

Ruaridh Raleigh

Backstory



Species: Human

Sex: ♂

Age: 37

Height: 6ft 1in

Weight: 205lbs

Siblings: 5 - brother named Dónall (2 years younger), sister named Isabelle (4 years younger), sister named Mary (7 years younger), twins (a boy and girl named Darragh and Shannon; 14 years younger)

Profession: Airline pilot

Ruaridh is a character from the *Indicators* book series. At the current time he doesn't appear on-screen. He is patient, disciplined, and kind, and grew up in a family where he felt he never got the care or understanding he needed. Ruaridh wants to give something better to the world than he got, so that he can break the cycle of misery that made his early years so hard. He trained as a long-haul pilot but came to love the feeling of coming home to his husband, Max.

Trust & Confidence

(newborn)

Ruaridh was born in Coolock, north of Dublin, to a set of Catholic parents.

His father had always had a positive, can-do attitude, and later in life Ruaridh would come to see this for himself. His mother was somewhat more downtrodden, not least because she had had Ruaridh under duress: her parents were exceptionally keen for her to settle down and have children, as they felt a good Catholic wife should.

Perhaps, when she gave birth to Ruaridh, she expected them to ease up on her, but that wasn't the case. Instead they - especially her mother - kept a very close eye on her and offered a lot of support and advice that she felt was unwelcome. The fact that this was her first baby didn't help. She felt nervous about making mistakes in raising him, and wanted to do everything perfect for his sake, not just for the risk of her parents' disapproval.

Ruaridh himself sensed this and, while he was unable to comprehend the nuance of what was going on, he noticed his mother's tension and reacted to it by feeling fearful himself. This made for a fraught parent-baby bond where Ruaridh was aware of her

distress, but couldn't begin to guess how to fix it. Instead, in his infantile, instinctive way, he tensed up as he tried not to contribute to it.

Freedom & Self-Determination

(toddlerhood)

As Ruaridh got old enough to begin to think of himself and his mother as two separate entities (as all infants do, in time), he began to notice the dynamic between himself, his mother, and his grandparents in a way that the reader may recognise.

His grandparents loved him the way a dragon loves its gold: possessively. His mother tried to please them even if they weren't there, afraid of the repercussions of defying them over "their" grandchild.

Given that he was a toddler, Ruaridh lacked the life experience to see this in context. There were many people in the world who didn't live like this, but he had never seen them, so had no idea that life could be different. Nevertheless, the whole situation felt hostile enough that he felt the pressure. He managed as best he could.

This meant listening to his grandparents when they told him about Catholicism and what it meant for him. Most of it went over his head, but he understood quite early that it was the core of his identity (although he had no idea what that could possibly mean), and that it meant that he and his family were pitted against the world.

Ruaridh was still settling into this difficult set of life circumstances when his mother gave birth again. When he turned 2, Dónall was born.

He watched from a distance as his mother's and grandparents' attention mostly switched to Dónall - especially his mum's. Ruaridh may not have felt happy and relaxed in the family, but the attention he'd been given had been his, and had proved to him that he was important to the grown-ups. Suddenly, with Dónall around, he felt invisible.

Seeing Dónall get the attention he felt was rightfully his and his alone was stressful to him. In addition to this he found it infuriating that Dónall didn't seem to be subject to the harsh tones that he was. This was the first time he had seen gentleness and kindness (at least, relative gentleness and kindness), and he felt cheated that Dónall got it - and without doing anything to earn it, either!

Of course, the reality was that Dónall was an infant who needed more attention than a toddler and was assumed by his grandparents to be perfect because he hadn't done anything 'wrong' or 'bad' yet. He hadn't developed a sense of personal will yet so they either hoped or assumed (or something in between) that he would be the perfect Catholic grandson.

Ambition

(young childhood)

Like many children, Ruaridh grew big and strong enough to run around more and explore further, but he didn't feel particularly free to do so. Unable to use the energy he felt within to full effect, he developed a chronic feeling of feeling cramped and controlled.

Being a boy brought up in the 1980s, he was encouraged to learn how to fight. As a 3-6 year old this amounted to 'play-boxing' or being goaded, although his granddad was far more prone to this than his dad. Ruaridh hated this with a passion. Sometimes his parents intervened to protect him and Dónall, but not always. If his grandparents thought they could get away with it, they tended to play Ruaridh and Dónall off against one another. Ruaridh may not have liked his brother but his grandparents' poisoning of their relationship was obvious to him. He became defensive about it, and it was a small mercy that Dónall felt the same way.

His parents had another baby, a girl called Isabelle, when he was 4 years old. From the outset he noticed the differences in how the grandparents talked about her to how they talked about Dónall and himself. They seemed more inclined to be indulgent - this was over and above the fact that Isabelle was a baby.

This wasn't the only change that Ruaridh experienced as a small child. His dad spent less time at home. Ruaridh couldn't have known this, but this was because there were more mouths to feed. He had to earn money to support all of their children, so support them he did - by spending more hours working at KILTech. As a result of this, Ruaridh felt less protected from his grandparents. He sensed that his mother feared them enough that she couldn't always bear to stand up to them, even to protect him.

He started to notice his mum's preference for holiday programmes on TV. He quickly learned that airline pilots took people to these serene locations, far away from their troubles, so he started fantasising himself as one. He roleplayed piloting his very own airplane by sitting in cardboard boxes, the box flaps acting as wings. He didn't like it when Dónall started trying to take control of his plane, and some big arguments ensued.

Whenever he and Dónall fell out and their mother wanted them to behave, she would use the threat, "wait until your father gets home!" Ruaridh quickly worked out that this was an empty threat but took it to mean that he should acquiesce because she needed him to. He complied, but it often meant that Dónall got his way. Ruaridh resented this but there was nothing much he could do about it, especially when Dónall started to develop a certain cockiness because of it.

Productivity

(older childhood)

Ruaridh experienced older childhood as a drab, frustrating, and limiting time. He longed for more freedom, and he dealt with that by planning ahead. He took school seriously and studied every subject he would need in order to become a pilot in later life.

This included team-work at school. Ruaridh didn't particularly think about leading a team, but he learned to get along with others as a way of making his life easier. He noticed that Dónall had more charisma than he did, and that rankled him, but he kept quiet about that and got along with anyone who he teamed up with, quietly and unobtrusively. As far as he was concerned, his goals were all that really mattered.

When at home, he played video games on his Amstrad. A lot of these had themes appropriate to his interests and, although he didn't play these games specifically for this effect, playing improved his hand-eye coordination, a skill he would later rely on.

One of the frustrations of his life at this age was seeing how differently Isabelle was treated, compared to himself and even Dónall. He didn't resent her for it, but he saw how much she was wrapped up and protected from the world, and he wished he had had some of that for himself.

Then his parents had another child: Mary. He kept an eye on how they treated her, but he didn't see anything that overly concerned him or surprised him - he expected that she would be wrapped up in cotton wool like Isabelle, and indeed she was.

When he was 12 and on the cusp of becoming a teenager, his dad took him and Dónall to England for the first time, to see KilTech. Despite the magnitude of this event he wasn't particularly interested. He noticed how engaged Dónall was during the visit and thought, "Dónall would love to be a part of this, but I wouldn't," and that was all right with him. This subtly served to distance Ruaridh from the family.

Indeed, Ruaridh's most enduring memory of this trip was the ferry to England. He spent the time thinking about how it must feel to captain such a large boat. He found the thought fascinating, especially when he tried to imagine the skills that the captain would have to use! While they were travelling over, his dad took the two boys out onto the deck and Ruaridh watched the occasional plane overhead. That cemented his fascination with large vessels.

Children growing up in the Republic of Ireland, like Ruaridh did, were taught Irish if they had a desire to enter university in Ireland. Ruaridh had already decided that he would do whatever it took to enter the travel industry, so he went ahead and took the early Irish classes. He had an uncle, Oscar, who routinely spoke Irish, and talking to Oscar helped him to learn in-between classes.

Child to Adult Transition

(adolescence)

When Ruaridh was 14, his parents fell pregnant again. This time they had twins, who they named Darragh and Shannon. After the twins arrived the house began to feel increasingly crowded. He found it difficult to concentrate on his homework with a pair of newborns crying every hour or less, and with Mary running around full of energy, like any healthy 7 year old. His parents were clearly exhausted and prone to irritability, and Ruaridh himself had his own problems: he was at a time of life when his brain was rewiring into that of an adult, which made him feel emotionally unstable. That made it all the harder for him to focus on his homework.

This was when uncle Oscar came to the rescue. Oscar had no children so his house was quiet. It was also conveniently close, so as soon as he was invited to do so, he visited Oscar on a regular basis to do his homework and to escape the intense atmosphere at home.

All of these problems resolved themselves soon enough: his parents decided to move into a bigger house, and although Ruaridh didn't hear much about it, his dad had a vasectomy during one of his visits to the UK and healed there, so that the grandparents wouldn't know about it so couldn't retaliate.

Whether by accident or design, their new house was within a few streets of their original home so none of the kids had to uproot their lives. This came in helpful to Ruaridh, given that he already had enough to contend with. The pay-off of being in a quiet environment and away from his parents' bickering and Dónall in general was enough to make the extra effort worthwhile.

Ruaridh had always been aware that he was gay, but it was only when he was around age 17 that he came out to his family. The results of this were explosive: his dad went berserk and his grandparents tried to blame Oscar for 'turning him'. His sisters complained of feeling betrayed.

Dónall remained quiet about the issue, though. At first Ruaridh wasn't sure whether to interpret this as silent judgement or acceptance, but soon after this he accidentally found Dónall's erotica stash and learned that Dónall was gay, too. They talked about it briefly. Ruaridh promised Dónall that he wouldn't out him to the family, but he secretly resented that he had had to tolerate the family's backlash while Dónall himself hadn't.

Regardless, it did help them to understand one another better. They developed an unspoken, mostly embittered, awareness of the damage that their grandparents could do with their traditionalist values. From here the two brothers silently started watching out for their younger siblings, unwilling to let them be damaged, attacked, and traumatised the way they had been. They facilitated getting their younger siblings out of the house whenever possible.

Ruaridh had become something of a black sheep by this point and was not trusted with his younger siblings, so he couldn't be the one to accompany them away from the house. Instead he facilitated Dónall getting Mary and Isabelle out of the house while he himself watched over Shannon and Darragh while they were in their parents' or grandparents' care. This only improved his self-regulation skills and fuelled his desire to get away from the family one day, once and for all.

Indeed, it made the idea of learning to captain a plane and literally fly to the other side of the world the world all the more appealing, even if only in his more dramatic moments. Whenever he thought about this realistically, he figured that it seemed as good a career choice as any so he reviewed his studies and refocused on the areas he would need to excel in, in order to train as a pilot one day. His determination to study meant that he visited Oscar as often as he could. He did this in secret to avoid drama, and it gave him the quiet time he needed.

Oscar was not LGBT himself but was happy to be supportive of Ruaridh.

Closeness in Relationships

(young adulthood)

Ruaridh continued his studies in college, and found that living there offered him more freedom than he was used to at home. At around the same time he started to find odd jobs, in the travel industry wherever possible. He didn't find anything particularly interesting but it gave him the industry-relevant experience he needed. He and Dónall grew apart, even more so than they already had, but despite his lack of attention he noticed that Dónall seemed very keen to move to England.

As far as relationships went, Ruaridh was keen on monogamous romance. He dated a little during this time in search of the type of relationship he was after, but found it difficult to find anyone in the LGBT community who wanted the same things as he did and shared his values.

As he grew accustomed to life living in student dorms he became comfortable with maintaining a home by himself, and that gave him more confidence to distance himself from his family. He firmed up his plans to leave. He continued to develop work experience and saved money. When he finally felt ready at age 22, he completely left his family. He didn't forewarn them about it; he simply moved to a new address and didn't give them his forwarding address.

He began to train as a pilot for short-haul flights.

Ruaridh's only concession to remaining in contact with his family was to visit during his younger siblings' birthdays. For him, this felt like the best way to ensure that his siblings were safe, and to catch up with them. By this time Mary was becoming independent enough that she no longer needed so much protection, and Mary was in her mid-teens so not too far behind.

Dónall turned up to these birthday parties too, and when he did, Ruaridh learned that he had renamed himself by deed poll to Daniel. The two failed to connect very well however, as Daniel was generally content to stay closer to the family than Ruaridh was and considered Ruaridh's behaviour as desertion. He had taken a job at KilTech and considered Ruaridh's distancing of himself from the family as desertion.

During one of their rather fraught conversations, Daniel accused him of learning to fly so that he could leave the family again.

Years passed, with Ruaridh continuing his training until he succeeded in earning his license as a long-haul pilot. He occasionally dated but didn't find the man he was looking for - at least, not until, at age 39, he found Max Williams.

Max was a romantic at heart, much like Ruaridh himself, and the two clicked over their mutual love of comfort and of the prospect of a secure home, and their appreciation for kindness in others. As a couple the two settled into a dynamic where Max was the person Ruaridh would come home to. They grew to trust one another implicitly.

Passing on Responsibilities

(older adulthood)

Ruaridh had no children but he appreciated the family - and therefore, stability - that Max represented to him, so after they had been dating for a few years, he proposed to him. The two married.

Max'd had a heart problem for a few years which had required surgery that he had been putting off. One day Max had a medical emergency that led to him having this surgery. This scared Ruaridh, but he held firm for his husband and the two got through it with minimal drama.

He loved being a pilot and had no desire to retire at any point. The only thing that prompted him to retire was pleasure at the idea of spending more time with Max, plus the fact that he had set the pair of them up well for the rest of their lives.

Ruaridh was deeply saddened to hear the news that Oscar had passed away, when Ruaridh himself was in his late fifties.

End of Life

(old age)

As happy and comfortable as he is in most of his life, Ruaridh has a couple of fears around death. Being raised in a Catholic home left him with a great deal of anxiety about the idea of being judged after his death. His other concern is that Max, with his heart condition, may die before him despite being four years younger.

Credits

Based on theory by:

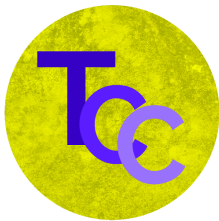
Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

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~ Hayley, Founder of The Character Consultancy

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