

Westlife

Our story



Westlife

Westlife Westlife

Westlife: Our Story

Аннотация

The biggest pop band in the world celebrate 10 years at the top – telling their full story in their own words for the very first time. 40 million albums 14 UK number 1 singles 7 UK number 1 albums Westlife have had more number ones than any other artist apart from The Beatles and Elvis and with songs that have become modern classics like Flying without Wings, they have ensured their place in the annals of pop history. Westlife – The Autobiography will chart the highs and lows of their phenomenal career and a unique friendship that has seen them endure as a band for an extraordinary ten years. The book will chronicle the band's story from the grass-roots of Sligo, Ireland to multi-platinum records, celebrity collaborations and chart achievements. But bubbling under this public face is a private and unseen story never before recorded, crammed with candid personal revelations, including of course the departure of Brian McFadden. Westlife have been a staple part of British entertainment for years, yet the public has no idea of the astounding life they have led – and still live – behind the headlines and soundbites. Here, for the first time, Westlife will take us into their confidence and reveal their lives and amazing ten year journey as the UK's biggest pop band as never before.

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Westlife

Our Story

With Martin Roach



HarperCollins*Publishers*

We dedicate this book to our parents

To our manager and friend, Louis Walsh

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PROLOGUE

‘So, Westlife, what do you think of Brazil?’ We were sitting on the top of a shaking tour bus, being interviewed by a well-known DJ in Rio de Janeiro, live on radio.

Around the tour bus were 3,000 Westlife fans, all screaming and chanting.

Back home, we’d already seen our first seven singles go straight in at number 1, a feat no band before us had ever achieved. We’d sold millions of albums around the world and gone from being unknowns in an aspiring boy band from Ireland to the front of every pop magazine in the world in just over a year.

Westlife was a phenomenon, without a doubt.

We’d been due at that Rio radio station, but there’d been so many fans waiting for us outside that we were unable to get anywhere near and our personal safety would have been at risk – had we tried to get off the bus we’d have been pulled apart.

As we’d pulled around the corner, the screaming crowd had surrounded the vehicle in a heartbeat and started banging on the sides, rocking the bus, chanting and screaming. It was mental. Several of us actually pushed our backs and shoulders up against the glass because we thought the windows were going to cave in.

We were loving it.

We got our cameras and handycams out and were filming the fans as they were filming us. It was great.

The security men made us climb up through one of the bus sky-lights onto the roof and do the interview there.

There seemed only one thing we could say in reply to the DJ's question: '*We love Brazil!*'

The screaming was so loud we thought our eardrums were going to burst.

It is a long way home to the gentle pace of rural Ireland, Sligo and suburban Dublin from Rio de Janeiro, but the journey to the roof of that bus – and beyond – would see a lot more twists and turns than any of us could ever have imagined.

Here's how we did it.

Part I

CHAPTER ONE

TOWN OF PLENTY



Shane

Peter

MARK xx

Nicky

For 35 years, my parents, Mae and Peter Filan, ran the Carlton café right in the middle of Sligo, on the west coast of Ireland. The whole family – all nine of us – lived in the house above it. We loved living there.

I was born on 5 July 1979, Shane Steven Filan, the youngest

of seven children. God knows how my parents looked after all of us. As well as myself, there were my sisters Yvonne, Denise and Mairead, and my brothers Finbarr, Peter and Liam. Dad was the cook and Mam ran the restaurant. They worked very hard and we didn't go without a thing. We weren't rich, don't be getting me wrong, but if we needed something, they managed to get the money together to buy it. There was always a few quid there.

That house above the café gives me my very earliest memory. When I was three, I burnt my hand on the cooker in our kitchen. I remember as if it was yesterday reaching up to put my hand on the ring, then roaring and crying when it burnt me. I can still see the dog outside the room looking in at all the commotion. Mam calmed me down and put cold milk on the burn to soothe the pain. It's a strong, vivid, first memory.

I loved having so many brothers and sisters around. My parents had had four kids back to back, with only a year between each. Then three more children followed with a two-year gap between each. My mum had her last baby, me, when she was 42. For some reason she'd always wanted seven kids and I think she just kept going till she got them. Back then it was very common to have at least four kids, to have just two kids wasn't the norm. There were a lot more big families then than there are now, certainly in the west of Ireland anyway.

I never got picked on because I had those older brothers, so that made my life a lot easier than some. Maybe I got a little spoiled occasionally, as the youngest, but to be honest because

there were seven of us Mam and Dad didn't have time to spoil us, they were so busy just looking after us and feeding us and all that. It was a good life.

What we did have was a lot of chips! Perhaps I'm remembering wrong, but it seemed like we had chips five or six nights a week. No wonder really – now I've got my own family I've learned how much looking after kids costs, so perhaps it was cheap and easy. Chips and cans of Fanta and Coke – whenever I see those it reminds me of my childhood. I loved it; the café was busy and there was always something happening and interesting people coming in.

After that, my mind flits to the first day at Fatima Primary School, when I was four. It was run by nuns and I was gripped by sheer bloody fear. I stood in line at the entrance, waiting to enrol, holding on to my mum's hand very tightly. One of the kids ran out of line and a nun went over to him, shouted something and then smacked him on the bum.

'These nuns don't look too happy, Mam,' I said.

Mam just laughed and said not to worry.

A few days later, I'd started to settle in but was still a little anxious. One of my brothers was in the school across the road and one afternoon I noticed he'd put his nose against the window and was pulling faces and waving at me. I just burst out crying, bawled my eyes out, I did. That was all just early nerves, though. In fact it was a great school.

I'd already started singing when I went to primary. Funnily

enough, 'Uptown Girl' by Billy Joel was my party piece. I'd be wheeled out at family dos; my mum used to make me get up in front of all the aunties and uncles to sing that song. Pure embarrassment, like. So I was rehearsing for the Westlife version way back then!

There was no musical background in my family, however. My dad's a good singer and Yvonne, my sister, could sing all the hymns well at church, but there was no real background of singing or music there. Growing up, my big thing was Michael Jackson. I was a mental Michael Jackson fan, *mental*. The *Bad* album was on constantly in our house – 'Man in the Mirror', all those songs. That and *Thriller*. Jesus, I just wanted to be a star, a famous singer, up on stage. I'd sing all Jackson's tunes in the mirror or in front of my sisters, but I was afraid of singing in front of a crowd. At that early point I was just taking Michael Jackson off really, copying him. I used to be quite good at mimicking people. Gradually, I developed my own style and my own voice and felt more confident about singing in front of people, but I never had the courage to go on stage until I was 12.

In class, I was an OK student, usually a C+, the occasional B, nothing spectacularly good or bad. My attention drifted very easily. There wasn't really any subject I loved. I wasn't academic and I didn't have any dreams to become a doctor or a lawyer. I enjoyed the craic with the lads, I was in a decent class and there weren't really any eejits in the group, so we all had a laugh. Apart from that, I never really enjoyed school that much, to be honest

with you, it was just OK.

The most exciting thing about school was what happened afterwards. I was always talking and trying to sort out something to do after class: 'Where are we going? What are we doing?' I played rugby a bit and some Gaelic football, but all I really wanted to do was sing. There was no class for that, so for me it was like, *OK, I'm going to do this school thing because I have to, but really I want to be in a band.*

Then I started auditioning for musicals at school. Those auditions, rehearsals and performances are my fondest memories of my time at school. It was an all-boys school, so the girls would come up from their school and we'd all stay late for maybe three hours, working through rehearsals. It only happened for about six weeks of each school year, but it meant everything to me, my whole life revolved around it.

The first big break I got was at the Hawks Well Theatre in an adult production of *Grease*. It was put on by a woman called Mary McDonagh. She was the choreographer, director and producer, and was a pretty well-known name in Sligo. She brought a lot of people up through the ranks in the theatre, offering them their first roles and giving them confidence on stage. She was a great director. She gave me the role of Danny Zuko's younger brother in this version of *Grease*. Also in the cast was a kid a year younger than me who I'd seen around town. His name was Kian Egan.

'Mum, can we go to the *feis* now, please?'

'Alright, Kian, come on, but we'll have to be quick.'

I was sitting in the doctor's waiting room, having just been seen about an ear infection. I was anxious to get out because my mum had entered me in a local poetry competition, called a *feis*. I was only four, but this was quite a big thing in Ireland, especially in Easter week. They'd hold a *feis* and you'd go on stage and recite a poem. Sometimes there'd be over 100 kids competing. However, I'd been quite ill with this ear infection so I actually missed my slot because Mum had been worried and had taken me to the doctor's. When we finally got to the competition, though, she persuaded the poetry judges to give me a later slot.

I won.

My mum and dad, Kevin and Patricia Egan, were like that – always encouraging their kids. I come from a big family of four brothers and three sisters – Viveanne, Gavin, Fenella and Tom, who are older, and Marielle and Colm, who are younger. Dad met my mum at the dance, they became dance partners and eventually started going out with each other. The first baby arrived when they were only 20; I arrived on 29 April 1980.

My dad was an electrician for the Electricity Supply Board of Ireland, so he'd be out all hours sending the young fellas climbing up the poles, organizing all that. His family didn't have anything, so he'd had to go to work at 16. Mum was a housewife. She had seven kids to look after, so she didn't have a spare minute.

My dad had been brought up in Leitrim, a very rural area. His childhood was very typical of the west coast of Ireland at that point, then he set up the family home in nearby Sligo. It was a

very busy home. At one point there would have been seven or eight of us in the house, all squeezing into bunk-beds and stuff like that. We weren't rich, but it was fine. I have a lot of great memories of my childhood and we remain a very tight family to this day.

My mum wasn't musical at all. I used to sit her at the piano to teach her 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep', but she couldn't get it. My dad, on the other hand, would have had it in five minutes. He never played an instrument, though. When he was younger, the opportunity wasn't necessarily there – if he'd said he wanted to be in a band, it would have been, 'Away with you, get back to work.' In his later years, however, I realized how much of a love for music he had and became more aware of his massive record collection.

All of us kids tried our hand at music. My eldest brother is, in my eyes, a piano genius – he's the vice principal of a school in Sheffield now, with honours degrees in piano and guitar. As a kid, he was a classical whizz on piano, so he started teaching me piano at a young age. Every single member of my family before me learned the piano and my other brother started playing trombone in a concert band and then bass in his own rock band.

I did the poetry competitions every year from the age of four and would end up with five or six first places each year. My mother would teach me the poems in the kitchen. I would always be in the prizes, and also started winning story telling competitions too. I was quite confident as a kid in that sense. But

it was my mum who did it really – she put her all into it, and there's no doubt about it, I wouldn't be doing Westlife now if it wasn't for my mother.

Most amazingly, she did it for all of us, not just me. Even though she had seven kids, she had the drive to get us out of bed every Saturday morning for speech and drama lessons, or out for piano lessons every Tuesday night, or guitar lessons on a Wednesday night or football on a Thursday. She still does it with my younger brother to this day. She's done it with all seven of us.

Then one of my sisters started to do variety musicals at the community hall. Along with Mum, she'd put a show together with singing, acting, comedy, all sorts of stuff. I was the guitar player and the singer and the comedian and the guy who dressed up as a woman and all that type of stuff. My first cousin Gillian, who later married Shane, was also in that.

I loved all this because I was what I call an 'out of school' kid. That's where I was happiest, not in class. The teachers absolutely hated me because I was too giddy in class; unless I liked the subject I was as giddy as shit.

I did the poetry competitions right up until I was 16, but by then I had discovered rock music and lost interest in reciting poetry, to be honest with you. One of my elder brothers had a rock band and I started listening to stuff like Metallica, Guns N'Roses, Bon Jovi, Green Day, Pearl Jam, rock and metal bands. Albums like *Dookie* I just played constantly and, like millions of other kids, I sat in my bedroom for hours trying to learn 'Seek &

Destroy' and loads of other Metallica songs.

My dad had somehow managed to buy me an electric guitar by this stage. I'd badgered him for a year to get it, then one day my sister arrived back from college with a surprise package for me, a black guitar – an Aria Pro 2, NA20B. I recall the exact model number. It cost £300, which for a guitar was ludicrous. Of course, being a teenager, then I was after an amplifier: 'You have to have an amp to go with it!' I hounded Dad until he bought me a second-hand Orange amp, which is one of the most classic pieces of amplification you can buy. I didn't know this at the time – I just knew if I plugged my guitar in, smacked the distortion pedal on to ten and switched it to maximum volume, it sounded amazing.

Inevitably, I started forming my own bands. During my school years, there were loads of different bands and line-ups, most famously Skrod, an Irish word for which the closest translation is a woman's private parts. After that, we became Pyromania and began a fierce rivalry with my older brother's rock band, Bert and the Cookie Monsters. Hardly Oasis versus Blur, but it mattered so much to us at the time! We would go around the school ripping down their posters and they would do the same to ours. They nearly always won any battle of the bands because they were older, but we thought we were the best.

At one memorable band night at Summerhill College, I brought out the best-looking teacher in front of a hall crammed with students, serenaded her with 'Wonderful Tonight' by Eric

Clapton and then gave her a peck on the cheek. I was the king for weeks off the back of that.

I was in and out of various line-ups; it all changed so many times. We'd practise in people's living rooms, including two friends called Michael Walsh and Derek 'Buff' Gannon. The eldest brother of my cousin Gillian had a band called, rather fantastically, Repulse, a thrash metal outfit. One time they got on a Saturday morning TV show, God knows how, and we were all so excited we went along to support them. You can see me in the background with my long, dark hair, head banging to Repulse.

I'd started to get quite good at the guitar, but one day I completely scuppered my chances of being in the next Metallica. Our drummer at the time was out on his bike with me and we were at the top of a hill. He said, 'Jump on, Kian, I'll take you down the hill.' So, being 15 and all that, I jumped onto his handlebars and we flew down this hill.

At the bottom of the hill there was a sharp right turn and a wall.

We were going way too fast.

He didn't make the turn.

I slammed into the wall face first.

I've still got the scar to show for it, on my right cheek. Worse still, though, I'd broken my finger, in fact the bone was actually sticking out, completely dislocated. I was in agony and an ambulance was called. I had to have three operations and to cut a long story short – or rather to cut a long digit short – the

finger stopped growing. So now it's shorter than my other fingers and crooked.

Which isn't the best news if you want to be the next James Hetfield.

More immediately, our most recent variety show had got through to the All Ireland finals and I was one of the guitar players. I only had two weeks to learn how to play my part with two fingers bandaged up. I could still play, but it had to be mostly bar chords. That accident pretty much finished any guitar prospects I might have had.

If you'd have been at school with me, you may well have thought I was a cocky little shit. Certainly the older boys did and it caused me a lot of grief. If I saw someone picking a fight with my brother Tom, for example, even though he could look after himself I'd run over and try to stand up for him. 'Get off my brother!' I'd shout, which always embarrassed him because, of course, I was his little brother.

Unfortunately, I got hit plenty. There were some rough times back then. At times it was ridiculous and, to be totally honest with you, I still carry a lot of anger about those years with me now. There were some dark days.

The thing was, I suppose I had a bit of a name for myself. I was well known and popular with the girls from all different parts of the town. It was just kids playing at relationships, but the guys from the same area as these girls didn't like it at all. As a result, I got bullied quite a bit by the older, tougher guys. I'm a little

reluctant to call it bullying, it was and it wasn't. It started off with verbal abuse, but soon escalated to actual physical violence. I recall walking home from one carnival with a split lip and getting hit at a school disco. One time I was walking along the street when three boys came across to me and – BAM! BAM! BAM! – they all punched me for no reason.

I've had too many black eyes, although luckily I never got a broken nose, even though plenty tried to give me one. The west coast of Ireland is full of very tough people. I don't mean bullies, I mean people who have had a hard, difficult life. So these sort of fights were commonplace and, to be honest, unless you were put in hospital, it wasn't a big deal.

It got worse, though. One day I was at home and the doorbell rang. I got up, opened the door and BAM, this guy standing there just punched me in the face. My mum was horrified and called the police, but nothing came of it.

It eventually got to the stage where I couldn't go into town, particularly on a weekend, because I knew there were a handful of guys – young men, really, by this stage – who were after me.

At this point, I never hit back. I thought that if I hit them back, I was going to have ten of them on my doorstep the next night. And I would have, no doubt about it.

It's improved enormously now, but like many towns, Sligo was rough in many areas when I was growing up and I couldn't go to most places without some bother. It affected me massively for some time and I begged my mum to send me to music boarding

school, because I just wanted to get out of town so badly. My eldest brother Gavin had told me about these schools where they organized rock bands and all that, and they sounded great, but the main reason I wanted to go to boarding school was to get out of Sligo. Of course there was no way my parents could afford that, so I had to live with the situation on the streets. I started lifting weights and got quite good quite quickly – not to compete with these people, but just to give myself some confidence.

Then one day, when I'd reached 16, I hit back.

I was with my cousin Gillian that day, just walking around town down by the supermarket. She used to introduce me to a few of the birds she knew and it was normally great craic. But not that time.

A few days before, I'd been at a Sligo Rovers football match and some kid had come up to me and said, 'Watch out, so-and-so is after you 'cos he heard you called his mum a whore.' He was talking about the local hard knock. I just knew this little shit would later say to that same hard knock, 'I saw Kian Egan at the football match and he called your mother a whore.'

Anyway, we were in the arcade and I noticed this hard knock and five of his mates across the way. They were all staring at me.

'Gillian, let's go. Come on.'

'Why?'

'That's yer man who is after me.'

'Why don't you just go up to him and say something?' Gillian didn't stand for no messing.

‘No, no, come on, let’s just go.’

I grabbed her arm and we walked out of the arcade, but I could sense immediately that they were following us. By the time we’d walked down the street and round the corner, they’d caught up with us.

I was shitting myself.

‘Egan! Egan! Did you call my mother a whore?’

‘No, I did not. I don’t even know who you are, I’ve never seen you before in my life.’ Then I said, ‘My mum is waiting for me to go and pick some shoes.’

No good.

‘Meet me in the car park in 15 minutes. We’ll sort this out,’ he said.

This was ridiculous.

‘Look, if you want to hit me, do it now. I don’t want to wait 15 minutes, just do it now.’

I’m not gonna pretend – I was absolutely shitting my pants. I was terrified.

He took a swing and I reacted, finally. I blocked him and then hit back...*hard*. I just laid into him and really let loose. It was three years of frustration coming out. He’d picked on me on the wrong day.

But I wasn’t out of the woods yet. Word spread that I would hit back and some of these idiots saw that as a challenge. So when I got a little older, going to nightclubs and getting well pissed was always a bit risky. I often went out with my friend Graham, who

would later join me at the start of the Westlife tale, and he was a hard lad, very capable of looking after himself. He had a bit of a reputation because he was from a slightly rougher part of town. If I was with him, people would leave me alone – he used to say, ‘If you hit him, I’ll hit you!’ However, if I went out alone or without Graham, it could get very nasty. Many times I would arrive at a club, spot a few faces in the crowd and just do a U-turn and leave.

Sometimes, however, confrontation was unavoidable, but even then I tried my best not to hit back unless I absolutely had to. Generally, I would let someone hit me three times before striking back. I figured if they hit me more than three times, I had to do something to defend myself. I would always say, ‘I don’t want to fight you, let’s leave it,’ but sometimes I was in a corner.

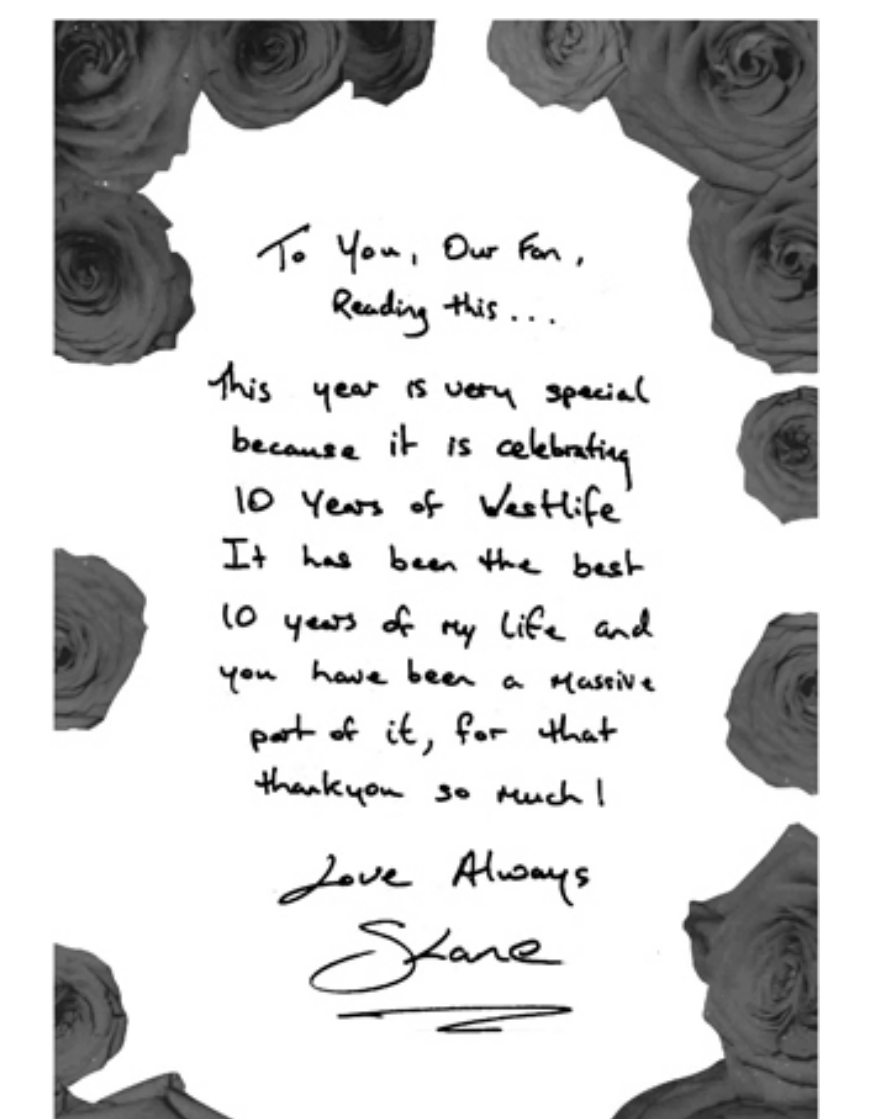
Since I’m being very open here, I must say that I was never going to move onto the next level: physically abusing people. I didn’t want to punch anybody, I was never a fighter, I only ever hit someone because I had no choice, you know, I was defending myself. Just sitting talking about the shit I let myself go through with these guys is annoying, it makes me angry. Kids shouldn’t have to deal with all that.

I know I have the benefit of hindsight now, but I think those difficult times made me a much stronger person today. I think they taught me a hell of a lot about life at a young age and helped me to be the person I am.

Since Westlife has become successful, one or two of these

guys have come up to me in Sligo, apologized for their behaviour and offered to buy me a pint. I haven't taken the pints, but it's interesting to see the change.

I am being brutally honest with you when I say that I did sometimes turn on those who were smaller than me. I never hit anyone, but I did call people names. It made me feel better, albeit momentarily, I'm afraid to say. I was stuck in the middle between the older, tougher boys who would kick the living daylights out of you and the quieter guys, often from the country, who came into school. It was a strange cruel pecking order. One day we pushed a kid into the shower with his brand new tracksuit and trainers on. His name was Mark Feehily.



To You, Our Fan,
Reading this...

This year is very special
because it is celebrating
10 Years of Westlife
It has been the best
10 years of my life and
you have been a massive
part of it, for that
thankyou so much!

Love Always

Stare

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