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- Magazine
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'The INLA tortured Séamus. That's why they don't want his body found'

Every year on the birthday of her missing lover, Cecilia Moore visits the forest in France where he is said to be buried. Here she, and his family, tell Suzanne Breen about their efforts to find out what happened to him

She met the man, whom she later found out was one of the killers, at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. She'd been told he could help. Her instructions were to stand at a certain book rack in the library and he would approach. Her Irish boyfriend had been missing for a month and she was out of her mind with worry.



Looking for answers: Séamus Ruddy's brother Terry and sister Anne who have lived with his disappearance for 23 years

123

The man who appeared was 'S', an INLA figure in Europe. "The meeting lasted 10 minutes," says Cecilia Moore. "I asked dozens of questions. His answers were full of contradictions. He said Séamus's

disappearance had nothing to do with the INLA and, if I kept making crazy accusations, I'd get them all arrested. He was heartless. He didn't give a shit. He saw me as an annoying woman he wanted rid off. I was pleading for information. He said Séamus was back in Ireland. I said his passport was still in our Paris apartment. 'Maybe he swam home,' he replied."

The Pompidou Centre was an odd meeting point for a republican. It was only later that Cecilia worked out why it had been chosen: "Visitors had to pass through a metal detector. The INLA had feared I might get a gun and shoot S in revenge for Séamus."

What S didn't tell Moore was that her boyfriend was about 100 miles from Paris, lying in a forest near the town of Pont de l'Arche in Normandy. It was a far from peaceful resting place. The first time the grave was so shallow that deer pawed up the body, exposing a limb. So the killers went back, moved Séamus, and buried him again.

Twenty-three years later, Séamus Ruddy's body still hasn't been found. Since 1999, four bodies of the disappeared have been found in Ireland. An end appears in sight in two other cases. DNA tests are underway on remains found last month in the Wicklow mountains. They are understood to be those of Danny McIlhose, a Belfast man killed by the IRA. New information has led to plans for a dig in Co Monaghan for Gerard Evans who was also killed by the Provisionals. But for Cecilia Moore and the Ruddy family, the prospect of finding Séamus's body seems as far off as ever. The INLA has admitted killing him and has given information to the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains.

"But we don't believe the same effort has gone into finding our brother as went into locating the disappeared buried in Ireland," says Séamus's sister, Anne Morgan. "In border areas, they've spent months searching for bodies. The combined total of the three digs for Séamus is less than a week."

Cecilia Moore, now an artist based in Dublin, was dating Séamus for three years before he disappeared. From the Isle of Wight, she was in Ireland training to be a silversmith when she fell in love with the country and Séamus.

"He lived and breathed politics," she says. A schoolteacher from Newry, he was national organiser of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) – the INLA's political wing – and a key figure in the 1981 hunger-strike campaign. Two years earlier, he'd been arrested smuggling weapons across the Greek/Turkish border. He was acquitted of the charges.

In 1983, he left the IRSP, writing a deeply critical resignation letter. "Séamus was an international revolutionary," says his brother Terry. "He'd joined the IRSP because he saw the Provos as right-wing Catholic holy joes. But he didn't like where the IRSP/INLA was heading – it was a far cry from his ideals."

After resigning, Séamus moved with Cecilia to Paris but they socialised with IRSP figures living in the city. They'd have dinner occasionally. Séamus secured a job teaching English at a private college, but politics remained his passion. "He organised the other teachers into a union," says Cecilia. He started an Irish Cultural Association. He held Irish-language and dancing nights. He established a newsletter for Irish people in Paris. He was also active in the campaign to support the British miners' strike.

A close family

Although Séamus lived in France, the Ruddys remained a close family. "I even made him a Christmas pudding and posted it to Paris," says Anne Morgan. She met her brother a fortnight before he disappeared. A teacher in Newry High School, she'd taken her pupils on a coach trip to Paris. "The driver didn't know his way around so Séamus boarded the bus and guided our tour.

"The Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, Notre Dame, we did it all. At night, he laughed at us trying to eat frogs' legs. We spent a wonderful evening in a café on Rue Saint-Denis. I treasure those photographs."

In May 1985, Cecilia was working in Cork so Séamus was alone in Paris. He agreed to meet three members of the INLA – chief-of-staff John O'Reilly, Peter 'Dunter' Stewart, and S – in a bar in Montparnasse. Séamus was nervous about the meeting. He contacted M, one of the IRSP members he was friendly with in Paris. M guaranteed his safety, according to the Ruddys.

In Cork, Cecilia started receiving concerned telephone calls from

friends saying they hadn't seen Séamus in days. She returned to Paris. "A box of letters and two cameras were missing from the apartment – they would have contained evidence of people Séamus had met or communicated with," she says.

Friends told her they'd seen M leaving the apartment. He had a key. She wondered how he'd got it. "I went to see him. He was very guarded. I said I was going to the police. He said he'd get somebody to talk to me. He set up the Pompidou Centre meeting." After that, Cecilia returned to Ireland and, with the Ruddys, kept trying to find the truth. "It was hell," says Terry Ruddy. "We travelled the country asking IRSP figures to meet us. An arrangement would be made, then cancelled. They'd say the Brits were raiding houses or give some excuse."

'They told us we'd be killed'

Then, the French police made contact to say children had found a black bag, weighed down by stones, which had been washed up from the Seine. They believed it contained Séamus's clothes. "John O'Reilly, whom we later found out had shot Séamus, told us that if we travelled to France to inspect the clothes, we'd be killed," says Anne Morgan.

She went to Paris anyway. There was a jacket with two bullet holes in the hood, blood-stained jeans and Doc Marten boots. She knew immediately they were Séamus's. He'd been wearing those very clothes on their evening on Rue Saint-Denis.

The situation deteriorated further for the family. The INLA met them in the home of a west Belfast priest. "We were told if we kept asking questions about Séamus, or talking to the media, we'd be killed," says Anne Morgan. "I was terrified for myself and my children. I'd look under the car for bombs before I drove to school."

Terry Ruddy says: "I was working in Dublin. Whenever a motorbike pulled up beside me in traffic, I'd think somebody was going to shoot me." Only Cecilia wasn't afraid: "I kept on at the IRSP. I must have written them hundreds of letters. I was never frightened. They'd taken away the most important person in my life, what else was there to lose?"

It was 1995 before the INLA admitted killing Séamus. "We all knew Séamus was dead long before then, except my mother," says Anne Morgan. "She put a chair by the front window, where she had a good view of the street, and she sat waiting for him to turn the corner. She waited every day for 10 years. After they admitted killing him, she died within months."

Séamus's murder was linked to an INLA power struggle. John O'Reilly wanted access to all the movement's weapons dumps and arms smuggling routes to strengthen his hand against a rival faction which later became the IPLO. The Ruddys believe their brother's refusal to divulge this information led to his murder.

Of his three killers, only S is alive. O'Reilly was shot dead by the IPLO in 1987; Peter 'Dunter' Stewart died of cancer. S, a west Belfast man, has served time in Portlaoise prison and is now in jail in the North. He once faced a murder charge in the Republic but was acquitted.

The limited searches that have taken place for Séamus's body have been based on S's information. Along with IRSP members, he has made several trips to the forest at Pont de l'Arche, including one earlier this year. The group received diplomatic immunity to prevent their arrest by French police.

Arms dump

S said Séamus had been buried in an INLA arms dump in the forest and then moved to a second arms dump. The IRSP laid markers on trees to pinpoint the location down to 10 square metres. Not only was Séamus's body not found in the ensuing search, there was no forensic evidence to suggest an arms dump was ever there.

The family wonders if S deliberately lied about the location. "We've heard Séamus was tortured before he was killed. S mightn't want the body found in order to hide that," says Anne Morgan. She believes IRSP and comhairle member Willie Gallagher, who has liaised with her over the location of the body, has been genuine in his attempts. He told the Sunday Tribune: "I will neither condemn nor condone Séamus Ruddy's killing, but I view his secret burial as disgusting and I will do as much to find his body as I would if he was a member of my own family." The INLA is carrying out another "internal review" into Séamus's murder and burial.

Sources say it's possible that members of the French revolutionary group, Action Directe, also have knowledge of the burial. Apart from S, a key person with information is M, the IRSP member seen leaving Séamus's flat in the days after he was murdered. M, who is now in his 60s, is living in Dún Laoghaire. When asked if S and M still have associations with the IRSP/INLA, Willie Gallagher refused to comment.

Every year on Séamus's birthday, Cecilia Moore visits the forest outside Pont de L'Arche.

"I found it hard to move on with life. It was difficult meeting new people. 'My boyfriend disappeared' is a conversation stopper. I met plenty of men over the years, but nobody ever replaced Séamus."

December 7, 2008

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