

# Monica McInerney closed captions

## Start of Transcript

### Description:

Photograph of the author, Monica McInerney, in a garden with roses and sweet peas. She is smiling, wearing a dress covered in roses.

### Text on Screen:

Monica McInerney

In-conversation with

Mary-Lou Stephens

### Description:

The cover of her latest book, *The Godmothers*, is on display beside her photograph. The first words at the very top of the book cover is 'AUSTRALIA'S NUMBER ONE BESTSELLING AUTHOR'. The illustration is stylised outlines of three women seated closely together, with different designs of a red dress, on a white background. The women are seated very close together.

### Mary-Lou Stephens:

Welcome everyone, we're here for a very happy occasion - a new Monica McInerney book. It's been a long time, we've been waiting for this one, so it's more auspicious than ever!

### Description:

Monica and Mary-Lou are shown on the screen, beside each other in a video call. Monica is surrounded by *The Godmothers* book covers and wears a vibrant red top. Mary-Lou has frames on the wall behind her and is wearing a pink top. Both appear very engaged in their conversation.

### Mary-Lou Stephens:

Now, Monica's early life sounds like something out of her story itself. She grew up one of seven children in the Clare Valley in South Australia, and her dad was a stationmaster. Her mum worked at the local library, but from then on life got rather real. Monica had to work for a living, and she's done everything from working in the music industry to hospitality work, including waitressing and hotel cleaning. But these days when she visits the hotel, it's there to either stay or to write about it, as she does. There's the gorgeous boutique hotel in *The Godmothers*. But let's start off by welcoming Monica and finding just a little bit more about her first.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Hello Monica.

**Monica McInerney:**

Hello Mary-Lou, it's great to talk to you again.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Good to have you here. Now we have a very limited time. I'm just going to start the timer so that we're all on the same page!

**Monica McInerney:**

We'll talk quickly.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

So many questions and some great questions from our audience as well, so it's great.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

So first up, Monica. Congratulations, not only on your new novel, your 13th novel, but on 20 years in the publishing industry. Can you take us back 20 years ago, to when you were first dabbling your toes in this world? How was it for you back then?

**Monica McInerney:**

I suppose in a funny way, I've actually been in the publishing industry for 30 years. Because for 10 years before I became a writer, I worked behind the scenes in publishing as a book publicist in Australia and Ireland. So, I promoted and toured with authors like Roald Dahl and Tim Winton and Margaret Mahy, and all sorts of amazing writers.

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

And then it was only after I left publishing, and my husband and I had moved to Tasmania, that I missed being around stories and talking about books and words all day. And I started writing short stories. And so, I wrote probably dozens of short stories in about two years I think, sent them out hoping they get published. Back they all came, rejected. But I was just loving the process of writing so much, I didn't mind the rejections. And then a beautiful thing happened in the space of about two weeks: three of my short stories got accepted, and that gave me the confidence to start working on my first novel. And that, after two years of writing, that became my first novel, *A Taste for It*, a comedy, so and that was published in 2000. So, my lead-in was short stories!

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Mary-Lou as she speaks.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

It's very interesting. We do have a couple of questions from our audience. So, how did you get started writing your first book? That's there, but another question in a similar vein is, did you attend many writers' workshops, or belong to any writers' groups, before you wrote your first book?

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

Mary I didn't, and thanks to everybody for the great questions you all sent in. Thank you. No, I didn't actually, and I was supposed to have gone to university to do an arts degree when I finished secondary school. And I actually deferred for a year. And in that year, I got a job as wardrobe girl on *Here's Humphrey*, the children's TV show. So, I never did go back and do that arts degree either!

I think I've learned how to write by being a reader and to this day I still read two, sometimes three, books a week, when I'm on a really good run. I think you can learn everything you need to know about being a writer, if that's the way you want to go, it's through reading. Because you can work out: 'Why am I interested in these characters?' and 'Why am I still turning the pages?'. So, a library and bookshops have been my university in writing courses, really.

**Description:**

Monica and Mary-Lou are shown on the screen, beside each other in the video call.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Let's talk about the inspiration for *The Godmothers*. So, here we are all these years later, your 13th book. So please give us a little snippet of what it's about.

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

This story of *The Godmothers*. It is all of my books are family/comedy dramas is how I describe them because I love to invent a fictional family. I think every family is full of drama and every family is full of comedy!

But this in fact is a family mystery, in lots of ways. I'm really intrigued personally, by the secrets that one generation keeps from the next. Sometimes for good reasons, sometimes for bad reasons. And I had two family stories that sowed the seeds for *The Godmothers*. One of them is from my childhood, and one of my father's half-sisters, so an aunt of mine, died in mysterious circumstances in 1957.

And I grew up, this is before I was born, but I grew up hearing "talk" about that, that aunt and, her (her) drowning death. And I always thought there was more to it, but no, none of the adults would ever talk to

me about it. You know, if it had been an accident, or had it been something else. And that stayed with me all my life, that idea of who knew the real story of that?

More recently, my older sister Marie turned 50 and her oldest friend gave her a collection of the emails and letters that the two of them had been exchanging. A really action-packed view of their lives in their 30s. They talk about their friends, their families, their relationships, apparently in forensic detail. And my sister has made her husband promise if anything ever happens to her, the first thing he has to do is destroy that book. Because there's no way she wants her kids reading anything that are, that is, in that. And of course, her siblings. So, I'm so intrigued and I want to get my hands on that as well.

But it's that idea of, what do, what one generation got up to, or know, that the next one doesn't, and for what reasons. And that was the starting point for *The Godmothers*. And I wanted to write - I love writing about the different relationships within a family. I've written about husbands and wives, and aunts and nieces, and brothers and sisters.

And I was very interested in the godmother relationship because it's a chosen one. And in this book, Eliza the main character has two godmothers, who were her mother Jeannie's two best friends. And they know all the family secrets. Olivia and Maxie are the two godmothers. And the book is really the mystery of Eliza trying to find out more about her mother's life. Find out about the father she's never met, and is she being helped or hindered by her two godmothers? So that's the path that leads you through the story.

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Mary-Lou as she speaks.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

And a question from our audience is, 'Did you have a favourite godmother?'

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

Of the novel? In the novel, or in real life?

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Mary-Lou as she speaks.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

No, no in your real life.

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

In real life. I have a godmother my, in fact, I never had a godfather. I mean, most people have godparents growing up. And in my (my) six brothers and sisters, all had a godmother and a godfather. And my godmother was another of my dad's sisters, who was very religious. And mum and dad both felt, excuse me being slightly flippant, but it was like two for the price of one. Because she was you know, she, she could fulfill both roles, really. And I think that's also why the idea of a godmother has really stayed with me, because that's what I had. I didn't have that. The book's not called *The Godparents*. And she was a very interesting character.

She had grown up through the Depression and she was diagnosed with polio as a 14-year-old. And that had enormous shaping influence on her life, that she had to spend a year in a hospital for infectious diseases as a 14-year-old. And her mum, my grandmother, would come down from the family farm to stand, and it would take a whole day to get down to the hospital, to just stand outside the hospital and wave at her little daughter in the hospital.

And so, scenes through the pandemic have really reminded me, you know, of how difficult that was. But I think, as I said, I think my own godmother was shaped by that kind of difficult upbringing. And she, you could never get any real insights into what she thought about. And she was very good at evasive answers. And I think that's led to this as well. You know, the whole idea of a secretive godmother. So sadly, she died in 2008. But, but I'm enjoying talking about her a lot and remembering through the process of this book.

**Description:**

Monica and Mary-Lou are shown on the screen, beside each other in the video call.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Let's talk about Eliza. She's in a very organised... well she's a very, very highly organised woman. She's (she's) the godchild. And she sets off - she's called by her godmother and she sets off to the U.K. and she ends up living in this amazing hotel. Now I'm wondering, is this hotel inspired, of which one of her godmothers, Olivia, is running - It's filled with art, it's absolutely gorgeous. Is this hotel inspired by a real hotel?

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

It's little elements of lots of hotels that I've visited, going to go in and have a drink in or stayed in or just explored, when I've been on a research trip, to be honest. But I did, it's set in Edinburgh. Eliza lives in Melbourne at the beginning the book. And exactly as you said, because of this tragic event which happened when she was a younger woman, she's turned her life into the smallest, safest, very lonely life that she, you know, that she needed. And then she's suddenly catapulted and finds herself in Edinburgh, where Olivia runs this boutique hotel. And I went to Edinburgh a few times for research trips and found an area called Haymarket. And there are quite a few hotels which have been established in the rows of

beautiful terrace hotels, terrace houses there. And Edinburgh is such a beautiful city for long, winding, curving streets with these gorgeous sandstone buildings. So, I walked around Edinburgh until I found the street that I thought, "That's where my, that's where my hotel is going to be". And stayed in one quite similar to it, in terms of it takes, that it took up three terrace houses. But the decor, everything else came out of my imagination, which was lovely. So every day when I was going up to my attic to write, I thought, I'm going to be in this gorgeous hotel and Eliza gets given the best room in the hotel. So, I was living vicariously Mary-Lou, for a few months! I have a research photo, I can show you if you like?

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Mary-Lou as she speaks.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Oh yes please!

**Description:**

Monica's video is focused on as she speaks. Monica is holding up a photograph of her standing in Edinburgh, with rows of terrace houses behind her. She is dressed in winter clothes.

**Monica McInerney:**

Yes, so this is me in Edinburgh, in January, and that's on one of the rows of terrace houses. Here's me peeking through there, sorry.

And that's the sort of setting for the Montgomery Hotel in *The Godmothers*. So that was in January. I had been there in April, the year before in 2019. My husband and I went over to do the initial research and then I had this gorgeous trip in January with my 18-year-old Australian niece who was visiting. And she came with me for three days and we double-checked every single location in Edinburgh together, carrying the manuscript with us. And I'd stand there and read out the scenes and the settings to make sure I had everything exactly right. So that's, so if anybody is reading the book, that's what the Montgomery Street looks like.

**Description:**

The video is focused on Monica as she speaks. This changes to show both Monica's and Mary-Lou's video side by side.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Wow. That's fabulous. Thank you. And now the other thing is, it is a boutique hotel with a lot of art, and art plays an important role in this. Not just, not as decoration, but there are a few plot points around it as well. So how did the art insinuate itself into *The Godmothers*?

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

Well, for me, I think I mean, art plays a very important part in my life, and in everybody's lives. I think we've all realised that through the through the pandemic and lockdowns, that how much when life is tricky, you know, we, we all find solace in beautiful art or beautiful music or be it literature, films, you know. Things that involve our imagination, that take us out of reality.

And everybody in *The Godmothers* has, has had loss of some sort, or has an ache for something that they had and is gone. Or something that they've never had and they'd long to have. And each of them have found solace in, in different forms of art. Olivia is Eliza's godmother in the Edinburgh Hotel. She had trained as an art historian and then met her Scottish husband. And so, she has been put in charge of the collection that the boutique hotel is quite famous for. Eliza herself, is an amateur artist and through very difficult times in her life, she has turned to, to painting and to the solace and the absorption of painting as a, as a way to, to distract her mind. And other people use, without any spoilers, photography is used by another character, and children's puzzles by another. So, there's ways that, that art can take us out of ourselves and, and also join us with other people too, I think, and that happens throughout the story, too.

**Description:**

The video is focused on Monica as she speaks, before quickly flashing to show both video screens side by side.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

There's a particular painting that you write about in this book? So, what's the significance of this one?

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

Two of the characters, I probably won't go into too much detail again because the book has only been out a week, and I'm not sure if people have had a chance to read it yet while they're watching.

But there's a painting that means a great deal to two characters. And it's, it's a painting that matters during their younger years and more recent, too. So, I had a gorgeous day in London. I went into the Tate Gallery in London.

I hope everyone can hear the plane that is flying over, or not hear it!

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

No, you are alright.

**Monica McInerney:**

I went into the Tate Gallery in London while I was researching the London scenes in *The Godmothers*, and I walked in as one of the characters does, and not knowing which painting I was looking for. But I was going to go into every gallery until I found one that felt like it emotionally leapt off the wall at me. And this was going to be the painting that would matter to two of the characters.

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks. Monica is holding up a photograph of her standing in the Tate Gallery in front of a very large painting, with a gold frame. The painting depicts two small children dressed in white who are lighting paper lanterns as day turns to evening. They are in a garden strewn with pink roses, yellow carnations and tall white lilies behind them.

**Monica McInerney:**

So, to show and tell again, this is me at the, in the Tate Gallery, beside the painting. That as soon as I walked into this room in the Tate, I thought, "There is my painting!"

It's called *Carnation Lily, Lily Rose*, and it's by an American artist called John Singer Sargent. And as you can see, it's enormous. Like you know, I'm five foot seven and that's, that's how it's towering over me. And it is the most glorious painting to look up at, look at in great detail. It's in a spring garden and it's two little girls lighting lanterns in preparation for, for a family party of some sort.

And this is a recurring image through the book. So, if anybody is reading the book and wonders what that painting (looks like), you can Google it if you like, but that, there's a sneak preview of it in the gallery.

**Description:**

Monica and Mary-Lou are shown on the screen, beside each other in the video call.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

I got to admit, I did Google it. I had no idea it was that big!

**Monica McInerney:**

It's huge! It's absolutely huge.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Now, you mentioned grief before, and it's something you and I have talked about during your tour for *The Trip of a Lifetime*. There was an element of grief in there. And certainly, in *The House of Memories*, you explore the death of a child and the grief there. So grief seems to be a recurring theme in your books. I'm wondering, is there something in the water in Dublin or is it just that, that heart connecting, sometimes heart wrenching, bittersweet melancholy that you're attracted to in some way?

**Monica McInerney:**

I think - It's a great question, Mary-Lou.

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

I think I am shaped by grief; I'm shaped by grief and love as a human being, I think. As we spoke earlier, I was very lucky to grow up as the middle child of a big, loving, noisy family of nine, and seven, seven kids. And I started writing in 1999, when I was writing my first novel, and my father died in March 2000. He'd been diagnosed with cancer and we knew he had a year to live. So, I was writing my first book through that last year of his life. And when he died, I could not believe, one: how much it hurt, and two: how much the whole world tilted for me. How our whole family changed shape. How everything that I had always felt sure of, the security of knowing Dad was there and, and that the ground was solid under my feet. It, it tipped.

And that was a quite an extraordinary time in my life to realize what, and I've read since, that grief is the price we pay for love. And that's what I learned.

And I think because I've gone on to write family stories. And I think they are the, there's a lot of love and warmth and comedy in my novels, but they all have a shadow side. And it is often grief because the more I talked about people after my own experiences, and very many subsequent griefs that I've been through because I'm 55 years old. And no human gets through life without feeling, you know, lots of different sorts of pains and sorrows and losses of friends, personal losses, things I would love to have happen that didn't happen. And you have to come to terms with that. And the more I talk to other people about being a human being and we all go through it, we all go through that in different ways.

And this book is very much a book about being shaped by grief, but not being wholly shaped by it, by being affected by grief. You can move through. Grief is an extraordinary emotion. It's a very strong, complicated emotion to, for a novelist to write about, I think. And as is love, because love can come in so many guises, too. But you can move through the different stages of grief. And for me as a writer and as an observer of people, I find that very interesting. That it can have a very long lead time and some people will never recover from a loss. Some people find themselves a different sort of person because of it. And as I said, everybody in this novel is, is mourning something or longing for something that they don't have. And that's, that's grief, too, in a way, I think.

**Description:**

Monica and Mary-Lou are shown on the screen, beside each other in the video call.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Yeah, absolutely. Olivia's relationship with her husband, who's in a nursing home, there's all kinds of layers going on in this book. It's beautiful. And it's so wonderfully well written and heartfelt.

**Monica McInerney:**

Thankyou! Thanks, very much.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

There is a lot of humour in this book as well. Olivia's mother-in-law, living in this gorgeous hotel, comes to mind. She is a piece of work and the scenes with her, are just so over the top, it's just gorgeous! And then

there's young Sullivan who Eliza meets on the plane, Eliza has a fear of flying and she's seated next to this... How old is he?

**Monica McInerney:**

He's, as the book begins, he's seven weeks from turning 12, he's very specific about that. So, he's eleven, but about to turn twelve.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

He is very specific about everything. And he loves to play Scrabble online. So, I loved him even more. But I was wondering about him. I know that you've been very close to your nephews and nieces as they've grown up. Was he perhaps based on someone that you know?

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

He's a little element of all sorts of things. I have a very good friend in Dublin who's the son of one of my best friends. And, and she has a son who I have day trips out with sometimes. He and I will just go, like we've been to the, the zoo together. Or we will have a day trip out in Dublin, and he has a fantastic vocabulary like Sullivan does in the novel. I mean, Sullivan is not my friend, but I've greatly enjoyed the, the friendship of a 12-year-old, well he's 10. And so, you know, that kind of age group. And I've got lots of nephews and, and I just find them so funny at that age because they're on that cusp of, of being very earnest. But they, you know, they're, they're very particular too.

And so, Sullivan was just a dream character to write. And I loved it every time he stepped in, like he was only supposed to be on the plane. As you mentioned that Eliza is very scared of flying and he calms her down on the flight. And, but I just had so much fun and he and Eliza were getting on so well, that he becomes a major character through the whole book! And that's one of the fun things about when you're writing, because I don't plot beforehand.

I know, I know my group of people. I know what I describe it as an emotional explosion of what's going to happen to them and it's going to set the plot up and running. But beyond that, I make it up literally as I'm going along, through with the first draft. Because it goes through many, many drafts, and edits. But that very initial when the whole story is down for the first time. And so, Sullivan was a surprise character for me, but I just couldn't let him go. And Celine the evil mother-in-law was another one, too. I had to cut out, I reckon, probably forty thousand words of scenes with both of them because I was just having so much fun watching! But I didn't need them, they actually weren't part of the plot. So, I've got like a whole, like I could do novellas with each of them if I wanted.

**Description:**

Monica and Mary-Lou are shown on the screen, beside each other in the video call.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Oh, I'd love a Sullivan novella! Actually, I'd love Celine novella. They are both fabulous characters.

**Monica McInerney:**

It might happen!

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Now, I think you might have had fun writing Maxie too. She's, she's the other godmother, we haven't talked about yet. So, she's... She's an actress and she's... She's lots of fun. She has that sense of drama and charisma that you expect in an actress. And she's also kind of childlike as well. So, I'm wondering with, how did, how did you go about choosing there's Olivia and then there's Maxie? I mean, they're not related, but I'm just wondering how you. You said you, you have a cast of characters to begin with. But those two particular personalities. How do they evolve, evolve while you're writing?

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

With the two of them, because I knew from the start that it was going to be about the godmother relationship. And Eliza's mother Jeannie is, is quite a troubled woman. And there's scenes going back where you discover Jeannie as a younger woman. And, and the friendship between Olivia and Maxie and Jeannie. They all went to quite a religious boarding school together. And they were kind of the bold girls, really. They're always a bit separate, up to no good and that kind of thing. So, they have a friendship that was very, very strongly forged at school. And I was also, that's another layer that runs through the book. It's about Eliza and her, and her pilgrimage, if you like, too. About her father and her mother. But it's also the story of a friendship between three women, over their lives. And, and I wanted to write, like Olivia, who's the one in the boutique hotel is, if quite, she's very, I'm sort of sitting differently talking about her now, I'm talking about her.

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Mary-Lou as she speaks.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Me too.

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

But she's very kind of controlled. And she, she needs to be, you know, because she's, she's become a stepmother as a young woman. She's now famous of running a hotel. Her much-loved husband has dementia and she's having to, to, to mourn his loss, even though he hasn't passed away. And Maxie was always the kind of... You know here I'm doing it, I'm sitting differently now too! Maxie was, was always the dramatic type and, and an actor. And she's a successful actor. She's on a, on a drama series in the U.K. that's very, very popular. And she's very well known. And, and I'm interested in the way that within a

friendship, you make allowances for each other over the years. But also, how you find yourself falling back into those patterns. Like Maxie, as a young woman, oh Maxie's just being flighty or, you know, that's just her being dramatic. You can get away with a lot for the rest of your life. There are a few scenes where somebody needs to be the adult in the situation. And Maxie's goes, "Oh no, I can't. I'll just get too upset". And she might not. She's a 50 year-old woman. She should be able to cope with those situations. But I'm really interested in, when I'm writing my characters, why they are like they are now and, and, and, and how much you can get away with sometimes. Because of what people believe you to be. So, it's a story about that as well, about your own self-image, I suppose.

**Description:**

Monica and Mary-Lou are shown on the screen, beside each other in the video call.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Now, Maxie does take us to Gretna Green for a wedding. Now, you've mentioned your research. It sounds as though it's totally meticulous, if you're standing there with a, your manuscript and ticking everything off to be right.

**Monica McInerney:**

I am, yes.

**Description:**

The video focuses on Mary-Lou and then promptly flashes to focus on Monica.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

So, I'm guessing you went to Gretna Green.

**Monica McInerney:**

I did. And I've got photographic proof.

**Description:**

Monica holds up a photograph of her smiling behind a sign saying 'Gretna Green'.

**Monica McInerney:**

Here I am with the sign in Gretna Green. For people that don't know, Gretna Green is on the border of Scotland and England. And it's historically famous for centuries, I think centuries, for being, yeah, since 1754 that people went there to elope. So, lots of people, in lots of books, over the years have run off to Gretna Green to, to get married. And, and I wanted these characters, my characters to get to go there for a wedding. And so, John, my husband and I went there for a couple of nights. And spent, and it's the most extraordinary thing.

**Description:**

The video focuses on Mary-Lou and then promptly flashes to focus on Monica.

**Monica McInerney:**

It's a wedding theme park, basically! I have no idea such a thing existed. And there's a big hotel by it, which I haven't got the photo of here. But you sit in the hotel and, and there's just brides and grooms sitting at the next table. Because people go there for either big weddings or they want to just literally run away and have a really little quiet wedding. But there's a cottage there, a blacksmith cottage, and you organise to get, to have your ceremony.

**Description:**

Monica holds up a photograph of a blacksmith's anvil.

**Monica McInerney:**

And then there's this Anvil, this famous Anvil, at Gretna Green in this, in this blacksmith's cottage. And the moment you announce that you're married, the, the person conducting the wedding hits the Anvil.

So, the sound revolves around the room and that marks that you're officially married. So, there's all these traditions and rituals there. So, it was a fascinating place to visit.

And I was poking my nose into this door and that door and got asked to leave because I thought it was just a tour group, being shown around one of the weddings. And in fact, it was a real wedding. And then there's me, like, looking around, so I had to kind of get out quickly! But as I said, it's such a theme park.

**Description:**

Monica holds up a board with a tea towel pinned to it. The tea towel has the words 'Gretna Green Famous Blacksmiths Shop' and has drawings of significant local buildings and the anvil.

**Monica McInerney:**

For example, you can get Gretna Green tea towels, which have every, you know, like all the different buildings involved and these sculptures here and there. And little arbours that you can stand under to have your wedding photos taken.

Fascinating place! I'm sure there's documentaries been made about it, but no, I loved having a look at that.

**Description:**

The video focuses on Mary-Lou and then promptly changes to show Monica and Mary-Lou's video side by side.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Oh, that's fantastic. Another fantastic location in this book is a castle. Now, we can't talk too much about it because there's a plot twist and another plot twist. There are lots of twists in this book that will just keep you transfixed until right to the very end. So, this castle involves one of those. So, we're not going to talk about why we're going to look at a castle. But the writing of it was so evocative. I'd love to see it in real life because I'm sure you've got a photo there of it.

**Description:**

Monica holds up a photo of her in front of a tall castle.

**Monica McInerney:**

I do. This is it's one of my favourite castles in Ireland, and that's me standing in front of it on a very, very cold January day. And again, I would love to sort of talk a little bit more about it because it's got a fascinating history. But I can't. But if you read *The Godmothers*, it's all in there. But that again, it's one of the... I take my location research really seriously. I try to, because I have lots of international settings in all of my books. And, and people visit so many places now that I know from emails that I get from readers, which I always love to get. They say, "Oh, you reminded me, I went there two years ago". And I want to make sure that I get it right, so for me to actually spend physical time in everywhere that I describe. So that's again, if you're reading *The Godmothers* and when I do start talking about that, so that's it from one angle.

**Description:**

Monica holds up a photo where the same castle can be seen in the background, with green bushes and bright yellow and red flowers in front.

**Monica McInerney:**

And then in summertime, this is it. There's a beautiful river and a bridge nearby in the summertime, they grow these beautiful flower boxes.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Wow.

**Monica McInerney:**

So, this is the castle towers over this Irish town, so.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

That is beautiful.

**Monica McInerney:**

Yeah.

**Description:**

The video focuses on Mary-Lou and then promptly changes to show Monica and Mary-Lou's video side by side.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Absolutely lovely. I'm just having a look. We are running out of time. I knew I'd have too many questions, I have pages of questions, but let's have one from one of our audience members. And this one is, it has been a few years between books. So, the question is, how long did it take you to write this book, *The Godmothers*?

**Monica McInerney:**

I'll give you the quick answer here. It took about 18 months. I had worked on another book for two years before *The Godmothers*. And when I finished writing 200,000 words of that book, I realised that that was one I'd needed to write, but it didn't need to be published.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Wow!

**Monica McInerney:**

So that's why it's taken me this long for this book. That's why it's been three years between books for me. I had written another whole book! But for lots of different reasons, sometimes books you write and they're for lots of readers. Sometimes you need to write, this is what I'm talking about creativity before, sometimes you need to write purely to write. So, I have a book on my laptop, at home in Dublin that I'm the only person that's ever read it, and that will always be the case. So, it took three years in terms of time for my last book, *The Trip of a Lifetime*, for *The Godmothers*, but the actual writing of this one, about 18 months. And I loved the experience, it was, I thoroughly enjoyed all of the characters. There's a lot of, as I said, there's a lot of shadow and sorrow. But I also laughed a lot while I was writing it, which is always kind of a funny thing to say. Because I'm at home in my attic in Dublin, writing and my husband can hear me laughing away upstairs in the attic!

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

The mad woman in the attic!

**Monica McInerney:**

I know, I'm giving it away, aren't I? So ...

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Well actually, while we're on the theme of the madwoman in the attic. There have been...

**Monica McInerney:**

You said it, not me.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

There have been a lot of questions about your writing process from our audience. And you're a very, by your own admission, Monica, you are very superstitious writer. So, I'm curious about your superstitions around your writing and what your workspace looks like...

**Monica McInerney:**

And I can show you if you want to know.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

As is our audience because everyone wants to know.

**Monica McInerney:**

I'm sorry, Mary Lou say that last one again?

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

As is our audience, because everyone wants to know.

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks.

**Monica McInerney:**

Know that? I'm very disciplined. That's the first thing to say. So, I turn up every day at my desk. I know that that's it's a lot about imagination, but it's also just absolutely discipline. You've got to, writing is a muscle. You have to turn up every day and work at it. So, I do that. But because your writing is in your head, I develop with each of my books, various rituals, and I collect things with each book which become a real part of the writing process for me. For example, *The House of Memories*, with the family in that are called the Foxes. And so, I collected dozens of fox figures the whole way I was writing that. The *Hello from the Gillespies*, a robin, there's a little robin bird is in that. So, I collected all these robins, so they were all on my desk. With *The Godmothers*, and this isn't a spoiler, I can say this. Sullivan, the little fellow that we were talking about, the 12-year-old, er, 11-year-old, he has a bit of a fixation with ring-tailed lemurs, the gorgeous animal. And I developed one, as the book. And, and these were great. When I was writing the *House of Memories*, as it turned out, you can get fox things everywhere. Ring-tail lemurs, a little harder to find! But I went to Dublin Zoo and Edinburgh Zoo. They had a great, so, there was a visit to Edinburgh zoo. But this is my desk while I was writing *The Godmothers*.

**Description:**

Monica's begins to hold up a photo and the video flashes to Mary-Lou.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Oh! Wow!

**Description:**

The video is now only focused on Monica as she speaks. She is holding up a photo of her desk. A large fox can be seen with a black cat in the background. In front of the fox ornament, there is nine ring-tailed lemur toys in front.

**Monica McInerney:**

So, the fox still survives from when I wrote *The House of Memories*, and then I have nine little ring-tailed lemur toys there. I'm also working on a children's book, which is being published next year called *Marcie Gill and the Caravan Park Cat*, my first book for younger readers, for 10 and under and I've started collecting black cats too! But I also got this habit. I have a thing about the number nine, that I can only finish writing at the end of the day if my word count ends in nine. And, and so that became important. And there are nine of these little lemurs. And I couldn't send off the manuscript, I save it into a Cloud each day. Like I email it to myself, unless I had touched each of the nine lemurs on the head, and then the fox, and then the cat, and then this little golden goose that my sister gave me. So I develop all these rituals and, and I understand, like, I'm not obsessive in my own personal life, but when I'm writing, I've realised that they're the kind of the little ways that I finish work for the day, like as a writer. And, you know this, Mary Lou, absolutely, through your writing career too. That, that it's not like you can clock off because it's still going on in your head, even though you finished at the end of the day. And for me, I think my rituals of tapping everybody on, on the head, that's my story and I'm sticking to it!

**Description:**

Monica and Mary-Lou's videos are shown side by side.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

It's a great story and one of the many, many reasons we love you, Monica. Absolutely. So, congratulations once again, 20 years in publishing and your 13th novel, *The Godmothers*. And we look forward to your children's book as well! You're most intelligent!

**Monica McInerney:**

Thank you. That'll be next year. And that's just been such a beautiful experience because it's a family story, set in a caravan park. As I said, for 10 and under. So, it's got comedy and drama, but it's also got magic in it and the joy of being able to make things happen with magic. And also, I'm working with this terrific illustrator from South Australia called Danny Snell, and that's been such an amazing experience to watch him turn my characters into these gorgeous illustrations. Because obviously with one of these, I don't, you know, they don't have illustrations. But my, my children book, children's book will have so, yeah, it's a lovely experience. It's been a lovely writing experience. And that will be the first in a series. So, I'm working on the second and third books of those, too.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Oh wow! Fantastic, you are busy!

**Monica McInerney:**

Yeah. A busy, busy time.

**Mary-Lou Stephens:**

Well, Monica, on behalf of everybody, thank you so much for joining us. This has been a wonderful chat and a wonderful opportunity to find out more about your latest book, *The Godmothers*. So, if you've read it already, you know how wonderful it is. If you haven't, well make sure you do, it's well worth it. It's just another gorgeous book from a fabulous, fabulous storyteller. Monica, thank you so much.

**Monica McInerney:**

Thanks so much, Mary-Lou, and thanks so much for everybody at Queensland Libraries for hosting me, too. And all of you for, for tuning in tonight. Thank you.

**Description:**

The screen is showing the logos of Public Libraries and Councils who have partnered in this author event. The list is going from left to right is: City of Gold Coast, Ipswich Libraries, Brisbane City, Redland City Council, Logan City Council, Lockyer Valley Regional Council, Noosa Library Service, Sunshine Coast Council/Libraries, Moreton Bay Region Libraries and Gympie Regional Libraries/Gympie Regional Council. At the bottom right hand corner of the screen is the Penguin Random House Australia logo.

**End of transcript**