the pitches would be full of before with all the local lads, would be playing football, some would be playing Gaelic, some playing soccer, some playing hurling, whatever. And at eight o'clock on a summer's

evening, I'd have to go in. Yeah, no, it wouldn't get dark until nine half nine, but I would have to go in and he would come out, and he would call me and which is mortifying. I would go home, grumbling and, and mortified, embarrassed, because like they all be going ha ha in to bed early. But as soon as I got home, that was grand I was in. And then I could stay up until 12 o'clock. I could go and play records I could read. We had in those days were television was still very primitive, and black and white. But you know, you could do all of that. But it was just that. 'My castle and my rules'.

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Sabina Brennan 07:30

I wanted to go back to the music thing, because again, as I do with all my guests, I've been doing as much stalking of you as I can. And I did know that your father was a musician. I didn't know that it was the jazz but

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Mark Cagney 07:39

when he started out as a jazz musician, he was a purist. Right. And, you know, jazz was the rock and roll of its day. And he did very well with it. He moved up to Dublin, played with some big bands up there. Real jazz, like Duke Ellington type jazz, almost symphonic jazz. And then, you know, Basie and the swing bands came in. And he really loved that because he was a rhythm player. He was primarily guitar and bass. And he was not interested, although he knew everything, pretty much that there was to know about what he needed to play the way he did. But he was interested in rhythm and swing and driving and the pulse and the heartbeat and he would go listen, I don't care about solos because I used to say to him how come you never solo? Guitar players didn't at that stage, primarily a rhythm instrument and he said I'm no no interested in it, he said, rhythm is king But the big bands became economically not viable. Then they became, I suppose jump bands and then effectively show bands and if you were to remember remember when he would have started off he would have been in bands like Billy bronze band, there would have been 25 people more 15 to 20 people it

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Sabina Brennan 08:37

Not a chance in a million year of making any money

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Mark Cagney 08:39

when I say slimmed down, they then became

S Sabina Brennan 08:42
became the Show bands

M Mark Cagney 08:43
The showbands became the showbands. And he would have been in one of the first generation of show bands in Ireland in the 50s band called the Reagan, like his contemporaries would have been the early Royal show band and the Tipper Carlton's and those people who were all ex-jazzers, and that when on Monday nights, which is the musicians night off, they would get together and jam in some club or some venue. And then they would play their music, which would be always be, you know, jazz, and everything from some Dixieland, swing, and then the cooler stuff, you know, Parker, and early Duke Ellington, and people like that. So

S Sabina Brennan 09:17
I know that you had said somewhere that you always loved music you would have liked to have been,

M Mark Cagney 09:22
well, my first choice. I wanted to be a musician. You see my father was professional musician, but also, so were two of my aunts, my Mary, Mary, and Eileen, but Mary had the more successful career of them because she would have sung with a lot of those bands. And then she went to America, and before the Ed Sullivan Show, which people of a certain generation will remember because it did launched people like, you know, the Beatles, and the Stones in the States, but I mean he was the he was the Gay Byrne of America. But before that, there was a guy called Arthur Godfrey, who ran for years in the 50s in the States, and his was a variety show rather than, you know, chat show or And there was a talent type Opportunity Knocks-type aspect to that show. So he would bring on new performers and depending on how the audience voted or reacted to them they will be kept

S Sabina Brennan 10:08
a version of what is The Voice

M Mark Cagney 10:10

yeah yeah

S Sabina Brennan 10:10
those now, there's always been versions, they're not new things

M Mark Cagney 10:13
nothing new

S Sabina Brennan 10:13
Hughie Green show was one that we

M Mark Cagney 10:15
Opportunity Knock

S Sabina Brennan 10:16
Yeah, yeah.

M Mark Cagney 10:16
Well, she ran on that show for 26 weeks

S Sabina Brennan 10:18
Wow.

M Mark Cagney 10:19
Which would have been on primetime television in the States. Now, she got picked up by some producers in Broadway. And she did her own show over there. She did a show on Broadway called The Belle of New York.

S Sabina Brennan 10:29
Wow.

M

Mark Cagney 10:29

And the signature role in that is Mimi, and that was Mary's role. And so she had a very successful career. And then as a result of that, herself and Eileen, Mary would have been a much better all round performer but her sister, my aunt Eileen had a much purer voice, technically a beautiful voice and could sing anything but hated performing. She was, used to be, physically ill. Mary loved it she was a natural-born performer. But they were invited to tour with Arthur Feeler and the Boston Pops. So she had a stellar career. I mean, she made records for Glenside. Remember, back in the in the days of sponsored programs, there used to be a program called the Glenside Show. Glenside were an Irish record label. I think that the tag was "If you're going to sing a song, sing an Irish song", So that Mary had quite a few records done for them but she got tired of the road and she got fed up with it. You know this it's great when you're in your 20s in your 30s you get to mid 30s. And on and you know, it takes a toll you get haggard you get fed up of sharing a couch with, you know, 25 men and all that goes with that. And you just want to be at home, you know, you want to wake up in your own bed. So she came back but when she was in America, she she got very friendly with a woman called Helena Rubinstein, or Helena Rubinstein. She was one of the doyens of makeup and beauty. So she got very friendly with her. I think she might have been a fan of her music or whatever. And Mary's a very striking looking woman and would have had to do her own makeup, you know, obviously would, you know, they didn't have makeup artists back in those days all the girls took care of themselves and looked very glamorous, because you're on the road and you've got 25 men who are not going to help you with it. So she said, Would you be interested in doing that I'm going to open up in Europe. And then so Mary went to work for her and there was the Helena Rubenstein counter in Lester's pharmacy,

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Sabina Brennan 12:14

which is like a boots.

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Mark Cagney 12:16

Well, it would have been old school, it would be big. And you mean you had the Munster arcade, you had Cashes, your grocery stores and you had the Lester's

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Sabina Brennan 12:24

this was in cork

M Mark Cagney 12:25
so when she came back, she just basically went into the cosmetics business. She stood at that counter for I don't know, another 25 or 30 years

S Sabina Brennan 12:32
So Mary played a huge role in your life. There's a couple of things I want to ask is, and you did end up in a career in music as a disc jockey,

M Mark Cagney 12:39
because it was as close as I could get

S Sabina Brennan 12:40
Yes. Why? Did you try?

M Mark Cagney 12:43
My manual dexterity? just wasn't there? I have a very good ear. Yeah. I have a pretty good time. Kind of a built in clock metronome. Just the fingers wouldn't work. Maybe I tried the wrong instrument. And did you try your voice as an instrument I couldn't sing to save my life saved my life. Really? Oh, no, no, no, no.

S Sabina Brennan 12:59
And that's funny, because you know,

M Mark Cagney 13:01
my father could sing as well. By the way. He was a good singer. Hands like a labourer. you will go How can he play? And you won't hear him play the piano really didn't know he actually really like to stomp? you know, but they're incredibly delicate. And he could work with tiny little screws and electronics and stuff like that

S Sabina Brennan 13:01
Isn't it interesting. And it's incredible. But what amazes me and like, sort of, I suppose and anyone out there as well, you know, if you've ever wanted to, you can try and you can

learn some things that

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Mark Cagney 13:26

I tried. I tried. I tried. And what's that, from? I don't know, Shakespeare and possibly you can say Shakespeare who's going to disagree with you. But 'be careful, be careful lest you trample or crush my dreams'. my father was, as I said a little earlier, he was incredibly bright. And worse than that. He had a facility to absorb knowledge in Mercurial, he could pick something

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Sabina Brennan 13:49

What do you mean by Mercurial?

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Mark Cagney 13:51

Well, his his mind was Mercurial in the sense that he was always coming up with things, he was always looking at new things, he was always going at, I could make that better. And he would right, he did have a Mercury of temper too. Short and sharp and blow up, but not frightening. But his mind was constantly moving in different directions. And as he did that, he had the ability to absorb things. So for example, he could take up a new instrument that wasn't his primary or secondary instrument. And, you know, I remember once he was asked, there was a gig, going with a really, really good Caberet band, and they said, Look, we don't need a guitar player, bass player, we do need a piano player. Actually, what we really need is an organ player, because in those days, you could get organs that had bass pedals,

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Sabina Brennan 14:32

Right? right.

M

Mark Cagney 14:32

So he could take care of all the keyboard stuff, and then he could play the bass pedals as well. He said, Well, I haven't done that. He said, give me give me a while. So he got an organ. And within two weeks, he was good enough to go on and get paid And play it and get one partly not just play, but actually play to a level where it was acceptable for a professional outfit

S Sabina Brennan 14:50
So how was that for you?

M Mark Cagney 14:51
It's incredibly frustrating.

S Sabina Brennan 14:52
Yeah, that's what I was gonna say for you growing up. How was that seeing

M Mark Cagney 14:55
It meant you were never good enough You could never do anything as well as he could.. He would ask you to do a job and he would say, listen, strip that wallpaper or paint that, and you do it to the best of your ability as an 11, 12, 13 year old, And then he was your God if you want something done, do it yourself. you know, and you just kind of now he, these days in this current 'woke' world that we live in, you know, people would be on onto Childline you know going...I'm being killed

S Sabina Brennan 15:06
it was just never... Oh gosh look sure half

M Mark Cagney 15:22
my esteem has been destroyed by my parents and all the rest of it. But he just had a facility to get stuff really, really quick. He was super smart. He had an enquiring mind, and he had a facility to absorb stuff. And he would be able to absorb it and then use it,

S Sabina Brennan 15:35
he was always frustrated by other people who can't operate at the same level as him.

M Mark Cagney 15:40
Yeah, the downside of that was is that because he could do that his attention span was minuscule. And he didn't finish things.

S Sabina Brennan 15:50
Oh, okay. So he didn't follow through. He just was flitting around

M Mark Cagney 15:53
because it came too easy to him,

S Sabina Brennan 15:54
right?

M Mark Cagney 15:54
Because it came way too easy to him. And he didn't understand people for whom things didn't come easily too, for example, me with music. You'd never live up to it, you'd never match it, I'd never be able to play an instrument like he was never the smart as he was, I could never do things the way he did. But I mean, again, the otherside of that he was forever taking things apart and putting them back together again, and they would work better, was extraordinary. But it just drove my mom crazy. We had this enormous dinner table in our house. And it was like, I have four sisters and three brothers. So there was eight of us. And You're the eldest of eight. I'm the eldest. So the table had to be big enough to take all eight of us. plus my parents. And then of course, my father going ah well look we always need a bit of extra room on my mother was, was a tailor/ dressmaker. So she needed a really big

S Sabina Brennan 16:36
table for cutting out

M Mark Cagney 16:38
Exactly, all of that kind of stuff. So there was, it was enormous. I mean, you could have fitted another six or eight, maybe another six people. And I remember for months, there was an engine at the end of that. And the reason we all remembered is that because for about six or eight months, our food all tasted of oil, because there was this Mercedes engine, he was fac.. He was obsessed with Mercedes cars, that engine at the end of the thing that he was rebuilding, and he was doing it and I remember my mother losing her mind on occasions, quite 'Jesus Christ Johnny' I'm sick to death of the food tasting of oil. oh boy, when do you ever get that bloody thing off it? And that's

S Sabina Brennan 17:13
and I'm not diagnosing anyone. But it does sound slightly manic, you know?

M Mark Cagney 17:19
He was mad, and it was loose, and it was bohemian. And all of my friends thought it was great this place.

S Sabina Brennan 17:24
So if this fabulous sort of, well, it sounds sort of fabulous, unusual, bohemian life. You have this amazing dad that you've just described. And then at 16

M Mark Cagney 17:36
oh well it had started before that

S Sabina Brennan 17:37
15? you left because you're only a child, whatever age, whether you were 15 or 16 you left home

M Mark Cagney 17:42
All his bohemian outlook on life and in questioning everything and questioning convention and being you know, quite unconventional in his own way. He wanted very conventional upbringing for us. So my educational and career path was mapped out and he used to say listen, go to college, get your degree then you can have your life then you can do what you want. But until then, my house my rules this what's going to happen. His father had been a, was a doctor, had been surgeon, his brother was one. Another brother was in the Air Corps was a commandant in the Air Corps. But he was the rebel, himself and Mary were the rebels

S Sabina Brennan 18:12
both extremely successful in what they have to

M Mark Cagney 18:15

academically yes they'd all done well, but still very conventional, Cork. You're going to the right schools.

S Sabina Brennan 18:21
So you're very posh sort of.

M Mark Cagney 18:24
I had a very. I had a very good private education. My brothers, my sisters went to Saint Angela's, at the bottom of Patrick's Hill, we lived at the top I went to Christians, which would be the equivalent of Black Rock, I suppose.

S Sabina Brennan 18:35
Right?

M Mark Cagney 18:35
Christians and Pres. So yeah, I had the benefit of all of that. But my father had everything mapped out for me. And I had other ideas. And I didn't want what he, I didn't want to go to college, I didn't want to be a doctor, I didn't want to be told what to do. I wanted to be able to grow my hair as long as I wanted. I wanted to be involved in music in some form or fashion. And, you know, I was 14 / 15 / 16 and waiting till I was 23 / 24 and came out of college. Just like 10 years is a lifetime not having any of that. And I was also again a bit like him, a lot like him questioning and stubborn and like why. I painted a picture of him being kind of very authoritarian. And he was in many ways, you know, we had very boho of kind of existence and command structure and hierarchy within the house, and then quite strict as far as it looked from the outside. But we were all encouraged. Like one of my grandfather's great saying was that education is no burden. You can do everything

S Sabina Brennan 19:36
the great liberator

M Mark Cagney 19:36
Absolutely you should do everything. You should do everything you possibly can, read as much as you can. learn as much as you can, ask as many questions as you can, because you can't know too much. Use it. And what was nothing used to say is is the older I get, the

more I realize how little I actually really know. So that was encouraged in our house and big house that people were sitting around talking and you were encouraged to think and you'd be questioned on it So you have to have sharp elbows both physically and also mentally. And, like I had the biggest mouth, and I had the most questioning mind and I didn't understand why the contradictions. You know 'You didn't do what your father did'.

S Sabina Brennan 19:39
Yeah,

M Mark Cagney 19:44
you know you'd have taken over his practice you'd have become a doctor like your brother Michael did. No you didn't want to do that? No, you want to do music you want to follow your heart. Find something you love, and you'll never work a day in your life. So that's what I want to do. 'My house my rules, You don't like it? There's the door'. One day I went, Okay, so I took the door. And I've never really talked to him about what he thought whatever. But he his immediate reaction was, okay, so you made your bed now you lie on it. I'm not gonna ask you to come back

S Sabina Brennan 20:42
So when you're when you physically because I remember walking 16 as well and been yanked Back, Back home sort of thing. But when you walked out that door, did you know you were going to your grandfather? did you go What the hell I

M Mark Cagney 20:55
I had gone a couple of times first. Okay. There was a few few failed attempts. In actual fact, I did my I did my junior cert, while sleeping in his car. In his car, my father's car, I had left.

S Sabina Brennan 21:12
Wow,

M Mark Cagney 21:14
it was a real cute hoor move on my partreally cute horror movie on my so that's 14, I knew

I wasn't going to get the exams. I hadn't done the work. And I was breaking myself over I went This is good. This is bad. So how can I create a diversion?

S Sabina Brennan 21:26
Did you honestly think that

M Mark Cagney 21:28
this is I hate this, I'm not gonna do this, I'm not gonna go well, I'm going to get killed. September is going to be awful. And there was a lot of trouble between us there's a lot of arguing, fighting. And, you know, I was the eldest daughter, you have to remember and the experiment. And one of the things I realized subsequently as a parent, is, is that you really do learn on the job with the first one, the others get the benefit, right. And they were doing it and they had seven,

S Sabina Brennan 21:49
and they were learning from you. Well, they were watching because as a fifth child, I was the youngest. So I watched what the others did or didn't do you know,

M Mark Cagney 21:57
I'd had a few breakouts before that. And and also I there had been times, because of whatever was going on with them financially, where I had gone to live with my mother's parents, my Nana and PA who were lovely. I was blessed with two great grandparents that, who I loved dearly, really loved dearly. And then pop was my, my father was his favorite. He has his pet. And at another stage, I went to live with them in a house called Coolecarn Bishopstown. Coolcarren, which I adore it. I loved. I just thought this is lovely. It's brilliant. It's just me and pop and mom, and Mary, and all of this space. And nobody and no kids. I wanted to be an only child. But anyway, I knew that Junior. was going to be a disaster. And I literally like I have to, what am I going to do, either... I can't not do it, because they'll make me. But if something was to happen, that I couldn't do it for some reason or other, then I'd get away with it. Something happened. And the rose would always start with who myself my mother. And then she'd go 'Johnny, you need to talk to him'. And then she'd kind of make the bullets and he'd fire them.

S Sabina Brennan 23:02
Right. So he did what your mum said

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Mark Cagney 23:03

There was a blazing row between myself and my mother over something he came in. And there was some row over it and I don't actually remember the details of it. But I stalked off. And then she's going "but what... he's got his junior, what's he going to do? What's he going to do? You can't do that. That's just ridiculous". "I'm not having a few knows what the rules are. There's the door get out" thinking, of course, it'd be back soon as I got hungry. And I didn't I went down to my best friend Kevin Moynihan's house and I got fed there. And then it was it I was gonna stay with him that night. And then the second night was like, hang on a second, how come you're not going home? So where was I going to go? So this is back in the days when people didn't lock their cars. So I kind of crept back up the hill. And I tried the car, the car door opened and I went in, and I slept in the car. And the junior was starting the that was over the course the weekend. It was starting on the Monday it was and I think the first two or three days I slept in the car. Now, they knew I was in the car, right? My mother would come out with a bit of breakfast, all the rest of it. But of course, you know, it was completely disrupted. Eventually it kind of calmed down and I think a really cold one of the nights or something and it was like For God's sake get back inside.

S

Sabina Brennan 23:17

Yeah, yeah,

M

Mark Cagney 23:25

it was he wouldn't say you have to come home or I'm asking you, it's just like get back inside you. But the plan worked because I failed the junior. But of course it couldn't be blamed for it because how could I do proper Junior certificate I was

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Sabina Brennan 24:23

... living in a car.

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Mark Cagney 24:24

That stage then I would have been 15 that coming September. And then there was kind of a guerrilla warfare between both of us on and off

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Sabina Brennan 24:35

both of us? between yourself and your dad or yourself and your mum

M Mark Cagney 24:38
Myself an my parents.

S Sabina Brennan 24:39
Yeah,

M Mark Cagney 24:39
There was, there was,... I was an absolute pup. I was just difficult. I was awkward.

S Sabina Brennan 24:43
You were a teenager.

M Mark Cagney 24:44
Well, yeah. And I was a mouthy gobby one.

S Sabina Brennan 24:48
Yeah, but most teenagers are, you know.

M Mark Cagney 24:50
Manipulative and you know, cunning.

S Sabina Brennan 24:52
You've said at some point in an interview that I read, that you blamed yourself for a lot
The upset and turmoil that happened in your family. But surely the adults have to take
some responsibility for that, too.

M Mark Cagney 25:07
You want to find out how I got to my grandfather? Here's here's, and it's interesting that

you take that point of view. Right Fast forward a year, and things hadn't gotten any better. And then I was having trouble in school as well, in the year I went back after my, my junior. And there was rules or regulations. And I eventually told one of the senior brothers to go on

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Sabina Brennan 25:27

Feck off,

M

Mark Cagney 25:28

and there was more drama. So like, I was suspended, and then I was thrown out. And this is coming up to the Christmas and there was more going on in house. And it was just desperate. And you know, you ruin Christmas, You spoiled it and dah, dah, dah... And eventually, I thought, right, you know what, I've had enough of this. And I found a lot of money. Well, a lot of money at the time, in a drawer. And I went, right, okay. And at this stage now I'm coming up to 15 /16. I wasn't mad about drink, but there were like house parties and all that stuff. And I had a friend whose parents had a couple of cottages, I suppose you would call them but they were rented out and the people are rented out to run away over Christmas. So he was gonna have a party and one of those. And he said will you come to the party and I went Okay. We can stay that for a couple of days. Because

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Sabina Brennan 26:16

the parents are away

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Mark Cagney 26:17

Yeah, yeah, right. So. So we went to that went to the party had a great time. And it was free for about a week, I left on Christmas Eve, by the way, for maximum effect, oh, my goodness, oh maximum effect? Or am I going to ruin Christmas I'll ruin it properly. And I left with a bunch of money, which obviously wasn't mine. So I couch surfed, I suppose, or whatever you call me back then for as long as I could. And that went on for about a week. And then got into January. And nobody had any idea who I was because very few people had phones back in those.

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Sabina Brennan 26:47

Yeah, yes.

M Mark Cagney 26:48
So trying to find,

S Sabina Brennan 26:50
and we're talking house phones not mobile phones. Oh, yeah, yeah. So

M Mark Cagney 26:53
Anyway, eventually Whelan said, Listen, they're coming back, you're going to have to go they're coming back. You have to find somewhere else. And I dosed with somebody else for another night or two. And then I had nowhere to go. So I was literally on the streets. I remember finding a doorway in North Main Street in Cork and getting run out of it because it was somebody else's doorway.

S Sabina Brennan 27:11
Wow.

M Mark Cagney 27:12
So it was a bit like and again, you're the kind of 16 you think you're brave, but actually it's cold. It's bitterly cold

S Sabina Brennan 27:17
Freezing, yeah, yeah

M Mark Cagney 27:17
Some hairy shaggy fellow looks like it's, you know, like, like something from a Dickens novel. Says, "get out of there". and gives you a root in the arse to send you on your way. So eventually, I worked my way out to the Western road. I remember getting right opposite the entrance to UCC, there was a kind of a seated area, had a canopy on it where, you know, people would would stop and rest and whatever. So I saw Oh, look, there's a bench there and it's covered so but it was getting bitterly cold at the stage. I'll kind of settled down there freezing my you may have picked the time of the year for maximum effect. but it really wasn't a good time of the year for rough living No it wasn't I got run out of htat again. And I to start well, Western road, I'm on my way to bshopstown, athat's where pop,

and Mary are. So just keep walking, because at least if I'm walking, I'm gonna be warm. And eventually I ended up on their door at about four o'clock in the morning. And they had known obviously, they were so she went come on, come in, fed me, warmed me up and rang my father and said, "Look, he's okay, he's here. You might want to leave it a day or two to calm down."

S Sabina Brennan 28:20
Yeah.

M Mark Cagney 28:21
So my father came over. And my father and my grandfather were, as I said, they were like best buds. And he adored him. And they had a big row over it. And he says, "I'm not putting up with this, you don't know what he's like. And this is the straw that has broken the camel's back and all the rest, to hell with him.. And my grandfather turned to him and said, "Listen, no grandchild of mine is going to be wandering the street. That's just not going to happen". He said, "You have no idea what he's like, well if you think he's, so easy? Well, you take him then." So he said, "Well, he's got to go somewhere. And he's a child, and you're an adult," "you're taking his side against mine." If you're a grown up, you need to behave like one. And if you're not going to do that, then he's got to go somewhere. So he'll stay here," "You can't do that. What are you going to even take my son. we'll see what people have to say about that". And remember Pop saying it he said, "Well, good luck, with going into court against Dr. Paddy Cagney. No, Because he had, would have been highly highly respected. So my father was livid and furious and it caused a huge rift between the two of them, which I am, to this day, deeply sorry for.

S Sabina Brennan 29:16
And did they ever heal the Rift,

M Mark Cagney 29:18
He would have gone to visit his father two or three, Well, at least once a week, maybe twice a week, every week and we would go with him. From there on in, he would ring ahead to say I'm coming make sure make sure I'm not there. Okay, so those visits dropped to maybe once every fortnight. And it was kind of, had to be arranged and it was awful and I deeply regret that that happened.. The only thing I will say in my defense was is that my grandfather was at that stage going into senility or early Alzheimer's or whatever. And he would go in and go out of lucidity, and he became a handful to manage. He was

physically this great big strapping man, but he didn't know where he was a lot of the time. So you ended up looking after him. I did it and it was a pleasure and a privilege. Something that helped me grow up a lot. The first time I'd ever really thought of anybody other than myself. And it was somebody I loved deeply, and who was a huge influence on me. And not just loved, but I admired. I won't say at the time that I consciously was doing it for my father or being a surrogate for my father. But I subsequently think that their must have been some.. I'm sure your father saw that too? Do you think?

S Sabina Brennan 30:23
You can frame it that way.

M Mark Cagney 30:24
Well, I know that Mary said, she said, "you know, your father's right you are a pup And, you know, I didn't know whether we made the right right or wrong decisions, she said but when I saw you with pop and the way you were with him, she said, I thought, you know what, he'll be grand. we just need to work on it a bit and get it out of him". And so that was a very, formative experience Ehhh I'm not sure. You see, there's two acts of forgiveness that need to go on there. One was that I robbed him of that. But also that he robbed himself of that there's absolutely no reason why he couldn't have visited his father. I mean, I could have gone to the room to

S Sabina Brennan 30:57
your father's passed away, still alive?

M Mark Cagney 31:00
My father's gone,

S Sabina Brennan 31:00
Gone.

M Mark Cagney 31:02
So, but that rift never really healed, and I was, you know, it tore the family apart. And there were people took sides, you know, and, and people take sides in my own, my own immediate family. I mean, it went on for donkey's years.

- S** Sabina Brennan 31:15
But there does come a point where you have to self preserve, or you have to make peace with what happened and, and move on. Because it's the only way you can kind of survive, you kind of get stuck in a moment. And I'm going to jump forward. Because this podcast is all about surviving and thriving in life. And when you go through your life story, You've, you've endured an awful lot of,... you have
- M** Mark Cagney 31:38
I've made people endure.
- S** Sabina Brennan 31:40
Ah no, no, no. But you've also, you know, you've lived through, you've mentioned your first wife, and she tragically died very, very young. And I really do want to talk to you about that. So you met Anne when you were about 19?
- M** Mark Cagney 31:51
Yeah, in Cork at the time
- S** Sabina Brennan 31:51
she had health issues.
- M** Mark Cagney 31:52
Of yeah she had nephritis when she was seven, and her kidneys were in the process of failing. She was on dialysis.
- S** Sabina Brennan 31:59
While, when you when you were dating?
- M** Mark Cagney 32:01
Oh, yeah, it was You know how I found out? I found out about that, when we were dancing one night, and I had a leather jacket on. And even though the music was quite loud, I could hear a kind of zzzzzz, a kind of a buzzing and feel a little vibration on my shoulder.

And I went what the hell is that?

S Sabina Brennan 32:20
Yeah,

M Mark Cagney 32:21
you know, and it was in a nightclub where I worked as well. And I just thought, is there something wrong with the speaker, whatever. She didn't say anything. Yeah, she just kind of gave a little smile And I went "do you not hear that am I going mad she went , yeah. And then, little afterwards, we were sitting down. And I was holding her hand. And she had what's called a fistula, which is where they join a vein and an artery to make the blood pump faster to go into the the dialysis machine, right? It's a joining of the two, she used to do it as a joke to freak out nurses who were taking her pulse for the first time. She'd give them the left hand, and they'd put their hand on the fistula. And they got 'Oh, my God', like they'd been, because it's almost like getting an electric shock, you could feel the buzzing. And it was, it was the buzzing of that on the leather jacket. And I just went, 'What the hell is that?' So then she explained. Oh on the other thing as well, I could never understand why she wouldn't let me bring her home. Because she would go to the club, she would only drink water and chips of ice. She didn't drink any alcohol. And then at two or three, she would disappear. Or she'd go No, sorry. I'm up early in the morning. No, I'm going home with the girls or whatever. But she was actually going to Finbarrs to be dialysed. She used to have her dialysis done in the middle of the night. And then she would come home, get some sleep. And then she'd go to work. So she to all intents and purposes, she was completely normal. You would never ever know unless she chose to tell you. And so that's how I found out that she was a dialysis patient.

S Sabina Brennan 33:48
Wow. And so then you married relatively young.

M Mark Cagney 33:53
Yeah, I met her when I was 19. And we were going out with each other for a couple of years. And then, what age was I, married when I was 24

S Sabina Brennan 33:58
Do you know what year you were married?

- M** Mark Cagney 33:58
Em now I have to calculate I calculated our relationship in different ways, right? We were married on the 28th of March. Yes. So our wedding anniversary was recently, the 28th of March
- S** Sabina Brennan 34:03
And the 28th of March is also the anniversary of her death.
- M** Mark Cagney 34:18
hang on a second though, 30 years ago, last Sunday. And we had been married for 11 years. So that's 41 years. And we've been together for six years before that.
- S** Sabina Brennan 34:28
And she's dead 20 years and
- M** Mark Cagney 34:30
She's dead. 30 years, 30 years since last 28th of March.
- S** Sabina Brennan 34:34
So very tragic, very young project. She was 38 and you were younger than her> Yeah,
- M** Mark Cagney 34:41
she was older.
- S** Sabina Brennan 34:43
You were 34. And to phrase this question about how did you cope because you didn't really cope. I mean, obviously you have gone on to survive and thrive. But at the time when she collapsed. She collapsed in Brown Thomas,
- M** Mark Cagney 34:59
She'd had the first hemorrhage there

S Sabina Brennan 35:01
A brain hemorrhage?

M Mark Cagney 35:02
Subarachnoid Yeah.

S Sabina Brennan 35:03
Okay.

M Mark Cagney 35:03
And they took her to the Meath hospital and I got a call, ended up going to the Meath we're told look, we're not sure, something in her head, might be hemorrhage. We're going to do a CAT scan. Now back in those days a CAT scan was a big deal. It was a bit ooh something with the brain. Yeah. And they have to move on from the Meath, then to Beaumont.

S Sabina Brennan 35:25
Beaumont handles all sort of head injuries, neurology

M Mark Cagney 35:27
So we sat around there, they did the CAT scan, and they came back and said she's had sub arachnoid brain hemorrhage. Thankfully, that bleed wasn't too long. But we've also found that there's another vessel on the other side. I don't know which one is the vertebral is on the right hand side. I don't know what vein is on the side, right. But there was one on the other side at the back of her head, which is ready to go as well. Interestingly enough, because of all of the messing around with veins and fistulas. And at that stage, she'd had two kidney transplants. So like her cardiovascular system had been interfered with.

S Sabina Brennan 36:02
I mean, she'd been ill since Yeah, for 21 years reallyl.

M Mark Cagney 36:04

There were little bulges and potential embolisms And apparently, also, she had too, what was known as a tangle of vessels, which I believe is quite common, right, that a lot of people have them. And women in particular seemed at that time to be more prone to brain hemorrhages in their mid to late 30s. I have no idea whether that's true, or not I must have a look into that. But Anyway, she had another vein or artery which was ready to pop, or was bulging, or they we're worried about it, they said, Look, this one was a very short, I think this the first bleed was sort of two or three seconds. So this one could be much longer, could be much longer, much more dangerous. We have to go in and we have to fix it. Now. That's a really, really big deal for an awful lot of couples and for an awful lot of people But when you had gone to the edge as often as Anne and I had with various things with with kidney transplant, which was groundbreaking surgery back in the time, and she had gotten really, really sick at one stage and spent nearly 18 months in Mary's in the park, because she got shingles, which in her case, ended up with practically every inch of skin from her neck down to her bellybutton being taken off I mean it was dreadful, it was awful.

S Sabina Brennan 37:10
And you're only kids really in a way through

M Mark Cagney 37:12
We are, we are and we were int Dublin and we're..

S Sabina Brennan 37:14
you can say that with hindsight like I'm in my late 50s. Now you look back and you realize that your 20s you really are kids and even your early 30s

M Mark Cagney 37:22
She was a pro

S Sabina Brennan 37:25
She obviously had to grow up very young, you know,

M Mark Cagney 37:28
She would put herself on and off the machine, she would she would do because she could

insert the needles better than any nurse or any doctor. She was so expert at it and she knew.

S Sabina Brennan 37:35

So they're going to take her into, for surgery. So she was conscious, was she conscious between the first

M Mark Cagney 37:40

She was yeah. we're having a conversation I never forget the last conversation was because it was, look, this is what she did. She went into the ring, she fought the battle, she always won. I held her coat and held the fort down. And it was you've had this, there's another one on the other side. It needs to be sorted out. Otherwise you could have a big problem. And she went "Yeah, okay, come on." This is what I do. "And I always win" she said, "Oh, by the way, you know, it's bin day tomorrow." I said, Oh Yeah, yeah She said "make sure you put the bins out and don't forget to feed the dogs". And I'll see when I wake up. And those were the last words she spoke So she went, she had it. She was in an induced coma. She didn't really regain....

S Sabina Brennan 38:14

that's to protect her Aww

M Mark Cagney 38:23

And it stayed like that. And then she had another massive

S Sabina Brennan 38:30

hemorrhage.

M Mark Cagney 38:32

Oh, I have to remember the timeframe because it all blurs,

S Sabina Brennan 38:36

I can imagine.

M

Mark Cagney 38:37

That initial hemorrhage, in Brown Thomas happened on the 18th. And then two days later, they operated. So the 20th and then she was recovering for two or three, four or five days. And then she had another massive bleed, which went on for they thought in the region of 18 seconds and it was over and done with it was gone. She was gone. That was actually, oh out was the 24th Yeah. 24th 25th. And they went "look, we'll ventilate her but we have no idea how long this would go on. And I don't know if you know about brainstem it could be three hours could be three days could be three weeks could be three months. You know it will happen when it will happen" At thos stage my head is fried, melted because I thought she'd win she always did she never lost

S

Sabina Brennan 39:28

never I think for you compared to other people. I think other people would say she had no previous history and then had this you'd be going oh my god, she could die. Oh my god. Oh my god. What? Because you'd had that repeated

M

Mark Cagney 39:42

indestructable

S

Sabina Brennan 39:43

you'd been there before, more routine I suppose

M

Mark Cagney 39:44

Well she was the strongest person I knew? she just refused to allow this, to define her and to beat her. But you have to face facts. And people were very sorry and all the rest of it. So I remember being told that and I went off to try to get my head clear. And I remember coming back about a half hour, 40 minutes later, and talking to the staff nurse, the senior nurse on the ward and saying, Listen, I know when she would go. Anyway, she went, yeah, I said she will go on the 28th. And she'll probably go somewhere around Tea Time and she went "Yes, Mr. Cagney, whatever you say" sh said, Listen, you don't know her? I do. She didn't get to say goodbye. She will go on the 28th, around five or six o'clock? And she said, "Really? Why?" I said because that was the day we got married. And that's when we sat down to our meal for our wedding. And she'd say goodbye, then. That's when she'll go. And that's exactly when she went. Now. I had to give the permission to switch the machine off. I had to give permission for that. That's a very challenging decision, for a 34

year old what do you do? Every now and again and I've never actually do you know Getting me to say things here, I'm possibly leaving too much out on the pitch. You know, you do these kinds of things over the years. And people ask you Oh, it was the hardest thing you've ever had to do? Or who's the most famous person you've ever interviewed? Or, you know, you get those kind of 20 questions type things, right. And somebody recently asked me about what was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. And the hardest thing that I personally have ever had to do, is to give permission for that machine to be switched off. You actually think about it, this is your life. This is your soulmate. And even though she's, you know, intellectually that she's gone, and that it would be, you know, the cruelest thing you possibly could do not to?

S Sabina Brennan 41:39
Well, sounding by the kind of independent individual she was

M Mark Cagney 41:42
Exactly.

S Sabina Brennan 41:43
She would have just hated that.

M Mark Cagney 41:45
Yeah, absolutely. She would have, then there's this thing. She's also the toughest person that you've ever met. Anybody could defy the odds and come back, it would be her, but you knew at this stage it was gone

S Sabina Brennan 41:54
Okay, so I hadn't, I hadn't thought about that. That argument that you were having in your head, oh, my God,

M Mark Cagney 42:00
the extent of the hemorrhage was so severe that she could have existed was,



Sabina Brennan 42:05

did you make that decision alone? I mean, I know you were her next of kin. So you didn't discuss with her parents or anything? You just



Mark Cagney 42:13

Eh no, it was my decision,



Sabina Brennan 42:15

right?



Mark Cagney 42:17

Ah now, I was there with her brother, who was brilliant Eric, like a brother. But the biggest lesson that I took out of that. And it does apply to the parenting thing a little later on, which is, ah you can.. Well, you can go mad, and I did go mad. Okay, eventually, I had really good friends around me, they pulled me back and all the rest of it. Then you have to think about what do you do? Well you can go on or you can go under? And how do you go on when you've lost all of this. And it's the, it's very simple. It's that glass half full, or glass half empty. I had an amazing relationship. I had it for 16 years. And there's millions of people who don't get that at all. So be grateful for what you had, not for what you've lost. Or, more importantly, don't be bitter about what you've lost. Because as Nelson Mandela famously said, 'being bitter is like drinking the poison, hoping the other fellow will die doesn't work. It only poisons you". So what you had was wonderful. It's awful, that it's been taken away. But we didn't have and this is maybe the most valuable lesson and the one that actually helps me with the second phase of my life, which is that there was nothing left unsaid between us, we had the most normal, ordinary, mundane conversation that you could possibly have before somebody going for major surgery, which you know, wasn't successful and ultimately led to her death. You know, if your last words with somebody you love, if you had a choice of what they would be, you probably pick something really flowery and profound, whatever, right? Mine was about putting out the bin and making sure the dog was fed, and I'll see when you wake up. But that was also the very fabric of our lives, and our love and the way we work together. So in one way, it is the most banal and ordinary on another level. It's a perfect expression of the life I had, which I loved and which she loved. But there was nothing left unsaid between



Sabina Brennan 44:09

See I think that's a lovely, lovely, lovely way to look at bereavement of any kind,

particularly certain bereavement

M

Mark Cagney 44:17

as another day in paradise. Yeah,

S

Sabina Brennan 44:19

yeah, that's a lovely way. That's just so lovely. Just another day of

M

Mark Cagney 44:23

very ordinary paradise, but like our parents, yeah, yeah. Another lesson taught me Sabina, was, make sure make sure that you tell the people you love and you care for and who love and care for you how you feel, not in a big grand gesture, but just... I do it with the kids all the time. And I check in with them every now and again. I go listen you know, I love you, don't you? You know, you can tell me anything. You know, no matter what you do, I have no choice. I have to love you like that goes with the gig. It's unconditional. I might not like you sometimes. I might not like you a lot of the times but I'll always love you. And I'll always have to love you. And no matter what you do or whatever trouble you get into, come and talk to me about We'll sort it out first and I'll eat the years off you afterwards for being stupid enough to put yourself in that situation.

S

Sabina Brennan 45:05

But I will never not love you?

M

Mark Cagney 45:07

Absolutely. So there's nothing left unsaid. So there are no regrets. There's no torture, because that way lies despair. It's the old, you keep looking into the abyss of 'what if' forgetting, of course, that the Abyss looks back into you. To paraphrase Goethe, I'm not sure that he quite meant it like that but "That way lies madness and that way lies despair. And either because I'm incredibly lucky, or maybe my survivor's instinct was operating an overdrive at the time, that I got incredibly smart, in some way, a combination of the two, it saved me. Now, I did need help, I'd what I didn't need medication I didn't need, I didn't need to go to see doctors, I didn't need therapy, I didn't need any of that.

S Sabina Brennan 45:52
You needed friends,

M Mark Cagney 45:53
I needed friends,

S Sabina Brennan 45:53
and you had great friends.

M Mark Cagney 45:54
And I had great friends

S Sabina Brennan 45:55
And that's what really stuck out to me

M Mark Cagney 45:56
An be greatful for for what I had.

S Sabina Brennan 45:57
And I, you know, in terms of surviving trauma, because life throws, I say this time, and again, we have no control over what life throws at us. But you have control over how you respond. You went back to work way too soon after losing your wife. And you can kind of see how that, you know, might have happened. And you said you had whatever you felt was a breakdown, but you hadn't gone through the grieving process at all. You know, it's very clear now that you've made peace with that. And that unconditional love piece is so important. And I think when it comes to love, you know, I see people and you know, you kind of look at them. And I've said this over and again on this, you know, the movies and novels have an awful lot to answer for because they paint this picture of what love is, you know, and oh, he does this for me. And it does that Look for me. It's that mundane, you know, I'm married to someone and we sort of say, Valentine's Day, "I'm not getting your card", "I'm not getting you a card Couldn't be arsed. But you know what, I've had terrible migraine this week, and it goes down into my neck and my husband will look at me and say "you're in bits aren't you?" Yeah he'll like, stop everything and try and help relieve me.

That's love. That's, you know, you don't have to say those things. And that's life. It's the other stuff. You know, you can say I love you. You're the best, you can say all those things. Moon in June and the honeymoon lasts for how long? What do you do with the rest of your life? Exactly. You'd become best...

M

Mark Cagney 47:14

who's the first person you want? If something happens to you? Who's the first person you want to tell?

S

Sabina Brennan 47:17

Who's the first person you call

M

Mark Cagney 47:18

Who's the first person you need? That's the person you love

S

Sabina Brennan 47:21

Yes it's a friendship. It really is. It's ultimately about friendship and trust, and all those things. And it was wonderful to hear as well that you know, when you were really struggling, there was another individual who actually took you out. I was interested in one thing you said he basically took you out and took you away and you went traveling with him

M

Mark Cagney 47:40

Joe and Marian, Joe and Marian O'Herlihy, Marion would have been em. Well, I've known Joe since I was 15. We started in bands together in Cork, he roadied for one band, I roadied for another. So I'd known him on and off. He obviously has famously become one of the best known sound engineers in the world because he's been with U2 for 40 years. He's known as the big fat fellow with the beard. He looks like Grandpa Walton. Like he's legendary and rock and roll circles. Right. But his wife Marian, and Anne would have been best friends. So like it's the real cCork Murphya kind of thing, you know, so we would have been in and out of each other's houses. And actually that friendship has continued on but you know, when when I rang Marian actually to tell her that that Anne was sick something had happened and she was in The Meath and they live in Rathdown Park in Terenure But Joe was away and Marian didn't have the car. And she physically ran and I mean, ran from Terenure to the Meath to get there in time. And I was following out in a taxi. And I

think she got there before I did. Or literally we pulled in as she was soaked in sweat. Yeah, that's the kind of, of friends



Sabina Brennan 48:45

you can talk about. You can talk about family till the cows come home when people say blood is thicker than water, but the support of very real friends, you can't underestimate it



Mark Cagney 48:53

well, you know that that really, it's probably quite sexist, and it's definitely not PC. But the joke about a true friend is you ring them up and you say, Listen, I'm in real trouble. What have you done? I've killed the wife. Okay, stay there. We'll be around around with a shovel as fast as we



Sabina Brennan 49:09

definitely not PC definitely, definitely not PC



Mark Cagney 49:11

But you know that, you know, those are the people who would take a bullet for you yet stand in front of, you know, will throw themselves in front of a train for you like that. I was lucky enough to have people like that in my life, Like Joe and Marian would definitely, certainly at that stage without them. And again, we look even Peggy O' Brien. She was the house mother in 98 FM. And she would do that, you know, she would go he's in trouble. He needs a cup of tea. More importantly, he needs a hug. He needs somebody to hold on to right now. And she would find an excuse asked me that I want a cups of tea, bring it in, and then hug me until I kind of could speak properly or until I could do my next link



Sabina Brennan 49:45

You can't underestimate the power of a human hug. living through this lockdown is why it's quite challenging for people but actual physical contact and a hug can lower your blood pressure and actually really get your stress level. Stone really works. I'm afraid. That's all we have time for in this episode, but please do Tune in next week when I continue my conversation with Mark. In the interim, you can check out the super brain blog for bonus content. My name is Sabina Brennan. Thank you for listening to Super brain, the podcast for everyone with a brain

