

Where in Ireland did you grow up and what are your fondest memories there?

So, I grew up in County Wexford, which is about 100 miles from Dublin, fondest memories, we had a farm, so I always enjoyed that, being a bit of a farmer's daughter, had 12 brothers and sisters so it was always good fun, and lots of fighting, we lived close to the beach so we would go to the beach all the time, just kind of hanging out really, yeah, hanging out, having fun.

How did you first get involved in theater and how did you get involved with the Abbey Theater?

So, I joined a youth club drama group, I was about 14/15 maybe and then my dad was always into acting, he was into amateur dramatics, so was my mother, that's where they met each other first. So, practically every Sunday, he had a tape recorder and he'd tape us singing songs or saying a poem, we erased them all of course, taping over them. So, he was always interested in that, tops of the towns, and sketches, so I joined the youth group, I was in the national youth theater, I was around 17 at the time, so I went to Dublin and did that for a couple of months. So, then I did this theater course with the intention of being an actress, that was the intention, but then when I actually started the course, you had to do everything, it was a theater foundation course so you had to do set design, theater history, dance, my dance teacher said I should seek work backstage basically. So, I started in stage management while I was there so you had to do some acting but I was drawn much more to the stage management part of it, so when I finished that course, I actually worked in a couple of bars and stuff but I would ring the production manager in the Abbey Theater once every month maybe and sent a resume....I did some other kind of college stage management stuff when my sister was in college but that was just to get some experience doing it, something for my resume, and, so then eventually he called me because he needed somebody and my name was

known. As it happened, the first job I got, the director was someone who had directed in this big celebration of 1916 but this was all set in Wexford, can't remember what it was called but there were like 100 people in it, it was massive and I remember myself and my sister, Catriona, we were in it but it was daddy came out and got us off the beach. We were teenagers and we wanted to be on the beach with the lads from Dublin, with the fellas, and he was going, "no, youse are coming" and I was so mad at him but I had the best time, it was brilliant. As it happened, I walk into this rehearsal room and it was Thomas McKenna who was the director from the thing I'd done when I was about 17 but I'd had no idea who he really was at the time but that was just a coincidence but that's how I ended up there so I worked there then for 10 years and then I came over here to do a show, that's when I met Jason.

Tell me about first meeting Jason and the first couple of weeks.

So, we were doing a show called Freedom of the City, which was invited to Lincoln Center from the Abbey...it was Lincoln Center festival but it was actually housed in John Jay College so we went to the fireworks on the 4th and I met him on the 5th. The next day we went in to work and the set hasn't turned up, it was caught up in customs so we were trying to figure out what we would do and trying to set up for when the set did get there, we'd have all this other stuff done, so because of that, we had a lot of time talking that you wouldn't normally have because of the set up and all. So, the crew were lovely and we just got to know them and there might have been some flirting and yeah, he would tell you that he saw me across that stage, that crowded room, and that's her, that 's the one for me, and then I found out a few days into it that he was 6 years younger than me and I was like, "oh no, this isn't going to work, no way, someone so much younger", I was 30, he was 24 so that didn't put me off a little bit but clearly not enough but it was one of those situations where I often do wonder if I'd met him in Dublin and we had to make a decision because we lived 3000 miles away from each other so you had to say we're all in on this or this isn't going to happen, one or the other, but I often wonder like if we'd met in Dublin and we could've dated like regular people, would we have actually ended up

together? I don't know, I presume we would have but anyway so the first couple of weeks, as you can imagine, it was at a hotel room. So , it was great walking around NY. We had a great couple of weeks together and then I had to go, he had to stay, and then we started the whole long distance thing which was expensive and a pain, but it was what it was, and we just made it work, I suppose.

Once you guys started long distance, how often and how long would you guys visit each other and would you go to NY or would he go to Ireland?

Well, both, and then actually the first time I saw him, I was doing a show in Edinburgh so he came there, as it happened, I think the longest we didn't see each other was about maybe 10 weeks, that was the longest we ever went but the way it kind of worked out. People in Europe get more holidays so I would come stay as long as I could, sometimes, that could be 3 weeks. I met him in July, then I came over for Thanksgiving and I met his parent that time, they definitely thought I was in it for a green card, 100 percent. I was definitely not in it for the money, I'll tell you that, he didn't have any. He would come to me and I would go to him and it wasn't a big deal, I'd been to America lots of times by that time and he'd never been to Ireland, he thought Ireland was like a third world country. He didn't realize it was as modern as it was. His impression was like shopping trolleys in a river, like poor, everyone was really poor, maybe that's why his parents thought I was in it for a green card. Yeah, so it was like 10 weeks, maybe a little more.

So, you guys did that for a year?

A year and a half and then we decided to get engaged. I can't remember when, I know it was cold, so it was probably winter, the next time I'd come over and he couldn't think about living without me so he asked me to marry him and I said sure I'll give it a go. So, I can't remember when we started applying for the K1 because that was a long process but I think, I met him in July 99 and I moved here in Nov 2000, then we had to get married within

the 90 days. You have to be married within the 90 days. That's the K1 visa, you have to be married or you have to leave. It was really like a holiday romance really because even when we were together it wasn't like real life, I was on holiday or he was on holiday, it was great, just like hanging out. But, even living together for the 90 days, it's all trying to get work authorization....my dad got really sick and I had to go to Federal Plaza, which is where you have to do all the immigration stuff, if you have to go there, you have to go at 4 in the morning and queue up and hope that you get in. But, up to 9/11, the feeling you got down there was like you're an immigrant, who really cares. So, I went in, my dad got really sick, even the terminology was really horrible, I had to get what's called emergency parole. That's your travel documentation, emergency parole. So, I went down, pleaded my case, my dad's gotten really sick, can I get this travel document and they said, oh no, you can't do that. And I said, are you really not going to let me go home and he said, well, you can go home but you just won't get back in. As it happened, my dad actually recovered, in a couple of days, but if not, I wouldn't have been able to go to his funeral if he died but what would've been the point of going and not being able to come back if he died. He died the year after Jake was born, on Christmas day, loved that bit of drama, I told you that, he was into the drama. So, he died on Christmas day, he'd love that, add to the story.

Talk about some of the obstacles and the frustrations you faced during the visa process.

We did it by ourselves, we didn't hire a lawyer or anything, we did all the paperwork, it was very frustrating because of things like you had to give them an address for every place you'd ever lived and they wanted the dates. So, I don't know if they ever followed them up, and you had to get garda clearance from every jurisdiction you ever lived in... this was all in Ireland, Jason had to file different paperwork, basically that I wouldn't cost the state any money but it was expensive, like every time you filed a paper, it was loads of money. The day we got married, we got married in City Hall and we had all this paperwork, we went straight from our wedding to Federal Plaza to wait in the cold and we were told when we got there that

we had to mail all that stuff in, we had been there like 4 hours and we got married in Jan, it was probably freezing down there. So, it was very frustrating having to do all that, just going through it all because you have your fate in someone else's hands, like trying to prove you're genuine, that you're not just here for a green card, and the whole 90 days that's really frustrating too because it's kind of stupid..what would be the difference giving someone 6 months rather than 3 months, for the process as well, so you have to be together for 90 days, they do follow up, no surprises or anything, we did do that interview, like what color is your toothbrush, which is very short. I think they make their mind up when they see you, before you open your mouth up even. That was during the 90 days, once I got here, but what i did remember about that, they bring up this file, not on the computer, a file of every piece of paper we'd given them, and you just feel like saying, can I bring that back to where it's supposed to be because i'll be very careful, it's just like one false move andyou know they are professionals and know what they're doing but all that paperwork, ridiculous things like getting garda vetted. I was home recently and found a box of stuff and I didn't remember getting a chest xray but it was like to make sure you didn't have TB. If there wasn't a record of me getting a shot, i had to get it; things like that, my dr. didn't keep records, it wasn't computerized, but if you couldn't prove you'd gotten your shots as a kid, you had to get them. So, that kind of stuff was a bit annoying and all the paperwork, I suppose we could've gotten someone to do it but that would've been even more expensive.

So, how did you adapt to living in the United States and living with Jason, the first three months and then after you were married?

It was good, because I was very happy in Ireland. It wasn't like I was miserable, I loved my job, my friends, my family, so, I missed them, but it was worth it because I was mad about Jason obviously. I did kind of feel like I was in holiday mode and I couldn't work so that was kind of frustrating, you couldn't work, it just took a long time, you couldn't work even though my sister, who was an immigration lawyer was telling me that I definitely could work on this visa. I kept telling her they told me I couldn't. I'll

tell you what I do remember, I had never been here in the winter, I'd only been here in good weather except for when I met Jason, that winter that I came back. It was freezing, the wind would cut you in two, I'd never felt that kind of cold before. I spent my days when I moved here, we lived up on 72nd St in this studio apt., I spent my days walking around Central Park, being a tourist, but I didn't have loads of money but Jason did keep to his word and did keep after me. Then we got married and moved downtown after 9/11, it was like what you'd expect. I'd been to the states loads of times, my eldest sister had lived here, my two younger sisters were living in Boston at the time so I'd see them. For Irish people, it was no big deal, I'd been to NY loads of times, Jason's parents had never been to NY because NY city was a scary place, they were a bit horrified that Jason was moving his life to the city because of me. It was exciting, I enjoyed it. We did the 90 days, we got married in Jan, I was eventually able to work and I worked as a stage manager in a couple of theaters in NY, we got married in 2001 and then Jake was born in 2004. Once Jake came on scene, I really didn't work a lot after that, it wouldn't pay to work, and because of the nature of the job, and both of us were in the same business, we'd need loads of babysitters, all different times.

When you were living in the city, were you interested in connecting with Irish culture?

I wasn't going out of my way to go find Irish people but I knew several people who were living here already, like my friend George. I was friends with him in Dublin but not in the same circles, so I'm walking on 23rd st, passing by a theater and I see George's name on a poster. So I got in touch with George and mainly the theaters I worked in were Irish because I'd worked in the Abbey, that was a good thing to have there. But, I thought if I could get into Equity in America, I'm going to be a zillionaire. And the first show I did to get my Equity card, which was annoying because, in Ireland, you actually did have to prove you had an interest, but here once you got a contract, you got your card because they wanted your cash. Every pub was practically an Irish pub, and I played Irish music as well, but I loved it so you'd go to places where's there's a session on but it wasn't

like, I'd met this girl once and she was really really homesick and she was younger than me and she really liked being in Queens because it was just like being in Ireland and I was going, I could think of nothing worse! Not that I wouldn't want to be around Irish people but it's like, the miniature Ireland, it's like living in Boston, full of Irish and second generations, I find, and it's a bit of a generalization but they're pretty racist. There'd be a lot of Trump supporters among the Irish Americans, I get that impression. There was plenty of culture and plus I was like 30, it wasn't like I was in my 20's and I didn't feel the need to be Irish, like where they're really putting it on, it's nonsense. Plenty of culture, because of the generations of people who'd emigrated from Ireland already, there was, like every pub, every cop, every fireman, not so much now, but there was plenty of culture plus I called him every day. I remember on 9/11, I was wondering why no one was calling me, but they actually couldn't get through, all the phones were down. It was expensive but you got those calling cards, but now I know all their kids because of cellphones and facetime, with video chat and timing, being 5 hours behind. I went home nearly every year. When the kids were small we went twice a year, Feb and Oct because it was cheaper, most summers we went home when they got older and when you live in NY, you always had a visitor, and weren't ever lonely. When we moved to Jersey, all of a sudden, not so much.

So, how did you feel about raising a family in a different country?

I always kind of feel I've done a disservice to my kids by not having brought them up at home but it's only because it's different. We were in the city when Jake and Ciara were born, we moved when she was 6 months old because we were in a one bedroom apt walkup on 23rd street, dragging my kids up and down those stairs. What I did feel about being in NY, it's like a rat race, I remember I'd be talking to people in the parks and they'd be talking about going for an interview for kindergarten for their kids and I was like, you had to go for interview and that's what it was, the parents had to go for an interview and I was really not up for that, that really stressed me

out and I knew nothing about the education system but to hear that, that's like purely a NY thing not like here. I did feel like you meet people in the parks. When we came to Highland Park, I was going down to the parks, I was wondering where everybody was because everyone went to the park in NY. I didn't meet anyone until Jake started school so I really wasn't meeting people until he went to school and that's when I said, oh my god, I've moved to America, I didn't feel like that in NY, NY was so unique, like the republic of NY, but then when you move to somewhere like Highland Park, it was like, oh my god, I've actually moved to America, now I'm living in America and I really kind of felt it. I did make a conscious decision not to do what my friends who were Irish and lived all their lives in the states and felt like they didn't really belong in either Ireland or the states because they were like they were like in this mini Ireland world in the states and anything outside that bubble...so, they didn't do Irish dancing, I taught them a bit of Irish music, it wasn't like, I didn't go out of my way to do the , to have them in GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association, hurling and football), playing Irish sports, dancing, they have their kids in everything Irish and I said I'm not doing that to my kids, I always say to my kids, don't go home and say, "I'm Irish, not with that accent, don't do that" because guess what they'll be saying in their heads..fuckin yanks, don't do it to yourself. But, that's also why I went home as much as I did, that they would have a real, as much as an Irish upbringing as they could staying at your mother's house for 8 weeks, god love her. I did always feel, I think everybody wants to , it's just easier to navigate, if they were home, of course, they'd be playing Irish sports but it's a very different thing than doing it here, I wasn't trying to hide them from it or keep them from it, it was just, they don't live in Ireland, it was bad enough naming Ciara, Ciara with a C, that was enough hardship for her. It all worked out well but I would've preferred to have brought them up at home and for a good amount of time, I thought we might actually move back home but then it just became unrealistic although Jason is an Irish citizen, he got his citizenship through me and the kids have their Irish passports, they're dual citizens and that's now like a European passport not just an Irish passport because we're in the EU. That's kind of nice, apart from that, not so much.

What made you move specifically to Highland Park?

So, Jason worked most in the city but had a business in East Brunswick, they're probably close to their 25th year. They started in a little pod and now they have a 10,000 sq foot warehouse doing well, a lighting equipment company. So, he was driving out here all the time, So, we knew we weren't staying in the city, once Ciara was born, we were like this isn't going to work, we have to move. My idea of moving was to Brooklyn or Queens, I didn't think we were going the other way and we were talking and Jason said might as well be close to one of the jobs. Anyway, we came out here, I didn't drive so we had to find a place that you could walk, a walkable town, and he'd heard of Highland Park from working in East Brunswick so we'd come out here, just walked around, didn't even think to look into the schools, because you just go to school, never crossed my mind that we should look at the schools, thank god, they were good schools but it just wasn't on my radar. We went down to the park and basically it was near Jason's second job and it was a walking town so I didn't need to have a car so I could go to the supermarket.

Can you tell us a little bit about some surprises or challenges that you faced in your time here?

Certainly, in the beginning, all the stuff that you have to do to get your work authorization, to get your parole for your travel to be able to come back and forth, that all changed when you got your green card. In the beginning, it was that kind of stuff. Definitely the school system is a bit of a surprise, the first thing that surprised me was the pledge of allegiance first thing every day. That I found very weird, that that was a thing. But the whole school system, the whole thing, it was like, in Irish schools, like the one my sister teaches in, you don't have a school nurse, you don't have child study teams, you don't have cafeteria, any of that kind of stuff, and because of that, there's no point sending out a kid who misbehaves, you have to deal with it in the classroom. It's kind of amazing to have that stuff here, if the kid is sick, no school nurse, it falls on the teacher. I was very familiar with

America before I moved here so nothing was kind of shocking to me except for where did all the people in the park go, when I moved to Highland Park. I was very familiar with NY before I moved here, and moving to Jersey was different but I'd been here long enough already that there wasn't anything that surprised me to be honest with you. In the supermarkets here, you can find stuff like oxtail in the supermarket, you wouldn't find stuff like that in Ireland in the supermarket, like it was old fashioned. I was a little bit shocked at how not modern a lot of the places were, when I started looking.

Having gone through this whole process, would you have any advice for people moving to the US to pursue love?

Maybe hire a lawyer to do your paperwork. I would say go to a place because you want to go there, not to meet someone. Not really much more advice...have good children. Be prepared for the long haul and like I always say to Jason, "we might both speak English, but we certainly don't speak the same language!"