

VALERIE

VALERIE. No, see, something happened to me. That's just hearing you talk about it tonight. It's important to me. That I'm not ... bananas.

I mean, I'm a fairly straight ... down the line ... person. Working. I had a good job at DCU. I had gone back to work after having my daughter, Niamh. My husband teaches, engineering, at DCU. We had Niamh in 1988. And I went back to work when she was five, when she started school. And we'd leave her with Daniel's parents, my husband's parents. His mother always picked her up from school. And I'd collect her after work. And last year she, she was dying to learn how to swim.

And the school had a thing. They'd take the class down to the CRC in Clontarf on Wednesdays. She was learning very well. No problem. Loved the water. She couldn't wait for Wednesdays and swimming. Daniel used to take her to the pool on Saturdays and everything.

But for such a bright, outgoing, happy girl she was a big em ... She had a problem sleeping at night. She was afraid of the dark. She never wanted you to leave the room.

One of us would have to lie there with her until she went off, and even when she did, she'd often have to come in and sleep with us.

And I'd say to her, "What's wrong, when you go to bed?" But in the daytime, you know, she wouldn't care. Nighttime was a million miles away. And she wouldn't ... think about it. But at night ... there were people at the window, there were people in the attic, there was someone coming up the stairs. There were children knocking, in the wall. And there was always a man standing across the road who she'd see. Like there was loads of things. The poor ... I wanted to bring her to the doctor, but Daniel said she'd grow out of it. And we should be careful, just, about books we got her, and what she saw on the telly and all of this.

But I mean, she used to even be scared that when she got up in the morning that Mummy and Daddy would have gone away and she'd be in the house on her own. That was one she told

Daniel's mother. And all the furniture and carpets and everything would be gone. I mean, you know? So I told her after that, you know, we'd never, you know, it was ridiculous. And that if she was worried at all during the day to ring me, and I'd come and get her, and there was nothing to worry about. And she knew our number, she was very good at learning numbers off and everything. She knew ours and her Nana's and mine at work. She knew them all.

But then, in March, last year, the school had a, a sponsored swim, and the kids were going to swim a length of the pool. And I promised I was going to watch her. But I got ... I was late, out of work, and I was only going to be in time to meet her afterwards, but em, when I got there ... There was an ambulance and I thought, like, the pool is in the Central Remedial Clinic, so I thought like it was just somebody being dropped there. I didn't really pay any attention.

But when I got in, I saw that there was no one in the pool and one of the teachers was there with a group of kids. And she was crying and some of the children were crying. And this woman, another one of the mums came over and said there'd been an accident. And Niamh had hit her head in the pool and she'd been in the water and they'd been trying to resuscitate her. But she said she was going to be all right.

And I didn't believe it was happening. I thought it must have been someone else. And I went into, I was brought into, a room and Niamh was on a table. It was a table for table-tennis, and an ambulance man was giving her the ... kiss of life.

She was in her bathing suit. And the ambulance man said he didn't think what he was doing was working. And he didn't know if she was alive. And he wrapped her in a towel and carried her out to the ambulance. And I got in the back with him. And they radioed on ahead, they were going to put her on a machine in Beaumont and try to revive her there. But the ambulance man knew, I think. She wasn't breathing, and he just knew, and he said if I wanted to say good-bye to her in the ambulance in case I didn't get a chance at the hospital.