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Hunger Strikes helped loyalist find humanity

(Margaret Canning, [Irish News](#))

A former UVF member who shot dead a Catholic in the 1970s has described his bloodlust after carrying out the murder as a 17-year-old.

Alistair Little told Michael Buerk on BBC Radio 4 yesterday that he now regrets the murder of James Griffen (20) in Lurgan, on October 29 1975.

"Simply from the perspective of killing another human being, that was wrong and I regret that, but there were other things that make that more of a complex issue," he said.

Mr Griffen, a stone cutter, was sitting in the living room of his house on Hill Street when Little shot him five times through the window.

"When I was going up to the house I saw a young fella. He was only nine or so but if he had been older I would have shot him too."

Mr Griffen, who was one of 13 children, was found bleeding heavily from his head by his father Emmet and sister. He died in hospital shortly afterwards.

Little, who became a community worker after his release from prison, fled in a car with three others.

"We went to a disco to make sure that we were seen talking to people but I left early because I was busting to get home to hear the news," he said.

"I was pleased when they said someone had died. I went to bed and slept. I just thought, 'good job'."

Little was arrested with three accomplices two weeks later.

He was found guilty of murder and sentenced to be detained at the pleasure of the secretary of state because of his young age.

He was released after 13 years.

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"The choice that I made that day changed everything for ever. There are consequences and costs you have to pay," he said.

Little's parents distanced themselves from his actions: "They were devastated. There was just tears and brokenness. They had to tell me they didn't believe in what I had done but that I would always be their son."

But he said that at the time he was so consumed with hatred towards "Catholics, nationalists and the IRA – I made no distinction" that he had to be restrained from carrying out more sectarian murders.

"I said: 'Let's jump on a bus and shoot all the Catholics on the bus after the Protestants get off.'"

Little told *The Choice* – a series, presented by Michael Buerk, examining free will – that growing up in divided Lurgan had fomented his hatred of Catholics.

"There was the institutionalised sectarianism of living on an estate that was 100% Protestant. People were dying and being killed around me... all of these were factors that helped to shape me but ultimately I have to take personal responsibility."

But he said he rediscovered his "humanity" in the Maze prison during the Hunger Strikes.

"There were three prison officers who were laughing at Bobby Sands's death. I shouted at them and said Bobby Sands had more courage than they would ever have," he said.

He said he then questioned why he was "defending" a republican.

"I thought to myself that it took courage to do what Bobby Sands did," he said.

"That meant I acknowledged his humanity and the humanity of the other side."

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