

My kind of nonviolence



**Personal views from Ireland on
what nonviolence means**

Welcome to *My kind of nonviolence*

Welcome to this pamphlet entitled '*My kind of nonviolence*' which has been a long time in the making and whose publication coincides with 25 years of INNATE.

The idea behind the project was, is, to show that 'nonviolence' is a powerful force but not a party line. The way it aims to show this is through individual interpretations of nonviolence in people's lives. So contributors speak for themselves.

Thank you to all the contributors who tolerated an exceptionally long time in getting the pamphlet together. However we hope you, the reader, will agree that it makes a fascinating read. Pieces should be understood to refer to the date of writing, given at the end of each piece.

Thanks go to Stefania Gualberti who assisted with the project, to Mitzi Bales for help with editing, and to Roberta Bacic for trying to get it back on track. INNATE will be printing a limited number of paper copies and it will be available on the INNATE website at www.innatenonviolence.org

INNATE can be contacted through the website or at innate@ntlworld.com and by post or phone (16 Ravensdene Park, Belfast BT6 0DA and 028 – 90647106, code 048 from the Republic). Its monthly newssheet, *Nonviolent News*, is the main networking outreach but material is continually added to the website. INNATE also organises seminars, training events and solidarity events or demonstrations.

Please contact us if you are interested in our work or receiving information from us.

Rob Fairmichael,
Coordinator,
INNATE , Belfast, 2012



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My kind of nonviolence
was launched on International Day of Peace 2012
marking 25 years of INNATE

Front cover illustration:
***Food not war* 2011 textile by Irene MacWilliam**
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Attracta Walsh



At first I thought this an odd title, as I don't personally own a type of nonviolence, and maybe in a sense there is only one true form of nonviolence although there may be many faces of violence seen and experienced in our world. Of course I know that INNATE were looking for the individuals' stories of their personal journey to peace and nonviolent protest or action.

So, my story begins in the town (or city as it likes to call itself) of Armagh. Born there in 1958, eighth child in a relatively poor working-class Catholic family. Nonetheless, well brought up by loving, though very tired and jaded parents. Mum was a full-time stay-at-home mother, continually slaving at the cooker, sink, washing line etc. Contrary to popular opinion, I was not "spoiled" being the youngest, in fact I always felt bottom of the pecking order in the family, as everybody was bigger and cleverer than little me. Also, my Ma and Da didn't exactly lavish either material things or even a great outward show of love and affection upon me. I recognise now that I was loved and cherished, but they were hard times and a constant economic struggle for my Da as the sole breadwinner. I can now forgive him for being a bit short-tempered at times. He was a hard-working, dedicated family man. He didn't drink or beat up my Mum or thrash us kids (unless we needed the occasional "skite" to keep us in order). So you could say that was my first experience of nonviolence in action.

My older 3 brothers and 4 sisters were all very good to me. We had our little fights, but I guess I felt accepted as myself in the family circle. The first 10 years of childhood were largely happy and trouble-free. The only major events were the deaths of my Granny and Granda Walsh when I was about 6 and then 8, and when I was about 11 or 12, mum's brother, Uncle Harry died having suffered for many years after a stroke. Thus I experienced life and death, happiness and sadness, plus I had the benefit of an excellent Roman Catholic education at the convent

school. This gave me a firm foundation in the teachings of Jesus Christ, about love, forgiveness, and sacrifice.

Then it all changed – practically overnight in 1968 when a civil rights protester was shot dead in Armagh by the special police force, the B Specials. This unleashed a wave of rioting, sectarian fear and rumour, anger and a whole new language of words like, "RUC pigs", "Protestant bastards", petrol bombs, "burned out of their houses", guns, "British Army pigs", rubber bullets, CS gas, riot shields, landrovers, duck patrols etc etc.

But in our house I didn't hear those terms of abuse used against the so-called enemy. Catholics yes, but Republicans no, never. My Da only ever wanted a quiet life and for all his children to get on in life, as he put it, "Strike at what I missed". My dear Mum was herself the child of a mixed marriage. Her Da was a good Church of Ireland man, a career soldier in the Inniskilling Fusiliers and was wounded but survived the First World War. He was a member of the local Orange lodge but my Ma says that when he (Henry Farr) married her mum (Annie Cooke), Annie burned his Orange sash on the fire!

As young children pre-1968, we would always go out to watch the 12th July parade, and my Ma would freely chat to Protestant relatives and acquaintances at the gathering on The Mall. But 1968 put a stop to that. Then we were much more aware of the Protestant parts of the town and "our" areas, Protestant shops you didn't go to and the boys and girls at the Protestant schools that you didn't associate with. At age

10+ I accepted this as normal. It was all around and everyone was the same. The element of fear and uncertainty was very large in our lives in the early days of the Troubles, and things got worse then the British troops came over.

I passed my 11+ and started grammar school in 1970, the same year my brother Des went to Queens University. My folks were fearful for him going to the big city as things were pretty bad there. Things weren't much better in Armagh either, I remember walking to and from school often through riots. This entailed a number of lads from the secondary school, average age about 14, throwing bricks and stones at an army patrol, which thankfully didn't usually retaliate, but it could have turned bad. There was one occasion when I was coming home late after hockey practice and I couldn't get through my usual route home due to a very large crowd of stone throwers and army vehicles. My main thoughts were, "Stupid gits. Why are they doing this? I'm freezing and starving and want to get home for my tea and do my homework."

In my mid and later teens the killing, bombing and shootings got worse and worse. Every morning it seemed, my Mum would wake me up for school with the latest news bulletin from the radio, "Two policemen shot in Lurgan." "Riots in Andersonstown." "Soldiers raiding houses looking for arms."

One morning we were all woken up about 5 a.m. by thumping at the door. The Brits wanted to search our house. We all sat terrified in the living room while men with strange accents and rifles in their hands tramped through our home. Ma and Da were petrified that my brother Aidan, the only young male in the house then, would be "lifted" i.e. arrested, interned, beaten up and God knows what – forced to confess to terrorist crimes. This had already happened to other innocent young men. Aidan was only 16 or 17, and a big softie, and only interested in learning to play the guitar like Jimi Hendrix.

This was maybe the closest I came to "The Troubles" – brought right into my own home like that. The soldiers weren't abusive and we weren't uncooperative, having nothing to hide. Me and my sister Dymphna and Aidan were groggy and half asleep and barely ca-

pable of answering pointless questions about our names, dates of birth etc. They left, nothing came of it. On reflection, even after that sort of invasive trauma, I didn't hear words of hate in my family, my brother didn't go off to join the IRA or any such thing. Life such as it was went on.

Apart from bomb scares, explosions and random killings of policemen and others in the town, we weren't too closely affected. Only 2 significant incidents come to mind. Once a land-rover patrol came down our street, and not realising it was a cul-de-sac, they found themselves trapped. A neighbouring IRA activist across the road shot and wounded a young British soldier near our house. I didn't directly witness this as Ma and Da warned us to keep away from the windows. We heard the shots and commotion and later the story of how the soldier lay on the ground. In a great act of humanity and compassion, Mrs R from 2 doors down, (although a family with Republican sympathies) ran out with a blanket for the young man. I was deeply moved by this and still I feel the tears rise as I relate it.

To me that was nonviolence in action in our wee street. Also I see myself, determinedly walking on to school through the madness around me – that was my nonviolent form of protest.

The second event involved a boy I had dated a couple of times and remained friendly with – his father owned a bar in the town and was for some reason shot dead one night as he turned round to serve a customer. I felt very sad for Sean, and I hope he didn't turn to armed conflict as a result of this incident, but I don't know what became of him.

The years progressed, the Troubles worsened through the mid and late 70s. I couldn't wait to get through my A Levels and get away to university. I hoped to go to England to study psychology, but didn't quite get the grades and ended up with my 3rd choice of the University of Ulster in Coleraine. I was happy with this as leaving home was a big enough step and England seemed so far away and I was aware that my accent might not go down too well in Manchester or Liverpool.

University opened up so many new horizons for me. I found new friends from all arts and parts. Strangely I got on better with the non-natives – lads from London, Essex and Tyneside. We shared interests and a similar sense of humour, brought up as I was on British TV culture, the

Monty Python generation.

There wasn't much going on in student politics at that time. I suppose everyone was glad to be away from all that crap, safe in our ivory tower, young and carefree. Major change happened in my life when I formed a relationship with a Jewish-English guy and found myself unexpectedly expectant! i.e. pregnant at the beginning of my second year. We married, had a beautiful daughter, Clare, graduated and made a home. This was now 1981 and the threat of nuclear war was big on the horizon for us, overshadowing events in Norn Iron. We joined a local CND group and I learned about Hiroshima, weapons proliferation and the dangers of nuclear power. I realised like many others, that some dangerous loonies, namely M. Thatcher, R. Regan and Co. were in charge of the big red button that could end all life on Earth.

Having a child and a hope for the future fuelled our commitment to peace, disarmament, and clean and safe energy. My husband and I attended actions and protests in Belfast and were privileged to be among the many thousands who thronged London streets in 1982 for a major Anti-Nuclear march. It was a wonderful feeling to walk among a mass of like-minded people chanting, "One, two, three, four, we don't want a nuclear war. Five, six, seven, eight, we don't want to radiate!" At one point we stood off to the side and I was awe-struck at the volume of people streaming by. I had never seen so many human beings united in a common cause. It was like a great river flowing on and on. This was definitely my kind of non-violence.

By the time we had our second child, Owen in 1983, Direct Action had moved on to focus on army bases and related sites. We all four attended action at Bishops court near Ballyhornan in Co Down. I didn't know Rob Fairmichael then but subsequently got talking to him and we were able to reminisce about that time. (See photos on INNATE website.) At Bishops court I observed well organised and peaceful sitdown protest at the gates of the base. Police action was proper and civilised – indeed they too carried out their duties nonviolently.

Then for many years childrearing was my main concern. I was delighted to be part of the Integrated Education movement and

helped establish the new primary school in Portrush where our kids received a first class education in mutual understanding among other things.

We were also actively involved in the Peace Farm at Kilcranny, outside Coleraine, where we helped form a local branch of the Woodcraft Folk – a non-military type of youth organisation based on principles of co-operation, equality and care for the environment. All beautifully practical non-violent alternatives in action.

I also volunteered with Women's Aid, supporting women and children who had experienced domestic violence. In more recent times with my kids mostly grown up, my focus has shifted more to environmental concerns. This is another facet of violence, in this case being wreaked by ignorant mankind on the very planet that sustains our lives. I used to feel dread and despair about it all, but am currently studying with the Open University, looking at practical solutions to climate change, trying to live a low-carbon lifestyle in my own way, and hoping to put something back in terms of voluntary work overseas when my youngest child reaches maturity in a couple of years time.

It has been an interesting journey. I was inspired by many great people, thinkers and activists. I would like to pay tribute to Gandhi, Martin Luther King, the Dalai Lama, Bruce Kent, Sister Philomena Kilroy and all the folks in CND, Peace People, Integrated Education movement, Women's Aid, Quakers, Tools for Solidarity and more.

I would also like to take this opportunity to give thanks for the gifts of love and compassion I was born with, and for the loving and nurturing influences of my family and friends which I have enjoyed on my journey so far. ●

Portstewart, May 2009

Attracta Walsh was born in Armagh and educated at St Catherine's College there. She studied Psychology at University of Ulster, Coleraine 1977 - 81. She has worked as a secretary in the health service and in integrated education, and has a long history of voluntary work with womens groups, children, youth and community organisations in N. Ireland. She has three grown up children and currently lives on the North Coast. She is now a follower of the Bahá'í Faith and is involved in community development and organic gardening projects.

Edward Horgan



Edward Horgan protesting in the snow at Shannon airport

I am a former soldier who in recent times has become known as a peace activist. Many people have questioned how I made such an apparent U-turn. The reality is that I have done no U-turn. I joined the Irish army to help promote international peace as a United Nations peacekeeper, and to support the rule of law and democracy in Ireland. In those respects I have always been a peace activist. In terms of being a pacifist or peace activist, I place myself firmly in the activist side, but I believe that I am following the activist principles of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, by whom I am inspired. I have always found it difficult to stand idly by in the face of injustices and human rights abuses.

My military service included several tours of duty as a United Nations peacekeeper in the Middle East, and it was in this context that I came to appreciate the importance of the role of Ireland as a small neutral state in achieving success on the international stage way out of proportion to its size and population because of its recognised neutral, independent and genuinely altruistic status. However it was the suffering and trauma I witnessed, caused by wars, that persuaded me that justice, human rights and democracy can only be developed and advanced by peaceful means. Making peace by making war is an oxymoron, and peace without justice is just a temporary ceasefire.

My work as a civilian peace activist began as a United Nations Volunteer (UNV) in Bosnia in 1996, helping to organise the post-Dayton peace agreement elections in the devastated towns of central Bosnia. In the meantime I have been involved in election monitoring missions in Croatia, Nigeria, Indonesia, East Timor, Zimbabwe, Armenia, Ghana, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Tunisia and DR Congo. While one individual's volunteer input into such elections may seem small, such contributions, inch by inch, peace in small pieces, help to create lasting peace. In contrast, enforced peace agreements are often counterproductive. Democracy must be developed from within a community, not enforced upon it. Bosnia and Kosovo are just two examples of flawed enforced peace settlements.

At local Irish level, I became very involved in nonviolent peace activism when I became aware in 2001 that US troops had been invited by the Irish Government to transit through Shannon airport on their way to the illegal wars and occupations of Afghanistan, and subsequently Iraq. What was happening locally at Shannon airport was having a devastating international and local impact as the bullets and bombs were being used against the towns and villages of Afghanistan and Iraq. This was in clear breach of international laws of neutrality – but far more seriously these wars have led to the unjustified deaths of over one million people, up to 250,000 of whom were children. In the face of such injustices it is easy to get so angry that one would be tempted to use violence to prevent such injustices. However, violence begets violence – “an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, leaves the whole world blind and toothless”. I have seen far too many overfilled graveyards and met far too many traumatised survivors of wars. Peace can never be created by filling up more graveyards.

While in the process of monitoring the US military warplanes and chartered troop-carrying aircraft through Shannon, we became aware of suspicious executive jets also being refuelled at Shannon. It subsequently transpired that some of these were being used in the so-called “extraordinary rendition” programme under

which the US government was capturing or kidnapping prisoners and transporting them to special prisons, including Guantanamo and Abu Graib, where many of these prisoners were tortured, and many died under torture. As I write this international news media are reporting that as Guantanamo prison in Cuba is being phased out, it is to be replaced by Bagram airbase prison in Afghanistan.

During this time I also worked for a period as manager of a torture care centre in Dublin where survivors of torture received psychological and medical care, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the damage done to individuals by torture. The Obama administration in the US is placing severe restrictions on the use of torture as a matter of government policy, because of the adverse publicity that such abuse of prisoners was causing. But this policy of torture is being replaced in many cases by a policy of targeted assassinations and extra-judicial murders of suspected enemies, the use of special forces, CIA agents, American and foreign mercenaries or “contractors”, and unmanned drone attack aircraft are all being used, and many of these are passing through Shannon and other European airports on their way to their murderous assignments.

When faced with such gross human rights abuses, it is essential to control our anger, and to use rational reliance on the rule of law to counter such abuses and to achieve accountability by those responsible, and some measure of justice for the victims. Wherever the law is inadequate, especially international law, we must work tirelessly to improve and enforce the law. Whistle-blowing and exposing unpleasant truths are seldom pleasant tasks and can be expensive in terms of time and other personal resources.

In addition to the uncounted hours I have spent at Shannon airport over the past nine years, I have been arrested or detained on five occasions and charged before the courts (and acquitted) on three occasions so far. I have also made detailed submissions to the European Parliament TDIP committee (Committee into alleged transportation and illegal detention of prisoners in European countries by the CIA) investigating the Extraordinary Rendition programme, and to the Irish parliament Joint Oireachtas Committee

on Foreign Affairs, and the Irish Human Rights Commission. I have also taken a High Court Constitutional challenge against the Irish Government on the U.S. military use of Shannon airport. While the court surprisingly ruled against me on the constitutional issues, it did rule in my favour on the issue of international law, that Ireland is in breach of international laws on neutrality by permitting US troops on their way to war to transit through Irish sovereign territory.

This is my kind of nonviolent peace activism, and it makes me weary just recalling and recording some of these activities. However, I know it must go on into the future, by me and by others. The positive efforts of just one person cannot overcome the negative and destructive efforts of governments and of a multitude of perpetrators of crimes against humanity. We must put together coalitions of nonviolent peace activists at local, national and international levels – we must and we shall overcome. ●

Limerick, 2012

Edward Horgan, BA History and Politics; MPhil Peace Studies; PhD International Peace and UN Reform, is a former Commandant in the Irish Defence Forces and UN peacekeeper.



Edward Horgan, former army Commandant, returns his military medals and insignia, and his military Commission at Government Buildings, Dublin, in protest at the Irish Government's complicity in the Afghan and Iraq wars. September 2003.

Iain Attack



My understanding of nonviolence involves a mixture of different beliefs and values, such as pacifism, a commitment to social justice, and a respect for the dignity and integrity of every human being, even though it not always easy to reconcile the practical or political requirements of these beliefs. I would say that nonviolence provides a core value for me, according to which I try to guide the various disparate elements of my life, from the personal to the social to the political. For me, nonviolence involves not merely the idea of not doing harm to other living beings, but also of actively trying to do good. Sometimes it seems like nonviolence is a magnet, attracting ideas, principles, questions, action, analysis from lots of different areas and spaces, and holding them together to a greater or lesser degree.

I grew up in Canada during the 1960s, so some of my formative public memories are of the big political events that occurred in our neighbour to the south during that decade. I would have been aware of Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement in the U.S., and the shock that followed his assassination in 1968, and also the turmoil surrounding the anti-Vietnam War protests. My parents followed all of these events very closely, and there was no shortage of questions and discussion in our household, and

also the music of socially-concerned (or “protest”) singers such as Pete Seeger and Joan Baez. Thus, becoming involved in movements for social change seemed a natural aspiration by the time I was a teenager in the 1970s, and a concern for peace and nonviolence a recurring and central theme.

My direct involvement with peace issues began when I was a student at Trinity College Dublin in the early 1980s, through Irish CND.

Since then I have worked with lots of different peace groups in Canada, Sri Lanka and Ireland, including the Quakers, Peace Brigades International (PBI) and Afri (Action from Ireland). Working with the Quakers and PBI especially helped me pull together the different strands of my belief system, such as pacifism, nonviolence, social justice and international solidarity. I completed the M.Phil. in International Peace Studies at the Irish School of Ecumenics in the early 1990s, and I am now the coordinator of the Peace Studies programme there. This gives me a constant opportunity to study, discuss, debate and teach these issues.

Gandhi of course is a seminal figure for my understanding of nonviolence, as he is for so many others. This is for lots of different reasons. I have always admired his open-ended quest for the truth, which forms the basis of his commitment to nonviolence, and his unwillingness to harm others because of a dogmatic commitment to a particular ideology or social and political objective. Gandhi is also important because he combined the pacific principles behind nonviolence with a very practical concern with effective methods of achieving social and political change, especially satyagraha or mass nonviolent civil disobedience.

We have seen Gandhian methods employed

(both successfully and unsuccessfully) in a wide variety of situations over the last century, from South Africa to India to Burma to Eastern Europe and some of the former Soviet republics. Some have even claimed that the theory and practice of nonviolent action or civil resistance is the most significant political legacy of the twentieth century, out of all the different ideologies and social movements that emerged during this time.

In addition to wealth of examples of the use of nonviolence internationally, there have also been many efforts to both document it and to explain its distinctiveness and dynamics. These include Richard Gregg's *The Power of Nonviolence*, influenced initially by his experience with Gandhi in India and subsequently by the civil rights movement in the U.S., as well as Gene Sharp's three-volume *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. More recent scholars with important and interesting books on nonviolent political action and civil resistance include Michael Randle, Stephen Zunes and Kurt Schock, as well as many others. All of these writers have influenced my own attempts to understand both the limits and possibilities of nonviolence as a mechanism for political change.

Gene Sharp and his colleagues have been especially eager to emphasise the strategic dimension of nonviolence, in addition to the litany of particular tactics that can all be described as nonviolent or peaceful in some way or other. Sharp famously provided an initial list of 198 different nonviolent methods in one of his volumes. There is a danger that an exclusive focus on the pragmatic dimension of nonviolence can reduce it to a collection of discrete and isolated techniques, judged only by their effectiveness in achieving immediate goals, and that the broader vision of social justice associated with nonviolence can get lost or overlooked. A concern with strategy can help ameliorate this, and help us link our choice of specific nonviolent methods to a wider perspective on achieving larger political objectives, such as removing an undemocratic or authoritarian regime from power, or achieving deeper and more permanent changes to political institutions.

Thus, recent examples of nonviolent political action have often been concerned with practical outcomes, from immediate campaigns aimed at altering a specific government policy for instance, to more sustained efforts to achieve bigger political changes, such as nonviolent "regime change". Much writing about nonviolence has been documentary or historical, focused on collecting or collating case studies. All of this is important, and contributes greatly to our understanding of nonviolence and to moving it closer to the centre of political discussion and action.

My own interest in nonviolence also includes a concern with its underlying philosophy, including the values and principles that underpin a commitment to nonviolence. This involves a wide range of themes from ethics, political theory, theology, religious studies, social theory and so on, because nonviolence understood holistically is relevant to the whole range of human experience, from the personal to the political, from private belief systems to very public forms of widespread popular action.

Gandhi of course remains an inspirational figure because of his efforts to apply the principles he associated with nonviolence to the many aspects of human existence, from the highly personal (in the form of diet for example) to community living to vast movements of political change and international solidarity, all in the name of his "experiments with truth". I may not agree with everything he said or did, and there are many aspects of his life and thought with which I am unfamiliar, but for me Gandhi remains the single most important figure influencing my ever evolving and always incomplete attempts to incorporate nonviolence into my life. ●

Dublin, 2012

Iain Atack is the coordinator of the M.Phil. in International Peace Studies at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin. He is the author of The Ethics of Peace and War (Edinburgh University Press, 2005), and is currently writing a book on Nonviolence in Political Theory.

Julitta Clancy



My kind of nonviolence is about (i) dialogue towards understanding, (ii) sharing and understanding our heritage, and (iii) empowerment, as experienced and worked out through two voluntary groups with whom I have been closely involved since 1993.

(i) Dialogue: From the very beginning, dialogue has been a core element of our active nonviolence, coming about naturally and spontaneously rather than through any worked-out theory or academic study. It is about ordinary people responding to a situation, creating a safe space where listening could take place, where stories could be shared and difficult things could be said and heard. This form of nonviolence is about building understanding and respect, acknowledging each others' experiences, strengthening each other, raising awareness, filling in the gaps, helping to remove misconceptions, to challenge injustices, to work towards healing.

(ii) Heritage: In the context of the historic legacy of division, conflict and alienation, our kind of nonviolence also includes sharing in and appreciating each other's heritage, and improving our understanding of the varied and diverse heritage of this island.

(iii) Empowerment: And finally it involves empowering of ourselves and others - and especially empowering our young people, helping their understanding, facilitating and enabling them to find the tools to address their own particular challenges.

Background: It was not always so. For many years, "active nonviolence" (in relation to the conflict on this island) was for me a case of attending peace services and taking part in marches and rallies. Sometimes it involved discussion with others, sometimes it took the form of heated exchanges with people who justified political violence, invariably ending with the usual rebuffs: "*You don't understand anything, you don't live there, you know nothing*"; "*What about Collins and Pearse? - Your state was founded on violence!*"; "*Violence is the only thing the Brits understand - and violence works!*"

Passivity and powerlessness: For the most part, my nonviolence was of the passive variety, manifesting itself in despair, anger and frustration. Like so many others in the South [Republic of Ireland] - depending for our information almost exclusively on the media and rarely ever crossing the border - my family and I watched the images from each latest atrocity almost daily on TV. We heard the stories of injustice and miscarriages of justice, the failed political initiatives. Alongside the agony and the pain, the fear and the anger, we caught other glimpses - words of generosity, appeals for no retaliation, courageous people speaking out for peace and justice, ordinary people reaching out. But we felt powerless to do anything: "*The whole thing is too intractable; it's gone on so long; it's too complex.*" "*They'll never change up there.*" "*What can we do?*"

Meath Peace Group: It wasn't until early 1993 that a confluence of events brought some people together in Meath who wanted to do something and found there was something they could do. It was a time of renewed violence, and rallies were being organised all over the South. Northern voices on our radio told us of their pain and hurt, and appealed to us not to forget about the children and young people who had been murdered in their communities. An intense debate took place over the airwaves - for the first time in my memory ordinary people from the North were talking directly to us, and we listened.

After a peace rally in Slane a group was formed. We found people in our own parishes and in

other parts of the county [of Meath] who gave support, and we found some others who were critical or who felt we were wasting our time. A young man from Derry walked out of one meeting, saying that we were nothing but a crowd of “do-gooders who knew nothing and could do nothing.” His words were not lost on us. We knew that we had a job of work before us. We needed to educate ourselves, and somehow or other we needed to find ways to meet with people from both communities in Northern Ireland, to listen to their stories and their experiences, and in the process to examine also our own beliefs and to help to remove some of their misconceptions and fears about us. The politicians had their job to do, but ordinary people also had a vital role to play in building understanding, respect and, hopefully, trust. In the context of the time it was an opportunity that we could not squander.

Early learning (1993-94): We contacted anyone we thought could help us with information, contacts, ideas. We visited groups in Northern Ireland. Within a month of our formation we took part in a cross-community meeting in Lurgan which ended in heavy discussions (mainly with nationalists) lasting all night. We heard their hurt and their feelings that the South had forgotten them. We met with victims' groups, and with republicans and loyalists – all before the ceasefires. In mid-August 1994, we joined in a Scottish TV discussion in Glasgow with a group of 100 women from across NI where a range of diverse views were expressed. The conversations – and arguments - continued in the evening and on the buses back. We organised books of condolences and peace services, attended meetings wherever we could, and wrote letters to the papers. We read the Opsahl Commission report and other documents of the time and we were amazed to see the diversity of opinion and the amount of work that was being done by groups and individuals in NI – efforts largely unreported in our media.

Public talks (1993-2010): We decided to invite some of the people we had met and/or read about down to talk and - because we wanted to involve as many people as possible - we decided early on that these meetings should be in public (despite receiving threats). The Columbans at Dalgan Park offered us a room and this became the venue

for most of our discussions. We were heartened by the people who came to listen – mainly local people at first (some with Northern roots), and then, as word spread and contacts developed, also people from different parts of NI, each bringing their own stories, engaging with local people over a cup of tea – many of them crossing the border for the first time. We were encouraged also by the speakers who came – from across the political and religious divide, victims' groups, church people, community groups, human rights activists, peace groups, politicians, government ministers, ex-prisoners, lawyers, historians, teachers, researchers, and groups such as the Orange Order. Very few refused our invitation to speak and some stayed on and visited local schools.

Issues and themes: One discussion led to another. Many of the themes reflected issues current at the time (victims, parading disputes, prisoner releases, constitutional issues, Articles 2 and 3, political negotiations, a Bill of Rights, power-sharing, de-commissioning, truth commissions etc.) while others looked at historical aspects. No area of controversy was avoided and the question and answer sessions proved particularly valuable. From early on we recorded and transcribed the talks and distributed the reports (copies on our website: www.meathpeacegroup.org). The local newspapers carried summaries and the local radio, LMFM (which spanned the border) broadcast interviews which allowed a wider group of people to take part. The national media rarely took notice which was, as it turned out, fortunate for us! Since September 1993 we have held over 80 public talks and seminars (attendances ranging from 50 to 150). Difficult issues have been aired and challenging questions have been put. And through it all a dynamic developed that led to new insights, new friends and contacts and a range of other initiatives, including being invited to monitor disputed parades in Fermanagh, making submissions to various bodies, and running programmes and workshops in secondary schools in Meath (*see below*). A welcome grant from the Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund has helped pay expenses since 1998.

Guild of Uriel: In early 1995, a number of us attended the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin and there met **Roy Garland**, one of two members of the Ulster Unionist Party to make a submission to that body. Roy was involved in setting up a heritage study group in

County Louth along with local historians and community workers with whom he and his wife Marion had been involved over several years. The Guild of Uriel was launched at a public meeting in October 1995 in Castlebellingham and was quickly transformed into a group where dialogue towards understanding could be uniquely developed – honest and frank dialogue with people from a mixture of backgrounds and traditions, people who challenged us, people who moved us deeply, telling their stories and being listened to with respect. The meetings were held at various venues in Co. Louth (Castlebellingham, Louth village, Drogheda, Dundalk, Omeath) and occasionally in places north of the border such as Newry and Belfast.

From early on a safe space was provided where people could engage at a human level, where hurt and pain could be acknowledged, where tough questions could be raised and discussed, and where trust and friendship could be fostered. As the group developed - and with the aid of a grant from the Department of Foreign Affairs - we were able to offer a meal with each meeting. This helped to break the ice and allow for more individual conversation. An added dimension was found in the joint chairmanship (northern and southern Chairs elected annually) and the managing committee of the Guild which consisted of people from North and South and from across the traditional divide. Our regular review meetings allowed us to reflect on our experiences and enabled a deeper understanding and genuine friendship to develop while also strengthening us in our work.

Heritage: one of the most enjoyable aspects of the Guild and the Meath Peace Group was the shared study of our varied heritage. The Guild derived its name from the ancient Gaelic territory of Oriel, or 'English Uriel' which was centred in County Louth and included parts of Meath, Monaghan, Cavan, Fermanagh and Down. Visits of mixed groups to historic centres and sites in these counties were followed with return invitations to other places across the border. Together we visited sites such as the Battle of the Boyne in Oldbridge, the Somme centre, the prehistoric tombs at Knowth and Newgrange, the Hill of Tara, the Francis Ledwidge cottage in Slane, Kilmainham Gaol, Dan Win-

ter's Cottage, Mullaghboy Orange Lodge, Kilmore Cathedral, the Cavan Museum exhibition of banners and emblems, Collins Barracks Museum, the War Memorial gardens in Islandbridge, the tower houses of Louth and Down, historic places in Fermanagh and Tyrone, and many many more. And in the evenings following these visits we would sit down together to a meal and a meeting where we could discuss, share and reflect on what we had seen and learned, very often joined by members of local historical societies from both sides of the border, each adding new perspectives and new opportunities for enriching our understanding.

Youth empowerment: From the early days in the Meath Peace Group we visited secondary schools in Meath and brought guest speakers to talk to students. Students who at first may not have been so interested soon became very involved. We discovered that the vast majority had never been north of the border. From 1995 we developed our youth work into a six-week programme for Transition Years (15- 17 year-olds) involving discussions, workshops, guest speakers, written assignments, and study visits. The latter have included visits to Belfast interface communities, victims' support groups, Stormont, Belfast City Hall, the Maze Prison, Mountjoy Prison, Kilmainham Gaol, Collins Barracks Museum, the Ulster Museum, Linenhall Library, Brú na Bóinne (Newgrange and Knowth) and the Battle of the Boyne Centre.

In February 1996 – following the Canary Wharf bomb and the breakdown of the IRA ceasefire – our first group of students took action. They had been visited by several speakers from Belfast communities over the previous few months and this experience had made it all more real for them when the bomb struck. They were determined that peace should be given a chance and that another generation of young people in NI would not have to go through another cycle of violence. They organised prayers and books of condolences, wrote letters to the papers and to politicians, convinced students in other schools to do the same, and took part in major rallies in towns throughout the county.

Later groups took an active interest in justice and reconciliation issues: some concentrating on contemporary conditions in Irish prisons, others looked at issues concerning victims, others at identity issues and others at international conflicts.

The programme continued until 2011, with various schools taking part at different times. In 2010/2011 we worked with over 350 students in five schools in counties Meath and Kildare. Apart from the guest speakers and study visits, a major element of the programme are the workshops on identity and conflict which involve discussions and exercises aimed at helping the young people to reflect on aspects of their own identity and that of others, to be aware of their own prejudices, to learn about conflict and some of the legacies of the recent conflict and to be

aware of some of the challenges in building and ensuring a lasting peace on the island. ●

Parsonstown, Batterstown, Co. Meath, 2011

Julitta Clancy is a founder member of the Meath Peace Group and has been Joint Chair of the Guild of Uriel since 1995. She is an indexer by profession, specialising in law texts and historical/archaeological books. She and her husband John – who has also played an active part in both groups - have a grown-up family and 2 grandchildren.

Kevin Cassidy

Nonviolence for me is a way of being present in the world. It involves being relational, spiritual and political, and drinks deeply from the wisdom wells of the great faith and non-faith traditions.

My Journey

I was born in Belfast in 1938 a year prior to the commencement of the Second World War. Millions of men, women and children were killed in the blood-bath of the two great world wars. I grew up during, and in the aftermath of the Second World War and remembered vividly listening to the terrible stories and accounts of the violence of these times. A few decades later we were to experience the tragedy of the terrible violence of The Troubles in Northern Ireland. And so, from an early age. I was steeped in a culture and cycle of violence which sadly for many became the 'normal' way of life. Some people adopted a resigned attitude of "That's the way life is. What can I do about it?" Others adopted the attitude of denial, and tried to carry on with their lives as if everything was fine, but with sad consequences of their health and relationships.

There is still much evidence today of violence because we have failed individually and collectively to deal positively with it. This is evidenced in the continuing divisive and



Kevin Cassidy, second from left

violent language and deeds of sectarianism, and anti-social behaviour. The need for peace walls is a clear example of the fear and terror that people still live in our community. These peace walls are symbolic of the mental walls within people of fear, prejudice and an us and them attitude.

What kind of response could I make to all this? I realised that there but for the grace of God go I, and that within the shadow side of me, were those self-same attitudes of fear and anger which could explode in violence.

I turned to the Church for help and support, and welcomed the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). It was because of the terrible violent consequences of the two devastating world wars that led to the Catholic Church's response of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. It was hoped that this Council in highlighting the root

causes of violence would in some way contribute to a more sustainable peaceful and nonviolent world.

And so in 1962 Pope John XXIII opened up the windows of the Catholic Church to reform and renewal when he announced the opening of the historic Vatican 2 Conclave in Rome which was to have such a significant impact not only within the Roman Catholic Church, but also for the world at large. A new impetus for dialogue, renewal and co-operation between the Christian churches and world faiths ensued. It was a turbulent and painful time for myself and many entrenched Catholics as we faced up to the challenge of Vatican 2. But I remember it also as a heady and exciting time of great enthusiasm and hope for the world. I was greatly influenced by Pope John XXIII's encyclicals: *Mater et Magister*, 1961, setting out the Church's teaching on peace and justice and leading up to "a preferential option for the poor"; *Pacem in Terris*, 1963; *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, which paved the way for a Liberation Theology in South America to challenge nonviolently the structural injustice there; Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, a very radical document looking at the unjust relationship between the rich and the poor nations, global social injustice and the root causes of poverty.

Sadly, the Irish Catholic institutional Church failed to take up the challenges. Archbishop McQuaid on his return from the Council told his priests in Dublin that the Irish people did not need the reform and renewal of Vat 2 as they were firm and resolute enough in their faith. There was a fear that Vat 2 might unduly upset the simple faith of the Irish. This, for me, was an example of the structural violence of the Church, when at a whim of a Cardinal the richness of the teaching of Vat 2 was withheld from the ordinary person in the pew.

Active nonviolence

Active nonviolence became for me a very positive and constructive way to deal with the abuse of power, be it in the political, religious or social arenas. I joined Pax Christi in London and took up the cause of peace and justice for the marginalised and down-trodden at home and abroad. I was influenced by Bruce Kent and helped support the work of CND.

On my retirement, I returned to Northern Ireland in 1998, at the time of the Omagh bombing, and a year later, at a Pax Christi Conference in Omagh, was introduced to Mairead Corrigan Maguire's book, *A Vision of Peace*. It evoked so much of my own journey and vision that I joined the Peace People, and have been a member ever since. In recent years I joined INNATE. I realised the need to collaborate and work with other groups. And so began a series of coalitions with the Global Call to Action in response to the Iraq War. This led to the Justice Not Terror coalition where the Peace People and INNATE joined with Pax Christi, Green Action, people from Quaker Cottage and others in active nonviolence demos against US foreign policy in Iraq, and particularly at the growing arms trade and nuclear weapon proliferation at home and abroad. Another coalition, Make Trident History, was formed to take up the challenge of the growing proliferation of nuclear weapons, and this in turn linked up with the international group Footprints for Peace.

These were great opportunities of meeting others and sharing our hopes, and visions for a more nonviolent and peaceful world. The demonstrations at Faslane in Scotland against the UK's intention to upgrade Trident nuclear missiles were wonderful celebratory occasions to experience the creativity, energy and enthusiasm of so many. They also brought out the need for preparatory workshops and education in non-violent tactics.

Relational and Political

Other influences were the success of Gandhi's Ahimsa movement of the 1930s/1940s and later, Martin Luther King's work for civil rights for black Americans in the 1960s. Both movements dealt positively and constructively with power and its abuses.

For me, nonviolence worked.

I was also influenced by The Golden Rule which weaved its way through all the great faith and non-faith traditions of "Do not do to others what you would not do to yourself." Jainism, in particular, also included nonviolence to ALL living beings including non-humans. For me, it opened up a nonviolent relationship with the earth, and helped highlight the inter-connectedness of all living things.

I began to realise that when I am at peace with myself and the world, then I am very powerful. I had falsely assumed that power was out there somewhere, possibly in the hands of those in charge, and that in fact I had depowered myself. And so for me began a process of reclaiming my power.

If I were in any way to begin to work towards a new culture of nonviolence, then I would have to address the whole issue of the abuse of power and how I collude in this by giving over my power to others, be they church or state or whoever. This opened up the realisation that I am a political being and can make a difference in the world. This is very empowering when we realise that each of us can make a difference, not just in big important issues but in ordinary everyday events and relationships.

It is possible to break out of this endemic culture of violence and war and to create a new culture of peace and nonviolence. Hope became synonymous with nonviolence. It gave me the energy and courage to believe that change was possible, and that I could

make a difference in the world.

Spiritual

When I think of nonviolence, the qualities that come to mind are respect and love. One quality that I feel is so important for living nonviolently is gentleness. It is a quality I would like to craft more into my own life, relationships and actions. A young Warrenpoint man, Anthony McCann who is a lecturer in the University of Ulster at Magee Campus in Derry is beginning to develop a very interesting insight into gentleness as a way of being in the world (www.anthonymccann.com).

A worldwide group which embodies this kind of gentleness and non-violence are the Brahma Kumaris (www.bkwsu.org/uk/london). They are based in London and are women-led. ●

Belfast, September 2008

Kevin Cassidy was born in Belfast in 1938. He spent most of his working life in London, first as a civil servant, then as a Roman Catholic priest and finally as a teacher. He retired in 1998 and returned to live in Belfast.

Máire Ní Bheaglaoich

There was no national struggle in West Kerry when I grew up, but there were power/energy struggles and pecking orders and patriarchy. With a pub, a shop and a bit of land, there was work for everyone. The tone was pious and church on Sunday was taken seriously. The discovery of "Womenspirit" magazine many years later came as a surprise and a relief, as if half of me had been missing. I was able to cast off some shackles. The striving to be a good pagan seems compatible with peacemaking.

How an outwardly "respectable" family can harbour such sibling jealousy... that bullies people out of their small jobs and, in the other extreme, causes an arson attack a lack of reflection or accountability - means that the same old mindset with its pretended contempt for honesty, difference, even its indigenous culture, still prevails. One day in

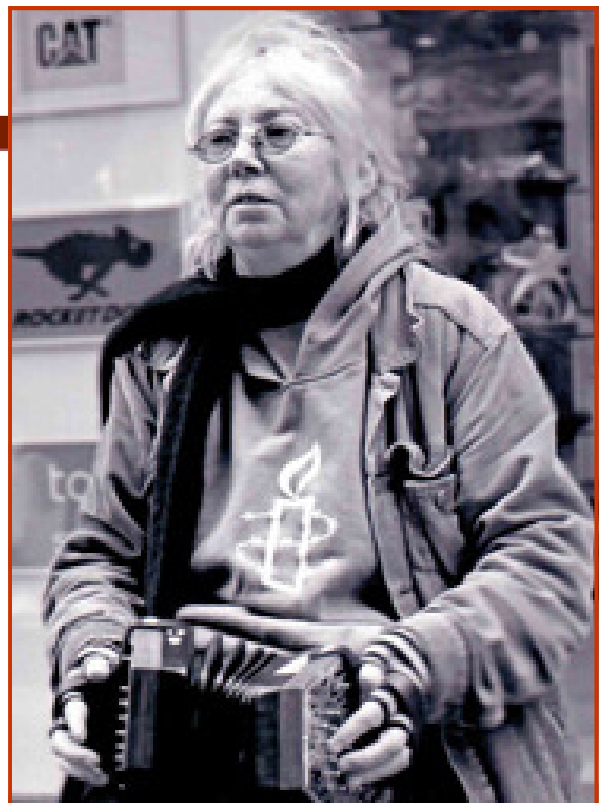


Photo by Esther Moliné

August, my back collapsed, all support gone.

Buannacht is a word for familiarity, ownership...feeling at home in, or with. Baile is home... all these words beginning with 'B', like the first sounds a baby makes. I feel more buannacht in Connolly Books or the Cobblestone than in my physical birth-spot... because of the undermining. Baile na nGall has become more a landscape of the mind and spirit. Developing ways of not feeding into the insulting drama – misdirected energy projected outwards towards others can be a reflection of self (self-hatred).

Girls playing with dolls are engrossed in make-believe, are creating a world of interaction and care for others. Boys on street corners are not always engrossed in play - gelled hair, eyes full of judgements – they watch, stare, and act as if they are entitled to pass rude comments. In our nineteen-and-a-half years in the south-inner city, "drugs" was the catch cry, but young boys' behaviour was what affected us every week. An 11 year-old footballer viciously stoning our windows with approval from his older brother, a furious 6 year-old throwing a bottle of lemonade, picking it up and throwing it again, resulting in a nasty bruise on my knee. I spoke to both sets of parents – with some results. In a country that officially does not discuss "domestic violence" and some males' aggression, there are no guidelines for unacceptable behaviour. We need accountability – on the part of parents and legislators. A gendered society that puts fixed expectations on both sexes will be, essentially, homophobic as well.

Watercolours, singing, meditation, aromatherapy, reading rather than competitive games and nasty video-games, are suggestions to heal the raging ones. In a reversal of the old situation where adults "knew everything", feral children are a sign of a sick society. Feral cats get more care. Imagine people being scared of somebody's children... this is a misuse of power, and we should not tolerate it. Throw gangs of men into the mix – who send women and children out every morning, until late at night, begging, scamming and skimming. Tell us our savings are not safe. People are being sorely tried and tested. We need leadership, not leaders – and it is up to every one of us to provide that leadership. To be a peacemaker does not

mean being passive.

The inner-home-struggle mirrors the wider world. On the local committee, a controller with a big car dominates meetings and undermines locals – "competing for the energy". What small group can withstand such violence? People must learn not to be so deferential.

The 87% male government only uses its own National language 1% of the time. Bi-lingualism is a good thing, but some youths in Gaeltacht areas speaking pidgin... "like, you know" are betraying their mother-tongue, rather than improving their verbal skills. The Ulster-Scots dialect of English was brought in to obstruct the workings of the Irish language bodies. So much for love of a language, which is more than a language, it contains our very independence and spirit. The so-called national broadcaster does only 5% of its programming in Irish. The Gardaí waived the Irish-language rule in order to facilitate a multicultural force, so they say. Mercy Peters in "Metro Éireann" is delighted.

We are going through the whole spectrum of colonised behaviour, and it is not called violence. It is always called something else, like poverty, or drugs, or lack of education – blaming somebody else, not taking responsibility.

So, positive nonviolence starts with me, as the protagonist. Being good to myself puts me in a better position to practise nonviolence. It is essential to work out personal anger through holistic and energy work. Then it does not cut across the righteous anger we feel at the injustices in the world. The European support day for Ireland's "No" to the so-called Lisbon Treaty, as proposed by the European Social Forum, is a good start.

The "funeral" for the neo-liberal militarized Lisbon Treaty to coincide with the Eurocrats' summit on October 15th...being planned by PANA and CAEUC outside Government Buildings...is another creative, nonviolent solution to our present situation.

Dublin, 2009

Addendum 2012: When I wrote the piece I seem to have written about violence not non-violence and is a kind of time-capsule. The violence has not gone away but my perception has changed as a result of reading "*Stepping into the magic*" by Gill Edwards, "*Start where you are*" by

Pema Chodron, and by focusing on the positive and being pro-active rather than passive and negative. Next time around I would write about not socialising children into a stereotypical gender role, and ideas on how to make streets, schools and homes safer by challenging aggressive behaviour and pointing out the contradic-

tions of heterosexuality. For instance, it is assumed that heterosexual males like women—the reverse is often the case . ●

Máire Ní Bheaglaoich, aka Mary, is a non-conformist parent, grandparent and street musician in Dublin.

Mairead Maguire

Life is for each of us full of choices. One of the most significant choices we can make in life is whether to kill or not to kill. Whether to use violence or not use violence. If we choose not to kill another human being, choose not to threaten or use violence under any circumstances, we are then left with the alternative of nonkilling, nonviolence, as a life choice.

I made this choice of non-killing, nonviolence in early 1970 when I was faced with the hard decision of whether to use violence in reacting to the injustice I was experiencing and which was being thrust upon the community by the state during The Troubles. I had always rejected the violence of those engaged in the armed struggle. that is, violent republicanism and violent unionism, but it was experiencing the removal of many of our basic civil liberties by the government and the physical abuse of the community by the state authorities, police and army, which I found very hard to accept. After all, was not the state there to protect the civilian community? Why then were we being persecuted, abused, harassed by these very same authorities? I felt this injustice very deeply as I believe we are all born with an innate sense of justice, and I asked myself: In the midst of such state abuse, do you ever use violence to get justice? Is it every right to use violence? I read the criteria for a just war. After all, has not the Catholic Church and other denominations for centuries blessed war under certain circumstances?

After a great deal of prayer, fasting and reading, I rejected the just war theory and instead began to ask: What would Jesus do? Jesus



said to love your enemy and do not kill. The American theologian, the late Father John L McKenzie said: “You cannot read the gospel and not know that Jesus was totally nonviolent.” Understanding these words, I became a pacifist and committed my life to non-killing and non-violence as a lifestyle and the way to work for justice and peace.

I believe non-violence is love in action. It has a great power to change things, but most of all it has power to change oneself. Nonviolence is both a way of living and a means for change. We start in our own mindset, choosing to disarm our minds of violence, judgement, rivalry, resentment, and all negative thoughts about other people. We put on the mind of love, compassion, kindness, and all the positive emotions that help us towards self realisation. Nonviolence develops compas-

sion and it motivates us to go beyond ourselves, our family, our community, and country to the wider world. Nonviolence is a hard path to follow as it demands we be prepared to die but never to kill and that we be fully committed and prepared to take risks for peace. But it is a joyful way of living in truthfulness and in celebration of being alive, in the moment, in a beautiful world!

We begin through nonviolence to realise the interdependence and interconnectedness of the human family and the entire cosmos. Through prayer, fasting, meditation, silence, a journey into the inner place, we travel to an enlightenment that gives us inner freedom. This inner freedom is one of the greatest gifts we can receive. It allows us to accept ourselves as we are and others as they are, and it moves us to want to be of service to others and work to change the injustices and suffering of our brothers and sisters in this human family. Nonviolence brings joy, peace and purpose into our lives.

Today many people in the world are afraid and anxious as to what the future holds. True, we have many threats and challenges emanating from climate change, poverty and militarisation, just to mention a few. But at the same time, many wonderful things are happening and we must remember to keep a balance in our lives.

Nonviolence can help us overcome fear and develop courage. It also helps us to focus on what is important, such as faith, family, friendships. Building deep friendships gives us rootedness, hope and solidarity. When we know God loves us, we are lovable and others love us. This gives a sense of identity, of belonging. Building non-killing nonviolent communities will help us to survive when hard times and suffering comes into our lives, which after all is part of everyone's journey.

I would like to see political scientists take nonviolence as a serious course of study. If they did so, we could challenge and hopefully change the insistence of world governments that they have a right to threaten or use lethal force as a means of self defence. This long standing building stone of armed force by governments must be removed. Governments have an alternative to armed

force and can build up non-killing, unarmed peacekeepers and provide peace and security for their citizens. There are alternatives to violence and governments and armed insurgency groups can be challenged to use such alternatives.

Governments need to think in a whole new way about human security and take nonviolence seriously as a way towards such security. To abolish war, nuclear weapons, armies and instead build non-killing societies and institutions, may seem like science fiction, but it is actually commonsense. Technology has advanced so much that we could destroy the world several times over and, with military madness, we have lost our sense of morality and now need an ethical framework by which we all live. If we are to survive and transform the culture of violence into a culture of nonviolence, we must as the human family restore the values of love, compassion, and service to each other.

All the great faiths share the ethic and golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do to you. Today we are challenged for our very survival to love one another and build non-killing societies and a nonviolent world. This is why we need each other and why we need nonviolence - perhaps more than at any point of history. ●

Co Down, September 2009

Mairead (Corrigan) Maguire is a Nobel Peace Laureate (1976) , and Honorary President and Co-founder of the Peace People, Northern Ireland. Mairead was responsible for co-founding the Peace People, together with Betty Williams and Ciaran McKeown, in 1976, after her sister Anne's three children were knocked down and killed by an I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army) getaway car when a British soldier killed its driver. Consequently, a number of marches were organised in Northern Ireland demanding an end to the violence in Northern Ireland.

She had previously worked as a private secretary in a major Northern Ireland company and was a volunteer with a Catholic lay organization, where she began her volunteer work with adults, young people, and prisoners. Mairead is a graduate from the Irish School of Ecumenics. She has continued her work with inter-church and inter-faith organisations, and is a member of the International Peace Council., the NI Council for Integrated Education, and a member of the Nobel Women's Initiative.

Miriam Turley



I've been involved in lots of environmental and social justice campaigns, anti war and anti corporation protests and information distribution campaigns. Many of the protests I've been to are high energy, and there can be an amazing feeling of people speaking out together, of common consciousness. Often, though, going home and realising that speaking out isn't enough is a real disappointment.

Often people feel that voting is an empty exercise, and attempt to engage in direct democracy, that is influencing decision makers by writing letters and articles, organising demonstrations, and partaking in direct action, which is actively trying to stop something that you think is wrong.

I took part in a massive demonstration in Belfast city centre on 15th February 2003, when around 14 thousand people spoke out against the impending war in Iraq. These were people who didn't usually demonstrate, people who'd gone out of their way to get out on the street. When I realised that a million people had done the same around the UK and the government wasn't listening and didn't care, I was a bit shocked.

So it made me wonder what we were doing wrong. And I started listening to ideas about how engaging with a bully is giving them legitimacy, and fighting the police is committing yourself to a battle that you have a ridiculously low chance of winning.

In permaculture you're advised that eternally pulling out weeds is a waste of time, because only more weeds will grow in their place. It makes more sense to plant something useful or harmless in the place where the weeds were growing to out-compete them so you can get on with your life.

Also I'm not really suited to massive international campaigns and protests. My presence wasn't going to be much use in mas-

sive protests, especially because I'm quite timid and don't cope well under pressure, but also because my talents don't match with the organisational and strategic skills that are needed. And I like working on small projects that I can see the point of and I can see the outcome of my actions, I always have. I love gardening because you can see whenever your job is finished.

I had also been thinking for a long time about the idea of thinking globally and acting locally, and about building community. Our society is fragmented and so many people are lonely, and I don't like that. I've since realised that a community can be drawn together to face a common threat, for example an unwanted road being built or a hospital being closed down. But I think that in the absence of such threats, why not create community through positive actions, like creating networks and spaces for people to make friends and discuss their ideas?

So I had:
Small is beautiful

Positive action rather than campaigning against something

Creating community

And I'd been getting into gardening and realising that local/urban food production was the way of the future. Food has always been my interest, it being one of the basic needs for life. So my kind of nonviolence is:

Eglantine Community Garden
<http://eglantine-community-garden.blogspot.com/>

The garden began three years ago on a bit of wasteground in the heart of South Belfast. A group of people who met at an environmental activism day decided to create a garden, half vegetable beds and half trees and shrubs. The garden is now stunningly lush and green and a fantastic wildlife habitat, as evidenced by the growing noise from the birds in the morning and the industry of bumble bees. The fact that the ground has not been tarmaced over makes it a valuable sink for rainwater, and with our drains running into the streets Belfast City Council are vocal in the need for more spaces like this.

We have irregular garden days, which are really tea parties. Interested people from Belfast city come to meet up and hang out and eat food in the garden. People who are already confident gardeners plant things, others have a go if they are asked to. People appreciate a free place to meet and socialise, where money is not necessary and there is an atmosphere of sharing and community. There are also a growing number of people using the garden from the surrounding houses. One man uses it to do his Tai Chi in, another uses it to fly his model helicopter. Children who live in neighboring houses play in it nearly every day and bring a really lovely atmosphere to the garden. We have had BBQs and invited neighbours, and have become friendly with quite a few people. There are compost bins which are well used by the

neighbors, and some of the local people keep an eye on the garden and pick up rubbish when it becomes too messy. Lots of the neighbours over the years have commented how much they appreciate the space.

Queen's Organic Veg Club.

The idea behind this one is to be an alternative to boring meetings. I thought perhaps there are lots of people in Queen's with an interest in alternative food systems, but who (like me) find their stomach leaping out of their body and running for the door when they walk into a meeting. And that if these people's paths could cross for a different reason, in a more open and friendly atmosphere, perhaps some valuable connections could be made.

The Queen's Organic Veg Club spent most of last year trying to get established, but we will relaunch this October/November. We have an office right by the university, and people will be able to order and pick up bags of organic vegetables delivered from a local producer/distributor. While they are in the office picking up their veg they can also browse our library, grab a cup of something cheap, hot and organic, check out the notice board and have interesting chats about climate change and how to get rid of slugs. We also plan to have a seed bank, arrange evening lectures on topics of interest and run practical workshops on themes such as "How to plant a seed".●

Belfast, 2008

Originally from Strabane, Miriam Turley moved to South Belfast to attend college and has lived there for well over a decade.

Mark Chapman

I thought I'd take this opportunity to take a meander through my kinds of nonviolence and the ideas around nonviolence that interest me. Some of my experiences such as an international nonviolent interposition project stretch back 20 years. Other actions like street protests and leafletting are a kind of nonviolence that many of us have been involved in so often over the years that perhaps we almost don't see them as a type of nonviolent action.

Gene Sharp's encyclopedic *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* identifies 198 methods of nonviolent action and includes letter writing, singing and rude gestures! So it seems that the context defines whether an action is nonviolent together with the assumption of course that the action itself isn't violent. This issue of what defines an action as being violent then leads to a discussion around whether damage to property

is nonviolent. I would contend that damage to property during an action does not make that action violent, particularly when the property being damaged has the potential for great destruction and indeed is designed for that purpose. The courts in recent times have found this type of nonviolent direct action to be within the law (see Raytheon 9 and Pit-stop Ploughshares actions in Ireland and Waihopai Ploughshares in New Zealand). While this legal outcome may not equate with these actions being seen as nonviolent in a Gandhian interpretation, I believe they are an authentic form of nonviolent direct action.



Mark Chapman at Faslane, 2006

In an anti-war action I was involved in some years ago we faced a charge of criminal damage for climbing onto a fighter jet at a large public event in London and pouring fake blood over it as well as displaying banners. The action was highlighting the fact that British Aerospace exported the Hawk ground-attack jet to Indonesia to be used in occupied East Timor. I was taken aback by the vociferous opposition to our action by onlookers and was almost thankful to be taken into custody! Even though this was essentially a symbolic nonviolent action it was evident that destroying military property was not seen as such by many people and just pouring paint on it was enough to enrage these folk.

Perhaps this is the challenge for nonviolent activists engaged in actions involving the destruction of property – how to make their action be seen as proportionate and indeed necessary in a materialistic world which sometimes seems to value property over people. Perhaps the way to go is to plan the action for a time when it's most likely to succeed (the middle of the night for many Ploughshares actions) and wait around to be arrested. Quite a few folk involved in Ploughshares non-violent actions have related how they had time to make some media calls immediately after disarming some military hardware and indeed called up the base security to inform them of their actions. I'm not sure that I'd be that dedicated to the maxim of "Don't do the crime if you can't do the time!" Perhaps taking responsibility for the action is about defending yourself in court but I'm torn between this and evading the rigours of the law if at all possible.

I find myself asking if it is logical to put myself at the whim of the state in court if I've already taken a conscious decision to carry out some non-violent civil disobedience. It may become a matter of publicity – often the authorities do not wish to prosecute activists because of the wide publicity that the case may generate. Likewise if I evade arrest then it may be more difficult to publicise the action if that is an important element in the planning of the action -- although there is the satisfaction factor in an escape from custody that should not be overlooked – or maybe that is just me! That slam of the cell door as I was locked up for the first time for nonviolent civil disobedience (albeit for only an hour or two) is a sound that I remember well. Of course it's about maintaining an element of control in custody and I remember a tip from somebody who said that he always tried to close the cell door himself or at least helped the officer close it! Arrest and custody provides an opportunity to explain and talk to police officers about nonviolent action and civil disobedience. I have often found them to agree with the cause if not our methods but they, like many others, are caught up in raising a family and paying the bills.

While some arrests following nonviolent direct action are expected and indeed planned for it's the unexpected arrests or those that haven't been planned for in the preparation and training that I have found most difficult. At the final day's blockading of the year-long Faslane 365 campaign against Britain's nuclear-armed submarines near Helensburgh in Scotland, for example, I was attempting to add to the general merri-ment of the large blockade at North Gate by performing some fire-breathing. My previous fire-

breathing experience at a demo near Westminster some years previously in what Sharp might categorise as a “symbolic public act” had not resulted in much attention from the Metropolitan police. Anyway at Faslane I was quickly arrested by Strathclyde's finest and taken away. On reflection, what frustrated me most was that I had acted and risked arrest despite our affinity group agreeing that we would try to avoid arrest that day. I had agreed to be driver for our group from Belfast and others were relying on me. As it turned out I was back with the group sooner than expected because of relaxed custody arrangements. Several of the group then travelled back to Helensburgh with me a few months later to act as witnesses and support me in court. Perhaps for me that is the essence of my kind of nonviolence – being part of a supportive group involved in a large non-violent action and its consequences.

Another memorable kind of nonviolent action for me was being part of an international interposition project between opposing armies at the start of the first Gulf War. This nonviolent action could be described as symbolic as the Iraqi, US, Saudi and UK forces were mostly airborne where the Gulf Peace Camp was established at Judayyidat Ar'ar in the desert of Iraq near the Saudi border. In September 1990 it was becoming apparent from the build-up of US forces in Saudi Arabia and from the rhetoric of some western leaders that an attack on Iraq was likely following its invasion of Kuwait. The genesis of the project came from a group of peace activists meeting in London in the autumn of 1990 with the aim of establishing peace camps in the Middle East area of conflict. The Gulf Peace Team issued a statement, quoted in part here, and appealed for volunteers and donations:

We are an international multi-cultural team working for peace and opposing any form of armed aggression ... by any party in the Gulf. We are going to the area with the aim of setting up one or more international peace camps between the opposing armed forces.

Our object will be to withstand nonviolently any armed aggression by any

party to the present Gulf dispute ...

We as a team do not take sides in this dispute and we distance ourselves from all the parties involved, none of whom we consider blameless ...

Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens) encouraged the team to go to Baghdad to negotiate for an autonomous peace camp base after Saudi Arabia refused permission for a camp in its territory. The camp was established by Christmas and volunteers from western countries and India, Philippines and Lebanon arrived to boost the numbers to nearly one hundred. By the 15 January, the UN deadline for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, numbers at the camp had dropped to over 70 as our safety became uncertain although most of us seemed to feel that we were more at risk from our own government's policies rather than the Iraqis. We witnessed heavy bombers flying towards Baghdad and the sustained bombing of the city and other areas.

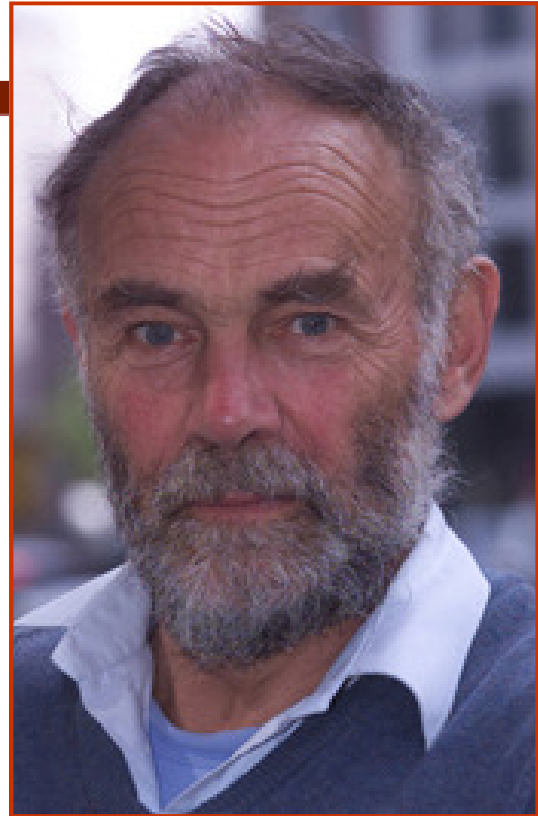
The camp was evacuated by the Iraqis about 10 days later. They explained that we were hampering their use of anti-aircraft fire and several of us refused to leave and found ourselves being carried on to the coaches by other peace campers! Rob Burrowes in his article in *Social Alternatives*, “The Gulf War and the Gulf Peace Team”, concludes that despite the shortcomings of the Gulf Peace Team in terms of ideology, policy and strategy, it successfully established a non-violent interposition in the war zone and inspired grassroots alternatives to resistance to the war.

I believe it was a powerful experience for all those involved and encouraged me to get involved with other international nonviolent projects like Walk for a Peaceful Future in the Middle East and Peace Brigades International in Sri Lanka. ●

Belfast, 2012

Mark lives with Gill, Finn and Pierse. He is working with the Quaker and INNATE networks and enjoys hill walking and flying kites in his spare time.

Peter Emerson



I used to be in the military, in submarines, where I rose (or sank) to the rank of first lieutenant. In theory, then, I was meant to be ready to use force, if orders came to do so, and we trained for everything from suppressing riots in some far flung colony (like Northern Ireland) to countering (sic) an all-out nuclear war.

When I resigned, I went to teach in a school for the poor in Nairobi. Every holidays, we used to take some of the boys to climb mountains, of which East Africa is many times blessed. So it was that a dozen of us went to the Ruwenzoris, the Mountains of the Moon, in Eastern Uganda. This was in 1973, in Idi Amin's Uganda, and when we came out just above Kasese, we were confronted by some of his soldiers. Thus, for the first time, I found myself at the wrong end of a British gun, an Enfield 0.303, Mk IV, SLR. I became a pacifist.

Two years later, I came to settle in NI and, being the child of an Irish Protestant father and English Catholic mother, I was not only unwilling but also unable to take sides. So I soon learned to object to questions which tried to force me to do just that. Are you Protestant or Catholic? they demanded. Neither. Then are you British or Irish? Both.

Part of the problem of violence stems from this habit of asking closed questions, only answerable by yes or no. Are you Serb or Croat? could be heard in Zagreb. Are you Hutu or Tutsi? was asked in Kigali. The whole basis of the Cold War was that other famous question: Are you a communist? Today's so-called war on terror comes from George W Bush's closed question: Are you with me or against me?

Little wonder, then, that as in mediation, part of peace building lies in open questions. In most instances of majority voting, however, which are all closed questions, you can neither compromise nor reconcile. To vote, you have to take sides. So a major priority is to

change the way we all relate to each other: collectively, we must learn to seek not the will of only a majority, but rather that which is most acceptable to everyone.

Initially, I just did obvious things: as a Catholic youth worker, I worked in a Protestant Youth Club – Cairn Lodge on the Crumlin Road – where pacifism was actually a matter of survival. Never hit a child, even (or especially) those who are 16 and much bigger than you. Secondly, if violence does occur, intervene with minimum force. When two boys started fighting, I shouted at them in Swahili. When one day two adults were knocking hell out of each other and a whole crowd was watching, just outside the Whiterock Resource Centre, I went in and separated them. And when two rival gangs confronted each other near the Ardoyne roundabout, I stood in between them.

Having crossed the peaceline here on countless occasions, and having campaigned for NI-CND in an utterly pacifist manner – with either deeds of self-sacrifice like fasting, that or those of good humour, with anti-bomb balloons on Queen Victoria and so on – the next thing to do was to cross the other peaceline: the Iron Cur-

tain. So I started to learn Russian, and then I cycled into the GDR on my way to Moscow.

In Belfast, meanwhile, in 1986, I organised the New Ireland Group's People's Convention, a public meeting in which we managed to bring together both SF (Sinn Féin) and the O/UUP (Ulster Unionist Party) not to mention others from the UPRG [Ulster Political Research Group] and even Ulster Clubs. The fact that we got all these together, over 200 of them, eight years before the IRA ceasefire, was achievement enough. But the second fact, that we found their consensus, was even more remarkable. We did not do this by a majority vote, but rather by a multi-option preference vote: the general consensus was for "Northern Ireland to have devolution and power-sharing with a Belfast-Dublin-London tripartite agreement". It was, if you like, a mini Belfast Agreement, 12 years ahead of its time.

In 1991, we repeated the experiment, and on this occasion there were 10 political parties in the room: SF and the UUP again, but also FF, FG and others, people like Michael D Higgins TD (Labour) and Trevor Sargent TD (of the Greens). We had now computerised the voting system, and we used a (huge – 3m x 2m) data projector to display the debate, the ballot, and then the results. Not bad for those days. The other feature of this meeting was the presence of a native of Sarajevo, and thus we tried, six months before the war in Bosnia, to warn of the dangers of holding a two-option referendum in that divided land: Catholics 20%, Muslims 40% and Orthodox 30%. The violence started on the day of the vote.

I had also tried to warn of the dangers of majority voting in the Caucasus. When the first ethnic clashes took place in what was still the Soviet Union, in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988, the headline in Pravda the next day was: This is our Northern Ireland. So in 1990, I gave a press conference (in Russian, not being a Georgian speaker) in Tbilisi, on the need for a non-majoritarian polity. One year later, the very majoritarian Gamsakhurdia came to power, and within two years, there were wars in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

When violence occurs, I believe the thing to do is to intervene, to get in the way. The

only way you could get into Bosnia, once hostilities had broken out, was either by being a journalist or a member of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR). So I became a war correspondent. *The Irish News* gave me the necessary piece of paper, the UN in Zagreb issued an accreditation, and in the winter of 1992/1993, I cycled twice across Bosnia, from Zagreb via Banja Luka to Belgrade, and from Belgrade via Sarajevo to Split. And the main purpose was to tell people that majoritarianism, the means by which a majority can impose their opinion on a minority, doesn't work.

No one is all right all the time. (Right?) Collectively, we might all be all right, if and when we can come to identify our collective wisdom. But individually, no one should have the arrogance to pretend that he or she can concoct a binary question, and then set this dichotomy in such an Orwellian way as to divide all concerned into those in favour, and those against: 'this' good, 'that' bad. In a word, the majority vote can be, and often is, a cause of war.

Sadly, the world blunders on; we learn little from our mistakes. The 97 per cent vote in favour in the 1972 border poll only made The Troubles worse. But nothing was learned. Twenty years later, and: "All the wars in the former Yugoslavia started with a referendum," (Oslobodjenje, 7.2.1999). In contrast, referendums in the Caucasus were used retrospectively to justify their wars: indeed, one official in Nagorno-Karabakh actually quoted the relevant clause of (a Russian translation of) the Belfast Agreement to explain their referendum, a massive 99% vote in favour. And still nothing is learned. The referendum, or the prospect thereof, was also the catalyst of violence in East Timor, Kashmir, and now in Sudan (Darfur); while majoritarianism in general was a cause of the genocide in Rwanda.

So in my kind of nonviolence, I campaign for preference voting, a means by which, collectively, no one individual can act as if he/she is right and all right; a means by which no one can dominate others. In all our relationships, we have to learn to compromise. ●

Belfast, 2009

Peter Emerson, the director of the de Borda Institute, has worked as an election observer for the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) in Central and Eastern Europe. His latest book is 'Designing an All-Inclusive Democracy', Springer 2007.

Rob Fairmichael

Being the coordinator of a nonviolence network, even in a small country on the edge of Europe, is a challenge to treat people and their views fairly, and to be in touch with different thinking.

Learning to respect others' approaches is a difficult task in life, particularly when you're into politics of any form, and I am, with a very small 'p'. I don't think it's a matter of trying to agree with everyone but of having respect for others within the same broad area – peace and nonviolence – who may differ on approach and beliefs, as well as a different kind of respect for those with opposing beliefs. 'What works for me may work for others' has also to be understood 'What works for them may work for others'; different strokes for different folks.

My own approach to nonviolence comes from a variety of sources – religious, political, pragmatic, human – within me and my beliefs. I embraced nonviolence via a rejection of militarism. This was through my experience of a British Army cadet force in Northern Ireland when I was at school in 1969, aged 16, and specifically a British Army training film on hand-to-hand combat (it was its ludicrous one-sidedness and surrealism that conscientised me). The background to that included both my religious beliefs, Christian, and my developing political beliefs. How anyone can be a Christian supporter of a military approach to issues boggles my belief given the teachings of Jesus and the experience of the early Christian church. Christians don't believe that Jesus lies in a grave – if he did he would surely be spinning in it at what Christians have fought for in his name.

I would like to think that in the four decades since I have tried to practise nonviolence my beliefs have deepened, expanded, and



matured; they have certainly developed but I am aware that I do not have all the answers, and I haven't even come across all the questions. But I have certainly become aware of the range and depth of nonviolence and aware of many or at least some of the possibilities. My work in nonviolence training is about helping others to explore these possibilities. My work with INNATE in general is about helping the sector, and allied sectors, to develop, and become a force for transformation in Ireland and more widely.

My nonviolence is an ethos, a code, a belief, for me part of my religious and political being. Nonviolence is thus an important part of the way I look at life. I practise (= 'try to practise' in all cases here) nonviolence as a part of spirituality and part of my understanding of truth. I practise nonviolence as a pragmatic approach, an approach which works or is more likely to work than violence. I practise nonviolence as a means of conflict transcendence, not in some wishful thinking way but as a concrete way to move beyond the walls of negativity and conflict. I practise nonviolent direct action as a way to challenge and confront the issues which society prefers to ignore or refuses to take seriously. I practise symbolic action, hopefully imaginative and often humorous, as a way to raise public con-

sciousness, and witnessing to what I feel is important.

The Troubles in Northern Ireland were a challenge for anyone believing in nonviolence. At times it seemed that all sides (republicans, loyalists, state and those in alliance with these three) each supported whatever violence they could get away with. It is a salutary lesson that the peace that is enjoyed, imperfect as it is, in Northern Ireland came primarily through movements within those supporting violence rather than directly from the peace movement. The contribution that peace and reconciliation groups and individuals made is significant and perhaps things would have got worse without them, and not have ended when they did, but we certainly didn't 'solve' the problem. And the lessons that could be learned are still largely ignored.

While third party intervention and mediation has made strides in Ireland, North and South, I think the contribution of a more general nonviolent approach, either as a party to conflict or in solidarity and advocacy, has not been tapped. I feel also that we have failed in a post-conflict society if young people leaving school do not have an understanding of conflict, the stages of conflict, possible responses to conflict, and their own reflection on conflicts they have been involved in. The fact that these are not a major element in the school curriculum strikes me as really crazy and fundamentally stupid. We come through a major conflict and just cross our fingers that it will not return again – what sort of response is that!

While I am not particularly influenced by guru figures, I take inspiration from all those who have stood up, or sat down, and been counted in the struggle for democracy, human rights, peace, nonviolence, the environment, socialism and fair treatment for all, through nonviolence and nonviolent action. That doesn't mean that I cannot respect someone who sees violence as their only option, and they may be very brave, but this is not a response that inspires me. I also try to learn from feminist analysis because it seems to me that the male nature of most violence – of all kinds – is an enormous elephant in the room, seldom seen and even more rarely analysed. There can be no

peaceful society without changes in male culture and patriarchy.

I do quote from the likes of Gandhi but at another level I tend to reject the concept of nonviolent gurus because I feel it is counterproductive in developing effective nonviolence; people can feel they are sinners compared to nonviolent saints and thus may feel they cannot emulate the heroic actions of the Mahatma or Martin Luther King. My point, which I would aim to explore as appropriate in nonviolence training, is that we all have possibilities to act nonviolently, even in the most difficult circumstances; the task is to persuade people they have choices, and explore the nonviolent choices that exist, and prepare people for them.

The more I learn about nonviolence, the deeper it becomes. It also means that my kind of nonviolence, while relatively simple in its approach to the world, is not simple in its basis, because that basis is multifaceted. Why do I believe in and practise nonviolence? Just give me an hour or two to explain...●

Belfast, 2011

Rob Fairmichael works unpaid as coordinator of INNATE. He also works as coordinator of an inter-faith forum on social and community issues in Northern Ireland, and in the field of mediation. He is married with four grown up sons. He is a bog wood carver and a jam maker (though in the pot in the picture it's colcannon).

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Roberta Bacic



The long road to living nonviolence

Living under the repressive dictatorship of General Pinochet in Chile – where I was born, grew up and entered my chosen career as a university lecturer – I took part in my first nonviolent protest. This came about when my philosophy professor, Jorge Millas, was dismissed for his opposition to the government policies regimenting university life. Professor Millas was one of the most important influences in my life, his personal philosophy being to “stand up for your beliefs and take your stand from ethics”. Together with some colleagues, we staged a strong nonviolent protest and at first succeeded in winning Professor Millas’s reinstatement. However, the Rector of the university, a high rank military officer, who agreed the reinstatement was himself dismissed along with our respected professor. This inspiring professor and human being later died in poverty. We, protestors, lost our jobs.

With this experience, I learned that the consequences of nonviolent action must be considered by evaluating the situation within the bigger scheme. This can perhaps be stated as “the philosophy of nonviolence is previous to the action”. I also learned that one not only has to think thoroughly about the effects of succeeding or not, but also to be able to evaluate how to face and live with the consequences.

I had long before been exposed to nonviolence as a principle. One of the other most important influences in my life was my father, who taught me that you have to love people for who they are and not for the things they do. He also taught me the beauty of life. He was not willing to kill anybody and was imprisoned for refusing to serve in the army.

Living in Chile at the time was living against the system. Whatever the risk, I knew I had to do something about the violation of human

rights – the killings, the people who vanished and became known as the “disappeared”; the torture in imprisonment; the forced exiles -- just to name the grossest human rights violations.

I was further inspired by the profound statement of Martin Niemöller, a German Lutheran priest who was imprisoned by the Nazis for opposing Hitler.

"THEY CAME FIRST for the communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist.

THEN THEY CAME for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.

THEN THEY CAME for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

THEN THEY CAME for me and by that time no one was left to speak up."

I was also becoming politicised through the teaching of Jose Aldunate, a Jesuit priest who was the founder of the **Movement Against Torture Sebastián Acevedo**. This group was born in an action in front of the National Investigation Centre in Santiago on 14 September 1983 when

around 70 protestors stopped traffic and unfurled a banner reading "Torture done here". They shouted their denunciation and sang a song to liberty, returning once every month until 1990. This public stand was in keeping with the tenet that to be silent is to be an accomplice. Father Aldunate says in his autobiography: "We had an obligation to denounce torture in public. We needed to shake the peoples' consciousness and conscience".

On the 11th July 2012 a trilogy about the movement has been published in the Human Rights web site of Nuremberg. Here the insights from a Human Rights perspective, testimony and theology are presented in depth.

http://menschenrechte.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Huhle_The-dictatorship-is-a-colossus-on-fragile-feet1.pdf

http://menschenrechte.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Bacic_Stitching-together-nonviolence-and-MCTSA.pdf

http://menschenrechte.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Ney_The-Solidarity-of-God.pdf

I started to read and study and struggle with ideas, to get angry and get challenged and get enthusiastic about socialism and nonviolence, which I believe are linked as both have at their core their pursuit of social justice.

After the dictatorship ended, I came to London to work for the War Resisters International. This is an organisation dedicated to nonviolence and my seven years there have been a key part of my life. In the first instance, it was a new stage of life for me, outside of the academic world, away from my country and my family. I had the opportunity to adapt the expertise I was bringing in by developing a project called Dealing with the Past. This title exactly explains the project itself.

Since coming to live in Northern Ireland, I have unexpectedly been launched on a new and supremely satisfying career as a curator of arpillera and quilt exhibitions. I connect the arpilleras created in Chile during the Pinochet violation of all decency with nonviolent protest.

Arpilleras are a traditional handicraft of Chile, where they originated, and then extended to other Latin American countries. They are appliquéd textile wall hangings made from scraps of material and attached to a backing of strong burlap ("arpillera" in Spanish). Once simply an example of home sewing, they became an expression of nonviolent testimony, and resistance to the dictatorship. Women gathered in groups, usually in a safe place such as a church, and sewed together, creating pictures of daily life. Many of these pieces showed nonviolent actions by women. For example, there is one showing women chained to the gates of parliament to protest the disappearance of their loved ones. Another graphically shows four methods of torture used by the regime. In yet another, women carry a banner asking, "Where are the 'disappeared'?" and in another in front of a prison: "Freedom to the political prisoners".

Supporters outside of Chile obtained and sold arpilleras as a way of showing solidarity, making public the women's plight, and giving them much needed income as the sole providers for their families.

Through the interest of quilters in the arpilleras, I in turn became interested in and absorbed by quilting. Soon I added quilts to the exhibitions, particularly as many of the quilts produced by Northern Ireland women also depict messages of the effects of The Troubles in their lives, peace and nonviolence.

Exhibitions have now been held around the world, in museums, art galleries, schools, universities and libraries; by NGOs, embassies, churches and women's organisations, among others. In general, the message is nonviolence, depicted in a creative and traditional way by women who wish for and work for peace in the world.

After almost 30 years, the memories of nonviolent action in the face of great personal risk in Chile still determine my beliefs and way of life. I now take part in the work of INNATE to further my actions for peace. But curating the arpillera and quilt exhibitions is a most important way for me to express my profound dedication to the practice of nonviolence.●

Benone, 2012

●With special thanks to Stefania Gualberti who interviewed me and transcribed the text that was

the start to this piece and to Mitzi Bales who with care, insightfulness and affection produced this last version. Interview by Stefania took place in Belfast in 2010, revised and updated in Benone, August 2012

Roberta Bacic is a Chilean curator of arpilleras & quilts exhibitions living presently in Northern Ireland, researcher at National Corporation of Reparation and Reconciliation 1993 to 1996, Program and Development Officer at WRI (War Resisters International) from 1998 to 2004.

Sean English

The Power of Nonviolence Recognising the Achievements

Sometimes it can seem that in relation to the question of peace and nonviolence that for every step forward we take we actually move two steps backwards. Historically in some specific cases this may be true. That is the nature of the culture of violence. But we should also recognise that enormous achievements have been made in understanding and recognising the power of the culture of nonviolence in creating more peaceful civil societies. These achievements do not come easily or quickly but that is the nature of the struggle against the ideology of violence. The cultural creativity of peaceful civil societies however defined is the only real foundation from which to meet the critical environmental and social challenges that threaten our futures.

I believe that the real contribution of all the various peace movements over the last fifty years or so will be seen as their part in undermining the prevailing ideology of violence. Slowly but surely inch by inch, drip by drip. This undermining of the ideology of violence was not an easy task. Because, as the Great Russian pacifist Leo Tolstoy understood that the undermining of the culture of violence involves a paradigm shift in almost every area of human culture. Tolstoy believed that the 'war system' was one of the main planks of the ideology of violence and that challenging the 'war system' was the most important initial step that needed to be taken. The work of all the individuals and organisations over such a long period of time is eventually bearing fruit.



The peace movements have undermined the very foundations on which the ideology of violence is constructed. What a contribution this has been will only be appreciated by future generations.

Recently the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair was in front of a committee of MP's answering very direct questions about his role in supporting the Iraq war. I would see this as a real vindication of the various peace movements who were so active against this war. They did not stop the war but Tony Blair was in front of that committee mainly because of the pressure that had been built up by the individuals involved over the years in the various organisations. Their success is that no future British prime Minister will go to war without thinking of how they might explain and justify themselves in a court of law. This may seem like a small achievement to all the people who have suffered in this specific war but it is still an achievement that will bear fruit in the future. Tony Blair, George Bush and others must real-

ise that they are lucky that they are not being charged with war crimes for launching a war of aggression.

The best historical example of peace building through nonviolent social change must be the European Union. It would have been inconceivable to people living in Europe after the end of the Second World War that within fifty years Europe would have created a peaceful economic and social community. And that this community would develop what seems to be a post war civil society. Even Robert Schumann and the other founders of the Coal and Steel Union would not have believed that such developments were possible so quickly. We in the various peace movements should not allow these achievements to be dismissed or their importance underestimated. It is little short of miraculous that the traditionally aggressive nations of Europe - France, Germany, England, Austria and Italy etc. - have given up their attempts at regional and world domination. The battle now is to make sure the original view of a peaceful Europe is not pushed aside by those with vested interests in doing so.

The Velvet Revolution of 1989 and many other developments since then have shown again and again the power of nonviolent social movements to create change even in very dangerous situations. There was no guarantee that the social and political pressures building up in Europe in 1989 would not descend into violent conflict. The ferocity of the conflicts associated with the break-up of the former Yugoslavia shows just how potentially dangerous the forces were. The best summary of these achievements could be summed up by the following statement: 'No amount of violence could have achieved in one hundred years the type of social and political change that was achieved in Europe through nonviolent social movements.'

The reason I want to emphasize these examples is that many people in the various peace movements will look at the wars that we have today and the levels of violence in society and may feel that after years of campaigning nothing has really changed. The wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East are seen as just some of the failures of the peace movements to be effective. Or in the

case of Northern Ireland and South Africa that even after a long drawn out political peace settlement has been achieved there is still a lot to be desired. But the rejection of violence and the establishment of a civil society is only the starting point or the foundation of a peaceful culture. Peace is no panacea for the social problems that societies face but the social problems cannot be effectively challenged while the peace issue is still outstanding.

In his Nobel peace prize speech (2009) President Barack Obama recognised the power of nonviolence. It should be seen as an amazingly positive development when a serving American President can say the following. We should not underestimate its significance:

As someone who stands here as a direct consequence of Dr. King's life work,
I am living testimony to the moral force of non-violence.

I know there is nothing weak – nothing passive, nothing naive – in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King.

If you just read that far in the President's speech you might think that some major breakthrough in our cultural understanding of violence and non-violence had taken place.

But President Obama immediately qualifies what he has just said and in fact he invalidates his own analysis by using two of the most traditional examples for justifying and rationalising the foundations of the culture of violence:

A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies,
Negotiations cannot convince Al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms

But even so we should not underestimate the significance of the fact that a serving American President could make such statements about the power of nonviolence even if he feels the need to qualify his own analysis.

My conclusion starts from the position that 'The War Puzzle' has been solved; that is the traditional rationalisations and justifications for war and for the use of violence have been critically undermined during the twentieth century. We now know that the problems of environmental integrity and social justice are not problems that

can be 'solved' through the use of violence. Whether we like it or not we are the children of the enlightenment and we must accept the consequences of critical thinking – and that critical thinking has shown that the Potentiality of Peace is far greater than the Potentiality of Non-peace (Violence).

So we can conclude that in the long human struggle between Peace and Non-peace – Peace has won. That the Culture and Ideology of violence for all its perceived historical importance has proven to be a false ideology and the future will be structured around the Culture and the Philosophy of Peace. It may seem ironic that the fundamental changes in our analysis of the war system have been brought about partly through developments in the science and technology of extermination.

But these developments have shown quite clearly that the arguments against war and violence were correct. And that the individuals and organisations who support peace are creating the new paradigm and are the visionaries of the future.●

Kildare, 2010

Sean English is convenor of the Peace Theories Commission of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA).

He has been involved in various peace movements since the hey-day of Irish CND.

He has taught a peace studies course.

He published 'The Collapse of the War System' (2007) under the name John Jacob English

Serge vanden Berghe

When Rob rang to ask me to contribute to this collection of articles I didn't hesitate. This question – what nonviolence means to me in my own life – has been much on my mind in recent months.

It's been a long time since I abandoned my quasi-professional political activism, and with it its tribal certainties, its labyrinthine strategies, its ready-made targets, its short-lived stars and its mythical heroes.

There followed an era of nappies, sleepless nights and gurgling babies. Affinity groups were replaced by parent meetings, selling badges and antimilitarist literature gave way to winter fairs at the primary school. My sphere of activity shrank considerably; the political animal quietly withdrew to its lair. Every so often, however, the "call of the wild" made itself urgently heard, resulting in a commitment to whatever was the current struggle: nonviolent education, support for asylum-seekers, demos at Shannon airport, among others – all seemingly unconnected and without any strategy.



And, oddly enough, the Irish struggles that closely corresponded to my type of action in the golden age in Belgium, the 1980s (demos, direct action to confront the batons or grab the headlines, public meetings to convert the converted, chanting simplistic slogans, etc.) were the ones that left me with an odd taste in my mouth.

Perhaps all those years spent living the daily life of Joe Soap, with other Joe Soaps, had made me soft?

When I did my national service as a conscientious objector in Belgium in the 1980s, I took part in a lot of nonviolence training at the Namur Peace University, and one of the principles I learned there, and which has never left me, is that in a conflict situation you must always try and communicate with the person hidden behind the uniform of your opponent. Remember that the enemy is not the person wearing the uniform or carrying the weapon, but the weapon itself, and the situation that has put the weapon into the hands of the person you're confronting.

It is that principle that leads me to be extremely wary of collective actions that do not respect this approach. This conviction has grown stronger over the past 16 years, while I've been living with Joe Soap.

I get on very well with young adults. For some of them, I'm like an uncle who's a bit different, to whom you can say anything. I know all the things their parents don't: about abortions and drugs, for example (and I'm beginning to learn from experience that a dialogue on these subjects is very hard to have with your own children). Distance helps: when they come to visit me here in Cork, it's for at least a few days, and we have time to talk on neutral ground.

For Paul, now in his thirties, flying was all he ever wanted to do. When he was 18, the most affordable way to manage it was to join the army. So he did. He thought for the 10 years of his contract he'd have to do exercises over the green plains of Europe and other NATO lands; the only enemy of the Christian West, at that time, was Russia, newly de-Sovietised and moribund... His wish was, after that, to fly on humanitarian missions. Now that, that was his real dream! Paul is a really decent guy. I said to him at the time that no one else could make the decision for him, but that some day, NATO would find an enemy against whom he would have to pull the trigger. He didn't believe it.

I had an excellent discussion with Paul at Christmas a while ago. He had just come back from his first tour in Afghanistan. I didn't ask him, but I could see he must have had to squeeze the trigger. We talked politics, obviously – both national and international. He knows perfectly well I used to be

involved in direct action against NATO bases in Belgium, and that I've demonstrated at Shannon against the transit of US forces through neutral soil. And what made the biggest impression on me was when he told about one of these direct actions by antimilitarist groups against the Belgian military base where he was based, when he was still in training. His description of these "yelling and threatening hordes" of so-called peace activists who treated him like shit were certainly not the result of indoctrination. The situation he found himself in then seems to have been one of the most violent he experienced in his whole life. And that action, beside the news headlines, did certainly not have a positive outcome on the real people involved: the men in uniform. He came to see us in Cork not long ago, with his young family, after his second tour in Afghanistan, disillusioned and a little bitter. He still tries to defend the necessity of his work there, but I felt his conviction crumbling.

Yesterday, through Facebook, Michelle, an old pacifist acquaintance now living in Spain, sent me a video of a talk given by a young American Iraq veteran (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akm3nYN8aG8&feature=player_embedded), who says that the main feeling overwhelming him since he came home from duty is the shame of what he saw and what he did. He ends by saying that the real enemy is not in those far-off lands but at home; that the enemy is the one who had sent him out there, that the enemy is the multinational that treats its employees like shit, that the enemy is greed.

Paul is almost there, and talking to him man to man is having a good effect on him.

Then there's Yves. Son of an alcoholic community policeman, he hasn't always had an easy time of it. He too joined the army, in a non-combatant unit – one of the rare jobs available to him in depressed Wallonie. For many years, his partner was heroin, now pacified into methadone. As a nonviolent peace activist, what message can I give him? What clues can I pass on to him to help him make sense of his life?

Political mass movements challenge systems, not men or women. I belong to these movements because they allow me to believe in my convictions, and because they allow me to believe in the ability of my convictions to change the course of events. For that, these movements are useful.

But the effect of my convictions, of my actions, does not come about through these same movements, which tend rather to neutralise them in a mass generalisation. If you say you belong to such-and-such an organisation, or such-and-such a church, you will immediately be classified by your opponents. Talk to them, person to person, face to face, without a parasitical intermediary, and any suspicion of manipulation will melt away.

Therein lies the ambivalence I feel about any mass political or philosophical action. How can we combine Thoreau and Gandhi ?

In the 21st century we are a long way from the dualism of the 1980s. Can I ask my present opponents to listen to their inner voice for their own salvation, while addressing them though the megaphone of an anonymous mass of people? Or have we become so unsure of ourselves that we need a mass movement to believe in our own convictions?

I direct my voice, as a free individual, towards my children, my neighbour, my colleagues, my friends -- and my opponents -- but in circumstances in which I know it will be heard, with all its nuances. It's up to me, as a free thinking man, to increase the chances of this happening.●

Cork, 2010

Serge Vanden Berghe, a French speaking Belgian, was born in Kortrijk in 1960. Having to perform his national service, he enlisted as a conscientious objector in a support organisation for CO's. There, almost by accident, he got in close contact with the War Resister's International. He worked in this international network at various levels for eight years before moving to Ireland with his partner, also a peace activist. They have two teenage children, and Serge is now a visual artist, a musician and a translator.

Sylvia Thompson

There's an implication, that I live nonviolently, wrapped up in this piece! Of course it's what I aspire to -- but do I really....?

Fourteen years of living in Belfast were graced by many people, events, happenings; a particular thread was that of awakening to personal and communal nonviolence. That was of course grounded by opportunities for learning, reading, praying and some training.

This gradually became more rooted influenced by my ongoing membership of Pax Christi International. Some of those I met were Brother Leo Murray SM, who shared with us his 'Credo of Nonviolence; Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayr; Sister Christina O Neill, actively involved in the area of conflict mediation and Fr Charles McCarthy who inspired me to participate in the '40 Day Fast for the Truth of Christian Nonviolence', and so many more wonderful & inspiring people..... my friends in Pax Christi especially the Belfast branch,



Eirene volunteers, Quaker friends and all in INNATE. A special day I remember was the launch of 'Christian Nonviolence: A Study Pack', produced jointly by the Fellowship of

Reconciliation and the Belfast Branch of Pax Christi.

Then my move to Kerry and quite a different set of circumstances. Nonviolence move with me as it had had now become an integral part of my life and so it has continued and another 14 years have galloped by.

Now the difficult part: to try to crystalise some of my ways of trying to live nonviolently, to whatever extent I manage in my daily life at work, in my neighbourhood, in civic society - 'my kind of nonviolence'. Here are some I find myself using 'benevolent looking' or 'glancing' which is different from plain looking or observing. It is in reality to wish another well. This is the art of attentiveness and fosters respect and reverence for the other, a desire for the true good of the other. Of course that 'other' may be a person or another aspect of creation. Have you tried it? You may find it has surprising results! (*Words of Peace*, Mary Evelyn Jegen, SND on Benevolent Living. published by Pax Christi USA)

It's amazingly useful, if walking down a street, you find yourself about to be forced off the pavement, or if you are on the receiving end of 'road rage' or in other moments of potential or sudden conflict. This is closely linked to the use of language and also reminds me how I have drawn on another Belfast experience, that of being a little involved in a type of consensus politics with Peter Emerson and the use of his "traffic lights" in a public forum to ensure people listen to each other, share the time available and use language that is accurate and builds up rather than alienates.

In fact here in Tralee, four of us who called ourselves 'Four Concerned Citizens', used some aspects of this to have an information forum leading up to the referendum on the Nice Treaty. All present, which included the invited politicians, were given the ground rules regarding length of time and use of language etc, and as chair (sorry no traffic lights) I ensured these were followed! It resulted in a great evening when all present got to actually hear all the different views, ask questions, and feel free to enter the discussion. It created an atmosphere of congeniality and respect rather than confrontation,

leaving people free to vote or not in a more informed way.

A third strand is that balance between assertiveness and endeavouring to see from the other person's viewpoint. When this is working well, which sadly is not always, it moves me past my need to react in defence of my ego to a place of greater freedom. It also frees me to listen, to look for the truth of the situation and not just to defend my own viewpoint. However, I also realize this is my life's journey to freedom and greater personal integrity so I take it step by step and try not to be too harsh on myself when I don't make it!

One other method I use quite a bit is humour, which when used lightly can enable people to enter into a more relaxed space. Maybe it works because it brings about an equality in the relationship(s) and causes people to look outside of themselves a bit more than just looking inwards.

In other words I believe there is another way to live and to bring about change and I enjoy being part of it.

I carry these strategies with me into my various areas of engagement. These are quite diverse, from singing in a parish choir which, like any group of people, has its moments of both tension and harmony to being a local representative for my Community Alert scheme.

Other activities include being a member of the Kerry Diocesan Committee Justice, Peace and Creation Committee, Kerry Stop Sex Trafficking Campaign, and the Tralee Fairtrade Committee. All of these activities bring me into contact with people first of all at membership level and then in outreach, be it at a stall downtown, speaking in a school, taking part in a vigil, knocking on doors, all of which give me ample opportunity to put into practice my personal way of nonviolence - and the good news is that frequently it works!●

Tralee, September 2008

Sylvia, originally from Co Limerick and at home in Kerry, has lived and worked in many places. A longtime member of Pax Christi, she loves to be at the heart of things, up mountains and meditating! She is currently working as a Speech and Language Therapist in a voluntary capacity in Lima, Peru.



Got a story?

This publication carries the story of fifteen individuals in relation to their understanding of nonviolence.

We would welcome more stories—yours—which if possible we can publish in our monthly publication *Nonviolent News* (e-mail and web editions).

We also welcome news in relation to peace, nonviolence, human rights and green issues around the island of Ireland, or likely to be of interest to people around Ireland.

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