SILENT VOICES

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"For those of us who grew up further south of the border, 'Silent Voices' finally articulates what lay behind the adult whispers, rumours and scare-stories we heard as children about 'the north'. The historical facts of the troubles have been well documented but what has been missing up until now is the story of those people who were not in the headlines but who were still caught up in the conflict. 'Silent Voices' gives the perspective of ordinary people who had to cope with the fact of partition and who were actively or passively involved in the troubles. As a social history the collection paints the reality of life for people on both sides of the border and on both sides of the religious and political divides. It's an insight which gives depth to the bald facts of history as we hear the views, perceptions and prejudices of ordinary people entangled in an extraordinary situation."

Eileen Magnier, RTE

"Reading these stories made an impact on me of the 'difference' and yet the 'sameness' of ordinary people's experience before, during and since the days of the troubles"

Baroness May Blood

"An illuminating and humane compendium of personal stories about the ways that people cope with marginalisation, discrimination and violence. Told with immense heart, these contentious, bleakly comic and the hair-raising testimonials confirm how raw experience revisited in the wisdom of hindsight is often the surest way to truth and reconciliation."

Brian Leyden

"These stories will come as a revelation to people like me who were completely untouched by the Troubles as they grew up in the north west. We knew nothing of the lives of people such as the child who grew up in a safe house, the Sligo woman living in fear of being bombed in Crossmaglen or the anxious Garda on Border duty in an isolated area in the dead of night. This book gives them a voice. Their stories deserve to be heard."

Alison Healy, The Irish Times

Community & Enterprise Department
Sligo County Council
Riverside
Sligo

Tel: +353 71 9111111

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Preface

Silent Voices is a collection of personal stories. The contributors are people who have in some way been affected by Partition or the 'Troubles' in Ireland or by conflict elsewhere in the world. All have a specific Sligo connection although the stories are not all set in Sligo. The stories reflect the people who told them and it is their own voice and words that you read in this book. The stories were told to an interviewer and later edited by that interviewer in collaboration with the storyteller. What you read here is the final distillation from that process.

This collection does not set out to represent a definitive view of any event, person or place. It simply tells you, the reader, how the events recounted impacted on the storyteller. Some things you read may make you feel uncomfortable; some may make you feel sad. Others may cause you to laugh or smile or bring to mind friends lost, wisdom gained, times past. For some readers the events in the stories will be part of history, and maybe for many of us little bits of history will emerge through these pages that are made new by being told from a different perspective.

Storytelling is about individual truth telling. It is not about setting any record straight and does not presume that there is a 'true story'. There are many true stories and for every story here there are dozens more untold stories that make us who we are in Sligo in 2011.

Storytelling is a way to make sense of things that have been outside our understanding, or beyond us. Telling is cathartic, it brings closure to the storyteller and many of the contributors reported strong feelings of relief associated with speaking their own truth to another person whose only job was to listen and record what was being said. It takes courage to tell our stories, especially if they are

hard to hear. As you make your way through this book remember that the contributors are just ordinary people trying to live their lives as best they can.

All contributions are anonymous, except where the substance of the contribution demands otherwise. The experiences recounted touch on universal themes associated with the impacts of conflict. Many names, places and other identifying references have been changed in the stories. Images used have been mainly chosen by the contributors.

Nothing is sanitised or tweaked to make it acceptable to any group or viewpoint and it may well be that you will read something in these pages that will make you think again about something and cause you to look at people and events in a different way. If that is so, the collection has done its work.

“Where will I start?”

Where will I start?

Where will I start? When I came from England to Ireland when the marriage broke up? That's how I ended up going to live in the North. I was here in Sligo for 18 months and my mum and dad was helping me. There was no such thing then as Deserted Wives Allowance, there was nothing, so I was still living with mum and Dad. That was in the 1960's.

Then my father-in-law, God be good to him, he got me a little house in Crossmaglen. You would get money then in the North, same as in England, you could have got about £11 a week.

I knew nothing about Crossmaglen before I went there. All I knew was that my husband was from there. I hadn't the foggiest idea what it was like. It was a beautiful little town, people were so friendly and so nice, even my landlord that we were renting the house off, he was an absolute angel. He used to come and take us to Mass on Sunday, him and his wife and children and if it was raining, he would come and take me and the children to school. And the people at the bottom of the road, when they got to know me, if a car came in the road or anything, they would check out to see who it was. I was lucky, I had beautiful neighbours.

My husband had deserted me so I was left with not a very nice mother-in-law, an awful mother-in-law, and that's when it all started off, that awful life, back then. Even now, years later, it's upsetting to remember that. It's still upsetting, that's what my son said to me, he says, 'Mum you've got talk to someone about it'.

I had the children with me and there was nasty things said to them by some people, they said they didn't have a father and they were bastards. My mother-in-law was very nasty and she blamed me that her son deserted me. I was only 28. I was afraid of her. If she said jump

then I would jump. I did have an awful bad marriage, awful bad; I was beaten a lot of times. There was no support in those days, nobody to talk to about it, no; nobody at all.

But as I said, we had beautiful wonderful neighbours, wonderful neighbours. But it was different for them. They were married like and they had their children, some had older children. Where I was, where I lived, there I was, like just – we'll say a quarter mile in a field and there was nothing near me only just this little house, all on its own. I used to say to the children it was like someone just came and picked up the house and dropped it in the middle of the field. It was very remote, just me with two little children. My eldest had made his communion and his younger brother was only four, very, very young at the time.

I got a little job, a cleaning job with a schoolteacher, a few extra pounds and my own mother-in-law reported me for working. They came out and they were going to take the Deserted Wives money off me, the eleven pounds a week. But the teacher, she was a lovely lady, she said, 'No, all Annie does is come here to pass the time because she's scared out there in that house on her own. She makes a cup of tea and I give her a pack of cigarettes.' She was a lovely lady, that teacher. Then I had nothing.

But it was awful when the bombing started. I remember being in the house one night and all of a sudden – there was a little shop down the road, a couple of times it was targeted, and a bomb went off, and the windows in my own little house, some of them was broken.

Even my Mum and Dad didn't even know how scared I was in Crossmaglen. For months on end, the two children and myself went to bed with our day clothes on us, because if any bangs came or any noise we knew we could get up and run.

I remember going into school in the morning with the children, and I used to be petrified because the soldiers used to be behind, you know, they would be walking behind the ditches sometimes. They were around any time, all the time, night and day, and I used to be literally petrified, literally petrified.

I remember one day, on St Patrick's Day and I had the children all ready for going to Mass, and we had our little shamrocks on. I looked out of the window – there was about 12 or 14 soldiers outside the door. And my children had an old bin with water in it, and of course English children used to love frogs and pets and things, and they had

the frogs in this water tank. The soldiers were there – they were nice, they were very nice. A soldier had chocolate in his pocket and he knew I was scared and he gave the chocolate to one of the boys. The boys didn't understand, they thought it was a game, God love them, sure they thought it was great to see ones coming around, because in them days, years ago, every little boy got a gun for Christmas with the caps and of course they saw the soldiers there with the real guns like, you know, for them, it was a bit of excitement.

But I was petrified, because I knew a girl, well I didn't really know her personally, but I remember a girl that was tarred and feathered in Crossmaglen because she spoke to a soldier; that was all. That went on in those days. She was stripped and there was tar put on her and she was feathered. You see that's what I was scared of that day when the soldiers came round. I thought, oh mother of God, the next thing is I'm going to be tarred and feathered.

The children knew that I was scared, and I was trying to cover up, to keep it from them. lt was a horrible experience. I was scared when the soldiers came into the house, because people knew that they had come in and I thought people would tell; sell you out for nothing, for doing nothing, in them days. I was afraid because of me being in England, and the children having English accents, that they would think the children were English and they'd make assumptions, and think I was cooperating or whatever you call it with the soldiers.

Another part of the Troubles that stays with me is the helicopters. You'd go into town and there was always helicopters, every day, flying around you and you'd think 'Oh my God what's going on now? They would be down low and you would think, 'oh bloody hell, the soldiers are around now, where's the next bomb going to go off?' We were surrounded by the border and if you went shopping you had to go through the border and you were checked and all that.

And then there was a big explosion down at Cullyhanna and I always remember seeing the pieces of the bodies of the soldiers, and they were picking them up and putting them into bags. I can always remember that and now even to this day after all those years, when I hear thunder, I'm absolutely petrified, because I can hear the bomb, not the thunder. Or, if I hear the bang of a balloon going off behind me, or on New Year's Eve with the fireworks, I'm absolutely terrified. I won't go to my sons on New Year's Eve because they have the fireworks going off. Anything like that, it absolutely freezes me.

I still remember that bombing to this day and how I thought at the time 'Jesus that could be one of my children in years to come. Some mother loved them children.' I could just visualise my son maybe going into the Army. They are all human beings; that's the way I looked at it. I can see where the IRA were coming from, there were a lot of them genuine, they would think to themselves, 'right, this is our country, you shouldn't be here', but at the end of the day those Army lads were paid a wage just the same as you or me going out to work, that was their job like, you know, because a lot of them joined to get trades in the Army. Afterwards I knew people when I was in England in later years, lads that were in the army and they said that they joined for to become mechanics.

After that bombing I didn't know where to turn to. I got to a breaking point; let me think when that was; 1972 or '73. Nobody was helping me. I couldn't live on eleven pounds a week, then something else happened.

My youngest, he had kidney problems, he used to wet the bed. The poor little darling he went down with my mother-in-law one night and he wet the bed. She got up and beat me, hit me across the face because the child wet the bed and she threw the mattress out and burned it. That pushed me to breaking point.

I couldn't tell anyone what was going on, not even my mum and dad. My dad and me were very close, I was afraid it would break his heart to think I was in such a state. I kept trying to put on the big show that I was happy and all that, but I wasn't.

I didn't know what to do. I couldn't take it any more because I thought Jesus the soldiers are around, I'm here in the middle of the thing, if anybody comes in or if anything happens, what am I going to do with the children? I think there must be a God up there because that night, my mother-in-law came up to see me. She very seldom used to come up there and I don't know how she seen it or what she saw, I can't remember whether she saw the tablets or what but she got the doctor and an ambulance.

I was put into Saint Columba's. I don't remember anything for the first couple of weeks, I hadn't a clue what happened or how long I was in the hospital or anything. She took the kids but apparently they had an awful time with her.

I got lots of shock treatment. I swear by that treatment. I know it's a horrible treatment because your mind, your brain is completely

shattered, but as far as I was concerned that was what brought me back to life.

I remember too a policeman being blown up at the bottom of our road, and I knew that policeman like from going to school with the children and seeing him in town. We were coming out from town one day and we just came on it, a big crater in the road, with white bags. The soldiers were picking up body parts and putting them in white bags. There was a shop that was targeted, a petrol station and grocery shop. I never found out why because not very long after that I moved out.

After the policeman was blown up my ex-husband wrote to me and told me to come back down here as he had a place for us. I always remember as we were going across the border, from Crossmaglen into Newry, into Dundalk actually, getting the train. The soldier says, 'where are you going?' We had the bags packed and he says, 'I wish to God' he says, 'that it was me that was going away today.' They shouldn't have been in Ireland, there was no way they should have been in Ireland, but at the end of the day, the things that were going on shouldn't have gone on, it was all tit for tat. I was all for a united Ireland but I wasn't for that carry on at all, to this day I wouldn't be for that carry on, the shootings and bombings. I saw too much of it. It stays with you.

I went back to my husband. We moved back to England. It was a big mistake, going back to him again. The same thing all over again, womanising and bringing women home to the house and into my bed and putting me out of the room, it all started again. I had no support. I have the scar there on my leg, where I had 37 stitches in it, he cut me with a knife, and he broke a tooth, and he broke my nose in three places, and I remember well, God be good to her, my sister coming and I was sitting on the settee with an old sheet wrapped around my leg, and she said, 'what happened?' and I said, 'I fell.'

I told her I fell down the stairs, and she got the ambulance. I went to hospital, and I remember the doctor saying to me, 'do something about this', he says, 'the next time it will be your throat', but I stuck it out because I was scared, I had nowhere to go and nobody wanted to know, not even the police. My sister got the Police and they said that there was nothing they could do unless I took him to court. There was nothing they could do. I just had to get up and get on with it. There were no refuges back then, in the early 70's. I had no phone.

It was an awful struggle. You had to keep it all to yourself because you were embarrassed, I was so embarrassed to think that I was such a disappointment to my mum and dad and like, in their eyes I wasn't but I was their oldest child and they didn't want me to go to England in the first place. My sister wrote to Daddy and he came over and brought me home.

Then I got my marriage annulled. It was two years of hell trying to get that done. I got it on the grounds of cruelty. They got all the hospital records to prove it. I would never ever advise anybody to go for annulment. I thought it was the best thing if I ever wanted to get married again. But it wasn't explained to me what it meant really. Years later my sons went to the chapel when one of them wanted to get married and they were told by a priest, that because my marriage was annulled, they didn't exist. I swear to God. I said, 'listen, how can you not exist, I have your certificates, I have your communion and your confirmation certificates'. I didn't know that when you get an annulment, in the laws of the Catholic Church, your marriage is completely wiped out.

I got a job after that and met a lovely man. He had been married before so we couldn't get married in a church. We got married in a registry office in England. Then we went away and got married in the Church of England. It was a beautiful service. We had twenty five years of real happiness. He was very good to me.

I'll always remember what Daddy said to me 'Look, if he is good to you, I'll accept him, as long as he is good to you. You married an Irishman and look what happened to you – as long as he's good to you and looks after you and the children he is always welcome in my house. But Mammy never accepted him because he was a Protestant, up to the day she died she never accepted him. I said to her in the nursing home 'Mammy, what in the name of God did I do to God? ', that's the words I said to her, 'what did I do to God Mammy? Everything I touch goes wrong in my life'. 'I know what happened to you' she said, 'You married an 'oul Protestant'.

The awful thing was my friend Karen was there with me, she drove me because I can't drive. Karen is Church of Ireland, she was with me and she heard what Mammy said, and you can imagine how I felt. Since my husband died, through all these years that woman has never missed a day but she calls to me either before she goes to work or she comes home from work. I remember after my husband died,

I was sitting down talking to my mother. 'Mammy' I said, 'you don't like Protestants, why did you go to the funeral?' 'Oh' she said, 'Oh I wanted to see what the inside of them 'oul churches was like'.

The time Lord Mountbatten was blown up. I was working in the factory in England. I remember hearing it on the radio that morning, or on the television or something like that, that morning before I went to work and I remember saying to my husband 'Vincent, will you pick me up, I'll ring you, and let you know what's happening.' Because I'm not kidding you, I was absolutely petrified going into that factory that morning. That we would be all killed, all the Irish would be killed.

Vincent was sitting on tenterhooks all morning waiting for me to ring him, but I rung him at dinner time and said, 'Vincent, everything is perfect, don't worry.' Not one person in that factory ever said a thing to me about it. There were three Irish that was working there out of a couple of thousand and nobody ever mentioned it. But I felt so bad thinking that it was in my own home town, in Sligo, that it happened. And I felt disgusted. I felt absolutely disgusted to think that, like I was so proud of being Irish on Saint Patrick's Day wearing my shamrock and my badge and this happened. That day, when Mountbatten was killed, it took the pride away. But the people in the factory, they didn't hold it against me.

I came back here to Sligo to look after my dad, and then he died. Then three years later my husband Vincent died. When I came home with Vincent, Daddy said, 'it's a prejudice really, it's like you are judging somebody without knowing them personally' – about Vincent being a Protestant and all.

There's no way I would want to go back to what was going on in the North back then, years ago in the 70s like. I'd like to forget all that now. I'd like to be able to bury that. My husband, God be good to him used to say to me 'don't live in the past, go for the future.' But I can't do that, I want to but I can't. It's the guilt I have for all the years and everything that happened. I do say to my children 'oh if it was only for me, you would have had a better life.' Thank God we got out of it, that there was nothing happened to me or my children.

I know a lot of people lost their lives on both sides but, thanks be to God, if there is a peace in Northern Ireland so that everybody can work side-by-side, both Catholics and Protestants, then something has been achieved. In England, I worked side-by-side with every nationality and religion was never brought into it.

If the fighting has brought peace to Ireland, then thanks be to God, the people that fought for it should be made heroes. If I'm somewhere and a rebel song comes on, I'm up there you know, and even my children, even though they are all born in England, they are all into the rebel songs. Don't get me wrong, I would be all for a united Ireland but not for bombings and shootings, or going back to being so scared of what was going on around you. I don't give into that old shooting and killing and all that at all. I mean does it solve anything?

I think there should be a 32 county Ireland but I don't want my children shooting or killing for it. If I thought for one minute that one of my boys were going out to shoot somebody deliberately it would break my heart, it would really break my heart. I would rather see them living as they lived in the famine than go back to that. If someone came to me now and said, right, you're going to lose your house tomorrow unless you do this, I would say right, sod you, take it, I'll live in the shed. I'll live in the shed.

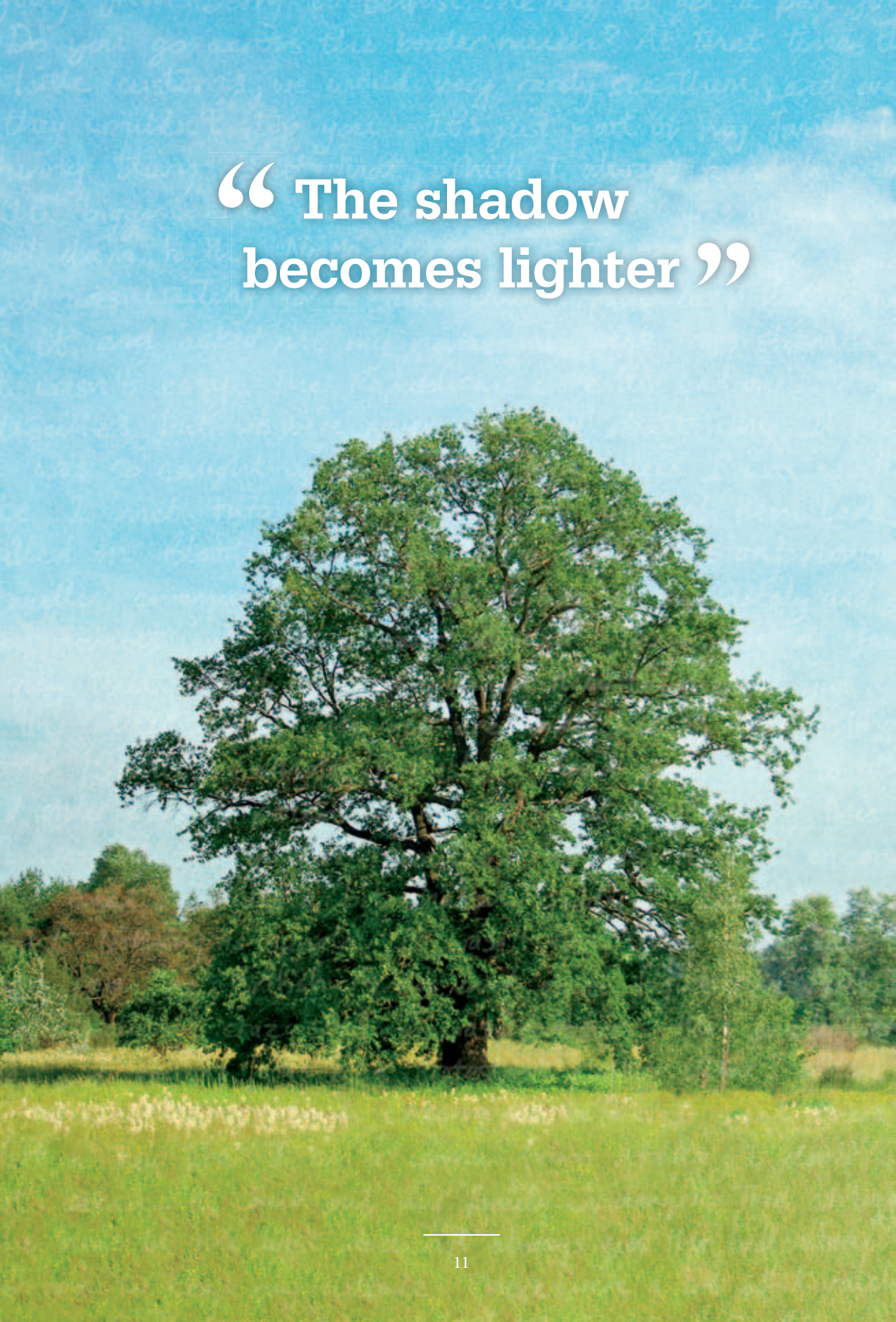
I would love to see a happy Ireland, I would love to see Gerry Adams, and whoever else was involved with it, standing up and saying, 'right, Ireland is united and we are all happy and there's going to be no more of this bombing and shooting.' I would like to see us united in peace. That's what I want for my children. I would never never never like to see my children or my grandchildren going through what I went through, what I saw.

I mean – I know both sides was fighting for what they believed in, but the only good thing I suppose that came out of it was that we got the Peace Process.

We got the Peace Process and all that, like they go to prison but then come out again in a few years, and they are walking the streets, they are free to go and murder again. To me it's like well, life should be life. If you go out and deliberately murder somebody you should get a life sentence. I don't know how I would feel if somebody murdered one of mine – oh Jesus, if somebody murdered one of my children – oh God bless us and save us, I couldn't live there, I couldn't, I would have to move. My heart goes out to people in the North now. There's no way I could live next door to somebody that even hurt one of my children or my grandchildren. I think I can understand the heartache.

As we are now in 2011 we seem to be getting along all right, whereas years ago in Northern Ireland it was bad because a Catholic couldn't get a good job. You were ostracised, you were put to one

side, whereas now they are alright. Catholics can go into the police, they can go into the hospitals, they can be doctors, they can be nurses, they can be teachers, whereas before they couldn't get any jobs like that. They couldn't mix, now they can. So I say, stop the bombing, stop the shooting, stop killing each other, because at the end of the day what is it all for? I live now for my grandchildren, and my children, that's my future, that's my world.


“ The shadow
becomes lighter ”

The shadow becomes lighter

I was an active Republican, an IRA volunteer. That was one of the activities I was charged and convicted with in the special court. I was a member of Fianna Eireann, when I was young guy, maybe for four years. Fianna Eireann is the Irish Republican Scout movement. In the Fianna, I had access to a history that wasn't taught in schools and that taught me about the rich heritage that I had.

I'm the only Republican in my family, a leaflet came around one day and my father says, 'would you like to join the Fianna?' And I just went. I had a rough idea what it was about alright because things were very active up in the six counties at the time. So it was never far from your ear – especially if there were IRA people in the area that you would know about. All the kids would know about them, as a legend, you know in that kind of way – 'What's his name down the road, Jesus, he nearly got caught up in Derry'.

We were only 11 and you know, boys are always looking for heroes – girls as well I would imagine. So yeah; we drilled, we discussed history, which was a great thing because that wasn't the kind of thing you had in the Scouts. Scouts was just about camping and getting badges and learning knots. I'm an expert at knots and history!

I remember the time of the hunger strikes – I was in secondary school. People knew the few of us in school who were in the Fianna, it wasn't that we were people to be reckoned with or anything like that, but we stood apart because of who we were, we were always talking about what was going on in the six counties and things were pretty active in Britain at the time. During the hunger strikes we went into the cloakroom and ripped all the black lining out of the coats, made armbands and sold them to the rest of the lads in the school and then sent the money to An Cumann Cabharach which looked

after prisoners' families. We got into trouble – not for ripping the lining out – but for actually wearing the armbands at school. This was the Christian Brothers who had basically put this Republican thing into our heads from first class! Anyway, it wasn't too long after the hunger strikes that I joined Sinn Féin. We would have had a very active Cumann, a young Cumann. Sinn Féin at the time was a party of agitation.

We sold the Republican News[1] because we were young, vociferous and fundamentalist in our ideals and the ideals of the world. We sold them Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday morning and Sunday night. We carried them with us during the week and gave one to anybody who wanted one; on the bus or standing at the bus stop or outside the fire station or wherever, that's how we spread the word. And we had clinics, mobile clinics in caravans, for people to come and talk – not to us because we were only youngsters, 17, 18 or 19. We were there to be used basically and our politicisation from the Fianna carried through into having very deep and radical political discussions within Sinn Féin, and of course the focal point for that always went towards the Ard Fheis.

Those years were fairly hectic within Sinn Féin because you had the changeover in the early 80s. Then in '86 you had the walkout, split, and what became Republican Sinn Féin who walked out of the Mansion House, singing 'Take it Down from the Mast Irish Traitor'. I'll never forget it because I was up on the roof doing security, looking down at Adams shaking O'Brádaigh's hand. We had a difference of opinion within our Cumann – we had a very large Cumann but we decided that we would go by the vote of the day and none of us would walk out. None of us did even though some people left later, but nobody walked out of the Ard Fheis, because there was no point. The movement was riven with splits down the years and even up to today. The focus was on ensuring that the splits were kept to a minimum or that the impact of splits was kept to a minimum.

I was working as an apprentice electrician. I was deeply affected by what was going on, not just in the six counties, you know, but in the rest of the country. Several times a year I went up to Belfast for commemorations. The community up there is amazing, the strength is amazing. You stay in someone's house, you become part of the family,

[1] An Phoblacht / Republican News is a weekly Republican newspaper.

that's basically the way it is. You go up there – you're like a chicken without a head because you haven't a clue about what's going on. When they came down I'd make sure they knew what was going on. We were going by the Harcourt St. cop station in a bus one day and we had kids in the front seat because they had never been on a double-decker bus. Going past, I said, 'there is the Garda headquarters' – they said, 'oh really, has it been hit many times?' You know, that's the way they looked at it. The barracks up there, it was about a record, you know how many times the barracks was hit. Straightaway, they were going for the assumption that the headquarters had been bombed out.

There was always stuff happening you know – it was the 'shoot to kill' time. Everyday I listened to the news. I switched from station to station from when the news began at 5.30 'til seven and the Channel 4 news – that was my TV.

You join Sinn Féin and you are done by association straightaway. Because as soon as you walked out of your Cumann meeting, the Special Branch are outside, and they are hungry and salivating at the mouth to see new members and they'd be in straightaway. They would search you, abuse you. If you were in the car, it would be like the Flintstones, the seats would be out on the road straightaway. They'd be poking holes in this, that and the other pulling the upholstery out. It was just pure abuse and harassment you know. A tactic which you can understand as well – same as around the world. But it had the opposite effect to what the servants of the state wanted. They want to scare people off, but it had the opposite effect, in my opinion and in my experience.

At work, the Special Branch would be in there straightaway – trying to discredit you to the bosses. You would think that the boss would come and say 'I've been told that you're in the IRA, you murdering bastard, get out of here'. Total opposite. The knock on the door and they're telling us basically, 'take care'. Sinn Féin, they'd have no problem with – it's a political party – that is my thing – out selling papers, putting up posters, electioneering and the whole lot. I would say, 'I'm in here doing your job as well you know. It doesn't affect you in any way'. They would say 'I'm just afraid of them and they give me a bad name – being outside (of the business premises)'.

But you do what your conscience says at the end of the day. You can't do what the Branch says. They once arrested me and held me

for 48 hours. After the first day, they were telling me everything I had on my walls – in detail – because I was quite artistic – about the stuff beside my bed and in my drawer. They were very good at the psychology thing.

I may have been living out in a flat for a bit of time. Or I may have been back at my parents' house. They would raid the house. They probably couldn't tie you down to any particular flat. You might have one flat where you are working, and one flat where you are signing on, but you might not be living there. That was the nature of things at the time because you'd be doing a bit of running about as an active Republican. They did raid the place, raid the house. To be honest with you, they were never impolite to my mother. My family weren't Republican, they would have been more Labour. But they were never impolite to my family, just me.

My parents and I had a few discussions about the Garda attention to the family home. But basically, my frame of mind at the time was there was not much you could do about it. You could either like it or lump it so in the end I moved out. When I moved out – they (my parents) were never raided again. They seemed to accept it – he's not living there – so we won't raid it. To raid a house, any security force knows that you're not going to keep stuff in your own gaff. So they just went in I suppose to see what sort of personality you had.

I was arrested a few times over a number of years. Then I was captured and convicted in a special court with no jury. Some of us got eight years, one got nine, one got 12 because he had been in prison before. You do six years instead of eight. An old volunteer said to me, 'you join the IRA and you're going to get caught, you're going to get imprisoned, or you're going to get killed'. Another Republican said to me once; 'prison is just another operation – part of being an active service volunteer – so you see it as an operation and you remain focused inside'. So when I went to prison I got involved straightaway with the activities of the unit. The unit, at the time, I think it was 80 odd. The state publicity was that IRA volunteers were you know, guys who'd been brainwashed and hadn't a clue what they were doing, but you had to be totally focused and realistic you know, because wherever you were, there were certain outcomes and you accepted that.

When I was arrested I had a shotgun at the back of my head and my face stuck in the dirt, so the first thing I thought was 'I hope I get

out of this alright.' I didn't care where I was going. Some of the cops that were questioning us, we knew them intimately; we'd been lifted by them and stopped by them on a constant basis, so you had that kind of connection. My main thought was – it's not going to get the better of me, that kind of stuff. They'd be trying all the psychology during questioning but they just didn't understand what was going on, that you were just focused on what lay ahead.

We were told, basically, in the special court downstairs in the holding cells – the barrister, the solicitor, said this may go all the way up to life, so we were kind of calculating what we were going to get. I don't mean we were seeing it as some kind of game, far from it, it was a serious enterprise. But, you know, eight years was okay, it was grand. In the six counties, it was a minimum of 25. In Britain, the minimum was 30. Eight years was fine. That doesn't mean that every day went smoothly inside, in a situation like that, you had a cell to yourself, you had a lot of time to yourself, especially if you were a thinker.

To me, being in prison was just part of the job so to speak. But it broke my mother's heart. It broke all their hearts really. They weren't judgmental in any way, shape or form. It wasn't the kind of family we had. We didn't have a very communicative family, but they weren't judgmental, they were supportive. It wasn't about what I did, it was about who I was. I'm their son. They came to visit me, and even though I may not have had a great relationship with one or the other, they still came to visit me, which makes all the difference when you're in prison. Especially in an oppressive regime. Of course it wasn't as oppressive as it was in the 80s. In the 80s, it was an active regime of battery and oppression but in the 90s it had kind of, well, the screw's wives and spouses had broken the whole campaign of brutality. The screws were responsible for bringing the campaign home to their families. So things were better and we were more organised as well in there.

Prison was another stage in the campaign. It was an education for me, to be honest. It wasn't just education but you can never have too much education, in my opinion, especially if it enhances any sense of realisation and broadens your perspective. I was always good at interacting with people, and I was always creative, so I got into the acting classes. We'd do our own shows, would put on several shows a year and then would have the pantomime at Christmas where you

know, the year was spent gathering intelligence on all the lads, any mishaps were noted! The VEC organised the education there, but the Republican unit had always organised their own education in there as well using the expertise of their own men in the prison. It was the same in Maghaberry, in Armagh – the women's prison, in Long Kesh, in the H-blocks – anywhere Republicans were, it was always active – education and regime. Then the VEC came in and said, 'look, we can streamline this and we can give you classes, tutors and something you haven't done before'. It was brilliant you know. The teachers were very proactive in what they had to give – I suppose having a captive audience was a help.

I was released a year early during the first IRA cessation. I'm lucky that I did get out; I would have gotten out a year later anyway so it's very much a bonus that I had that year. I thought it was very funny, I was nominated to be the spokesperson outside the gate, so I gave a spiel. The next day I went to sign on the dole, I think it was the next day. They gave me all this, you know, 'you have to have a letter of release to specify that you had been released from prison'. I said, 'I'll tell you what, you get the newspapers, you ring Nora Owen[2], she will tell you exactly who I am!' There were only seven of us released.

There was a bit of controversy over our release, public wise, but a lot of people saw it as positive in the sense that it was a proactive and constructive act on behalf of the Free State government, the 26 counties government. They were using it to put pressure on the British to make movement in the negotiations. No prisoner had been released by that stage in the six counties and wouldn't for a further two years.

After my release, people did not act in a negative way. Very much the opposite – 'hold on, well done' – any pub I went into. It was a year of celebration. People going out of their way to recognise who you were. I found that quite weird because years before prison you went out of your way not to let people know unless they were meant to know, and you come out of prison and everybody knows. People that I knew were going out of their way to make it known that they knew.

The ceasefire broke down a year later for a short period of time. I was living in Belfast at the time and it broke down for a couple of months. Remember Canary Wharf and then Manchester and all that

[2] Nora Owen was the Minister for Justice who authorised the early release.

kind of thing? I didn't return. I wasn't involved. I went back to Sinn Féin for a short while but I wanted to get back into education, very much so.

It was a conscious choice choosing a political route which necessitated the use of violence. I couldn't just walk away. I joined the IRA. Activities depended on where you operated as an IRA volunteer. It could be very different in, say Dublin, to what you were involved in, in the likes of the six counties or England. But it didn't matter, it was all in context, you are still active – it didn't matter what you were doing. In a collective sense, you know, when I was doing something as simple as getting a house, I am still responsible for anything that happened. If somebody got shot, it is part of the collective. A senior Republican once said a few years ago in answer to a question, 'are you sorry for people that were killed', you know, on TV. He said 'I take responsibility for everybody that died'. If you're a member of the IRA that was something that you had to do, because the shin bone is connected to the knee bone, or whatever; everything is connected. You mightn't pull the trigger, and you mightn't be bombing up the road, but in some way you're connected.

When you're on active service you're on active service and that was it. Whatever you are doing – you're either planning something, sussing something out, meeting people, getting information, hiding information, whatever you're doing, whether it's before, during or after. So you were active. It wasn't like you do it and then bugger off and make a phone call. Don't get me wrong, I downed a few pints and enjoyed my kebab, you know. Having a sense of humour got you through. It was a serious business. The reality of it was you weren't there because you wanted to march up O'Connell Street with your beret and your gloves and get a medal because you fought in the IRA. Nobody knew you were in the IRA unless they were meant to know. It was a secret, you got no acclaim, you got no credit. No pat on the back saying, 'fair play, well done for doing that.' It was pretty tight – it had to be by its nature.

It was different in Belfast, different in the six counties. Walk down the lane, pushing the pram, who's going to pull a kid with another kid in the pram, would you know that the bottom is full of whatever? It wasn't like that down here. But I had the history, I had the education, that's what I would call it, and others would say I was brainwashed. I didn't see that at all. It was a joyful time as well because I had a

connection that others didn't have to the people in the six counties. I visited them, I played in their houses, I played in the streets, in the fields and wherever else. I often hear that, the kids in the six counties they didn't know what was going on in the 26 counties, they thought it was another galaxy away. The same thing with the kids in the 26 counties, they hadn't a clue what was going on because that was what the government down here at the time, and successive governments, wanted to happen. They wanted it pushed away. They didn't want to be involved. It comes out every year with the 30 year rule – when documents are released. The truth comes out every year – but it's 30 years late. And leaks are coming out now from both sides… a little leak here and there dilutes the impact.

I hoped that my contribution would have an effect – positively. I knew what I was doing here and there wasn't going to bring freedom there and then. But the way I looked at things – me being active meant that it was brought forward a little bit – to create a momentum.

My children didn't know I was involved until I made it known. Our ones engineered it so that I would get out for 36 hours to see them, that was in '94 or something like that. I hadn't seen my son in three years. He knew I was in prison, he was told. In my memory he was sitting on a wall, and he said, 'what are you in prison for', and I said, 'I'm not a criminal. I was an active soldier, and I was fighting for the rights of the people. I'm here, you're here, that's all that matters.' We always had a very strong bond and we still do today, he's an adult. But it was very difficult. I'll never forget – we cried like babies when we were leaving. The two of us cried like babies. My brother brought me down to a pub in Portlaoise, and he lined up six Hennessys on the bar. He made me drink them and took me down to the gate. I got so sick in my cell that night.

I do have regrets about missed time with family but I always lived my life in the moment, especially now. I like the quality of the moment, I like to appreciate the time that I have. No, whatever I did, I did because I believed in it at that moment.

In prison there were a lot of Republican lads who hadn't done time so well. They'd never be left alone; they'd always be helped and counselled. So we were always there for people, always. You had a friend inside, a close friend, somebody who would run around with you. The OC and adjutant would come to you and say 'so and so is doing his whack, having a hard time', and you would take him

round the yard for a few laps, have a chat, and you did it because you'd expect somebody to do it for you. A simple thing like going and sitting down with somebody in the workshop, helping them to do a mirror or get them to help you with a mirror …developing that tight comradeship that you had outside, because outside you didn't have time to dwell on what was going on in here in your head, because you were active all the time whereas inside it was the only thing you had. The struggle for some people was to get away from it.

The strength of comradeship stays with me most about that time. The IRA volunteers were our families – the tradition, the history, your connection to the history, and the benefits that came out of it. Not just for the people in the six counties but for the whole country, the 32 counties. Because things have changed radically. You still have people coming up and saying, 'ah you did fuck-all, and people are still being oppressed up there'. But you look up there now, compared with a few years ago, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago, and it's radically changed. And people's perception of it down here has changed as well.

We're not just talking about the North you know, not just about North and South, but about East and West. That whole axis. I mean look at how people are viewing Sinn Féin now. I'm going around the doors now canvassing, and I'm battered with the goodwill.

My focus was always on 2016. It's still there in a sense. I was listening to Adams this morning on RTE radio – 'do you see reunification, do you see it by 2016?', and he was saying – 'well, we are in the Dáil, we are in government in the six counties'. If the people stand up for themselves, if they want to be heard, they'll put us in down here even if it is in opposition. We will build. Their antics, their political antics have changed radically. For the better. For the people of the country, completely, perceptions have changed.

Being a former IRA prisoner doesn't define who I am. When I get to know people, I don't go out and tell people I'm a former Republican POW. I don't do that, I never have. But when they find out, when it comes up in conversation maybe a year down the line, and I say, 'I was active in Republican politics', a lot of the time after that, there's been a gradual slithering away – not because they don't like me but because they're scared of that whole world. They slip away ever so slightly, the shadow becomes lighter.

They know you for who you are, they like you for who you are, but they're wary of the IRA thing. I'm still fairly forthright in my views, and I am going to talk about politics. Don't get me wrong, I think everybody is entitled to their opinions. I used to be dogmatic whereas now I'm just opinionated! But I do find that the relationship changes when it comes out, not that I've lost friends as such because they still say to me 'how are you doing', but it wouldn't be so close, it wouldn't be so active. It's fear maybe – fear of being associated. Everyone has their own politics, everyone has their own world view, everybody has their own opinion, you're entitled to it whatever you have. If it's strong enough, it will come out one way or the other.

Losing acquaintances in that way is okay. True friendship doesn't work like that. I have some fantastic friends who are still fantastic friends who wouldn't have been members of the Republican movement. When they found out about me, yes, they were fascinated. Some of them were shocked, but we're still friends, very much so and some much stronger because of that. Because of that sharing. But it's about judgment as well. I accept you are who you are because it's who you are – and I'm not going to judge you – because I don't want to be judged. That's just the way I look at things.

The Republican experience isn't understood. It can't be because you can never fully understand it unless you're involved in it. I know maybe it's a cliché but I think people have fantasised about it, about being an active revolutionary… Che Guevara and all that kind of stuff.

I think people recognise why we were active and they also understand that things are done for specific reasons and specific ideologies. People agree or disagree with things that happened. But I also disagree with things that happened over the years, but you understand the strategy behind it and the mess ups and the mistakes that were made or that somebody got a bit hotheaded.

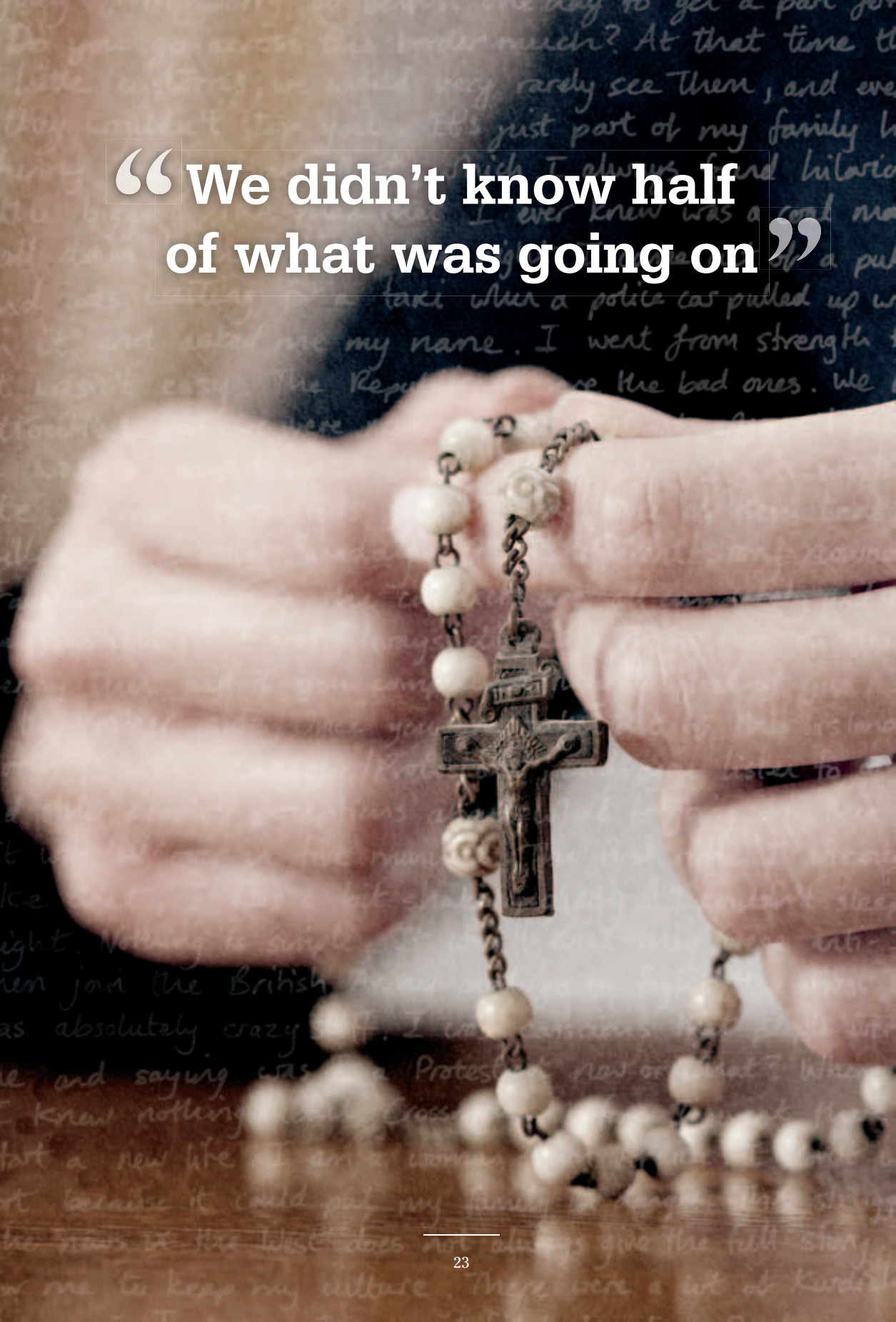
I was at a writing residential and I was going on about a novel I was writing. I was chatting to this guy and describing a character doing things like I might have been involved in, and this guy said, 'how can you write about that, how do you know about it, have you got experience of that kind of thing?' I said, 'not exactly that specific thing, but I was in prison and I know the mindset' … he said, 'why don't you write it from a Republican perspective as opposed to just someone that has been in prison?' But I explained it's because I don't want to

play off the Republican angle. It's a part of my identity, but I'm more than it.

I still have that security thing in my psyche. I still delete e-mails, I still delete texts, I keep nothing. You know, the text could be 'I'm coming for lunch' then you delete it straightaway. I didn't even have e-mail before I got caught, I didn't have a text number or mobile phone! They only became public in '95. I don't go broadcasting (that I'm a former prisoner) but I'm not ashamed in any way, shape or form. I didn't move to Sligo because I was ashamed of being a Republican. I just wanted somewhere quiet, that I could just 'be' and write and have my family up here.

I don't go out of my way to tell people. Generally I let people know if they're established friends. Or usually they'll hear it because some friends would take it upon themselves to say 'hey lookit, you know, he's done a few years in Portlaoise, you know'. I suppose I'm putting a bad light on it but generally – I've never had anybody say you know, 'fuck you.' Ever. But I have gotten to notice the pattern down the years that when some people find out, contact has gotten less regular. And I put it down to that revelation, and I can understand it, people who are basically your friends know who you are – you are on terms with them, you have whatever you have in common. And all of a sudden this thing is thrown into the hat and it scares people, because you are an albatross, you are someone that was involved in atrocities, you know what I mean? You'll always be painted with that brush which is a lot to do with Section 31 and people being fed 30 years of state propaganda. It has a legacy.

If I didn't have this past then of course I would be different. I wouldn't be who I am. We are, in my opinion, a result of our collective experience, which is part of my reality. I was an active Republican. There were many people who were much more active than me, and I was more active than some. That was me. I believed in what I believed in. It's still a part of me and I'm still a part of it. I'm a Republican, and if you don't like it, you're free to take it or leave it.



> “We didn’t know half of what was going on”

We didn't know half of what was going on

When I was younger, in the early 1980's, we had been in Scotland for a while and when we came back we lived in Fermanagh. And because there was no halting site round where we were, it was our first time actually living in a trailer as a family. We had family living in Fermanagh and they knew of this woman, who had a kind of an old farmhouse, and there was nobody living up there. She was kind of a friend of theirs, she used to mind stuff for them, sure we didn't know half of what was going on, God help us.

So we pulled up and we were in the mobile, there were six of us and mother and father. We pulled up and sure, this oul woman to me was like a woman that was basically real old rural Ireland, the west of Ireland. She was going round with her bucket feeding her little animals and the devil knows what with her kilt on her and her glasses.

Well, one morning she came over to the side of the trailer, I'll never forget it for as long as I live, and she says to the oul fella, 'sure now, you won't be letting the wee ones over there this evening'. And I was looking at this woman and thinking to myself sure you wouldn't go near anything belonging to her because, well, you wouldn't know what would come out of the sheds and bite you! That's the way we seen it, we were only small. But once she says that you cannot go over there, sure that's like a red rag to a child like and you're going to hoke for all you are worth! So I looked at the oul fella and he looked at me and he says, 'oh no lady don't even go there' right? Then he says to her, 'is there something you have in it like ma'am', because God help us, he was trying to be a pure, nice little fella'een. 'Well, you'd

never know now, I have a wee few things left out for the boys that'll be coming round the night, you know'.

Lovely! So what we discovered anyway as the weeks went on, was that in the evening times she would get an odd call, and she would know when the lads would be coming across the fields, coming across in the dark of the night. So she kind of tipped the oul fella off, 'if ye hear any noise now it would not be in your interest to be coming out of the trailer you know'. What? Come out of the trailer! The man would never have done it. We were terrified. I think he slept in his clothes with his boots on! That's the truth. And me mother with the rosary beads, four of them around her neck and two in each hand, she'd leave you weak! So we knew there was something going on then because she'd be like a rattling box!

So the oul woman used to leave clothes out, a bit of food, a bottle'een of alcohol I suppose if they were going through the fields. But the most thing she used to leave out, and this was an awful thing I suppose to admit, was a gun. She'd leave out a gun and like you couldn't go near the sheds, Daddy wouldn't let you go near the sheds at that time because he knew then, the woman used to tell him the things she'd leave out.

Well Daddy, the oul fella, he said it to our distant relative and he said, 'aye well you know the boys comes across the fields there, because that's coming right across from wherever through that part of Fermanagh'. So that was that and this went on for months with the oul woman. She was obviously a Catholic woman, we were Catholic and we wouldn't pull up there if she wasn't. Then all of a sudden this oul woman wasn't a real oul woman to me at all, do you know what I mean? She was like a young woman dressed up so as to cover for the lads that was going around in the night.

Anyway we were in the trailer one particular night, and we got up in the morning and we were going to go to school. The oul fella was petrified, he said the trailer was rocking the whole night. He was going to bring us to school and he was coming down the road and he was shaking. I said, 'What! This is not good for my nerves watching you, the way you are going on'! We didn't go to school we went into Enniskillen, and the street we were after coming up the day before, right across from the bridge, the whole street was gone! The whole thing was gone. Everything. I said, 'Daddy was that there yesterday?' But he said, 'that must have been what happened last night'. He

called me mother by her name like, and she said, 'o we better go home, in the name of God we better go home'. The whole street was blown up. That must have been nearly the height of the Troubles, when that kind of stuff was going on. We were living at a farmhouse in Fermanagh where she used to leave out guns, and they were blowing up half of the town in one night and no talk at all about it, and then, the curious thing about it was, you would see vans and cars pulled in trying to go in to buy the damaged goods. The bombed places weren't even cold! They were still on fire kind of job! I used to find that weird. But it was very, very scary.

We were coming across the border one time, I was in the back of the van and my mother was in the front of the van and the old fella got out. He was going across the border that many times, there was a triangle he could get that let you go across the border if you wanted, and we were hours and hours at the border trying to get this sorted out. Daddy cannot read or write so he was answering questions, trying to read forms, fill in about this and that. But Mammy, she wouldn't go in to the soldiers if she got all the money in the North of Ireland. She wouldn't put a foot outside the van. She was terrified of her life of the soldiers. But anyway after hours of him going from one to the other trying get the papers sorted and get the triangle, he eventually got it so he thought he was the bees knees, no soldier would ever stop him again. Oh please!

While we were waiting on him to get the triangle, I saw something that I don't even believe I seen. Well, you know them things, they were like a tank with a big gun thing on top of them? Well, I used to think that these things were in films, you would never think you would see one of them in reality.

So we were in the back of the van and I said, 'oh look' and me brother turned round and he said, 'Mammy look at the thing at the back of the van, at the windows, and the gun going round!' and this gun was going round, brrrrrrrr. My mother was weak and she watching the gun God help us. Us kids were not paying a bit of heed once we had seen it. We just wanted Daddy to come out so we could get on and go and visit Granny. But wasn't there a jackhammer going on the side of the road. And me mother thought the noise was the gun coming in the back window of the van. Seriously. Because it was pointed right at the back window! She nearly had a heart attack! But me father, he never seen the tank but he'd seen the jackhammer,

and he gets back into the van and he said, 'what's wrong with you?' and she said, 'I'm never, never coming back to the North again'. She was back that evening. The soldiers was in kinks when they realised what had happened because they seen her jumping and saying her prayers with the rosary beads! She was terrified. God help her, she was terrified. She remembers it to this day.

One of the crazy things I do remember was that after a few months at the oul woman's farmhouse my mother put in for a house. Unlike the South of Ireland we had a brand-new three-bedroom house within months, a brand-new state-of-the-art house. My mother was in shock, she couldn't believe it. She was on the housing list at home in the South for years and she couldn't get one, she went on the housing list in the North and she got one in a matter of months. So that was an incentive for her to stay there, it was terrifying for her like, but she stayed there.

She went to the North because there was no money in the South of Ireland at the time, but she thought there was a few bob to be got in the North and you do whatever you have to do to get a few pound. They were selling clothes out of the back of a van at the time. Seemingly they were told, the oul fella told us afterwards, that there were particular areas you can go to and other areas you cannot go to. But there was an awful fear; truthfully my Mother had an awful fear.

We were in the house anyway and we went to school. We had a school play, and of course mouthpiece here was in the school play, wasn't I. Black and white minstrels they were doing. They asked me if I could speak Irish and I said, 'what's that'. I didn't realise at the time that because I was a Tinker, I was cut out from being taught Irish in the Free State at school. Well, they wanted me to go on stage singing the national anthem in Irish because we were having a play. I didn't know what the national anthem was, never mind sing it in Irish! Anyway, we were coming back from town and the radio was playing the 'National Anthem' – we must have had an English channel on. But I didn't know the stuff that was going on in the North, because when the schoolmaster said national anthem what did I do? I went to a nationalist school and I was singing God Save the Queen. Well, it was God mind me after that. There were two or three girls, and one of them looked at me and I said, 'what's wrong with you?' and she said, 'what's that song you're singing?' and I said it was the national anthem I heard on the radio in the van. The schoolmaster was standing behind me

now and he wasn't a bit impressed either but because I said it was on the radio in the van, he said, 'oh, leave her alone'. The reason I got away with it was that I was blow-in from the South, not because I was a Tinker, but because I was blow-in from the South.

I nearly got me guts put out on the road that time all over God Save the Queen. I don't think I ever sang a thing after that. I'll never forget it. When they told me about the Queen and who she was – well my nerves! She nearly got me killed – she did! Without me even knowing it! I'll never forget that.

Going down to the North another time, at this time I was married to a Northern Ireland man, well, he was from the Armagh border, yeah, he was 'the dude' all right and all that stuff that goes with it! So, he had a wallet that was done in the Kesh, it was in the front of the vehicle going across the border. He stopped at some fella's house buying or selling something, and didn't I put me hand into the front of the van to get the money. I had no bag only this purse. As far as I was concerned it was a jail purse, and it was nothing but bad luck and misfortune because there was trouble in these prisons over these things.

As time went along I discovered that this was an armchair Provo that I was married to you, know? and when I took out the jail purse, he went luminous, he went luminous because I put me hand in and brought out the purse and it was sitting there on top of me knee.

He was green but sure it meant nothing to me. The other man looked at me, that I was giving the money to, you know because of the purse, and I said to him 'oh don't mind that shitty thing'. He never said a word to me, but the other fella was nearly melted going down through the seat. Then the man said to me 'do you know something love, your naïveté', he said, 'is so genuine'! He was in kinks laughing. I said, 'OK, whatever', and I gave him his money. I was oblivious to what was going on; and I didn't care either, truthfully.

One very, very scary day with my beloved ex-husband, we were going to his homeplace and it was quicker to cut across the North to get to where we were going. I had two of my children with me in the front of the van, and without me knowing he put up a tricolour on each back window of the van. Oh he did. He put my life in danger and the lives of my children, you know. I didn't know that I was going through the North with two tricolours in the back windows of the van and I with my children in the front of the van. We were going to see

their granny that they only met every four or five months, so I was fixing them and making sure they were ok, then they'd think their mother was a tidy bit of gear – at least she got them out of the gate before they were filthy again!

Next thing this car started beeping behind me, but when I say start beeping, I mean like a lunatic and it overtakes, and the car driver he starts making the most vulgar of signs. But the driver of the van was equally as bad making vulgar signs and beeping and whatever else. Next thing the van I am sitting in with my two children starts going tail to tail with the car on a small side road and I thought 'one of us is going to be killed and it better not be me, yes'? They went on for a good bit of the road and my ex was calling him the black Protestant this and the black Protestant that and I said to myself 'okay you're at something'. I said, 'what's going on?' Well, says he, the tricolour is in the back window. My heart nearly stopped. I said, 'stop the van, stop'. He wouldn't stop the van. We got to his mother's place a couple of miles down the road and he pulled in the van. I got out and his mother came out to greet us and I didn't even say hello to her. I got out of the van, I opened the two back doors, I got the tricolours and I danced on them, and when I was finished dancing on them I put them into the fire. But when I put them into the fire it was like slapping a bold child. And his mother said to him 'what did you do'? because he was her 'boy' and he was bold! Now, truthfully the woman was disgusted about what he had done, but if people like that were going round Northern Ireland in the height of the Troubles, it's no wonder that so many innocent people got hurt.

He was in his 20s. He had seven years on me. There's a lot of armchair Provos and there's a lot of people thinking that they're doing this that and the other. What type of conversations are they having in the pub? Putting a Sinn Féin poster on the back of the van in the West of Ireland – who cares who you are voting for? It was to show that he was interested in the 'RA, but that kind of stuff wasn't healthy for anybody. It particularly wasn't healthy for my two children in the front of the van on that day. Anything could have happened.

Things were better for Travellers living in the North. Its not that there wasn't as much discrimination but it wasn't as open because their problem was avoiding bullets, and I'm not trying to be flippant about it here. Their problem was staying alive. They were more against one another because of being Protestant and Catholic than

for being settled and against the Travellers. Now it's a few years into the Peace Process, but when you go up the North you can find more of a prejudice against Travellers now. You can feel it now. It wasn't evident in the North before but now you can actually sense it and feel it in some areas. And that's genuine like, you can.

I can feel the prejudice in the North of Ireland, but truthfully, you could still go in to a premises in the North and get served. But if you're on a market or if you're going selling or different things like that you may watch out. I would worry that the level of discriminatory practice in the North has gone up so fast in such a short time. What level will it get to as time goes on, I ask myself? And the fear is that when people take things to the limit in the North of Ireland, they really do take them to the limit.

I've been told by groups that are in the North that there is an increase in racial attacks and discrimination. Because the Protestant/Catholic issue is seen to have gone away – even though it hasn't – the impact is that it's increasing against Travellers and against marginalised groups generally.

It's not all going to go away just because of the peace treaty because human nature is human nature and they are feeling the loss of what they lost in all those times. The politicians might sign off on A, B, C, and D, but there are human beings that are feeling that they have been forgotten about in it all and that's where the real work is to be done. That's why you would have the fear. There's an awful lot of reconciliation work to be done in the North and believe me it won't be finished in 50 years time in my opinion.


“Any chance of a salmon?”

Any chance of a salmon?

I couldn't tell you what age I was for sure when I found out my dad was in the IRA but I remember he used to go away off at night times and I would ask him 'daddy where are you going' and stuff like that, and he would say, 'son, I'm going off fishing', but then he mightn't come back for three or four days. Then I remember, I came home from school one day, myself and my sister, and our house was closed so I went over to my neighbour across the road, she would mind us, and she said, 'your dad was taken away'. I said, 'what do you mean?' She said, 'well, you know, your dad was taken away', and I was pretty dumb, thinking like 'what's going on here?' She explained to me that the army came and got him, and I was like, 'what?' And I kind of – I put two and two together – and I realised what it was. It came out then in the local papers, you know, 'IRA escapee has been arrested in this house' and that was when the penny dropped. When I was younger, I kind of had suspicions of something, he's not going out fishing for three or four days and coming back with no fish, you know!

Even though I was young I knew about Sinn Féin, but I don't think I was old enough at the time to understand the IRA or that there was any connection. I knew there was something, but it was when that incident happened that the penny dropped. I was in primary school, so I suppose I was about ten. I was actually in the house that morning and I heard a commotion downstairs and dad saying, 'I'm telling you one thing, don't wake up my children' so when I got up in the morning there was just mum there. But there were other times when I got up in the morning and dad wasn't there anyway so I thought it was a normal day. Mum made your breakfast, you went off to school, she dressed you and whatever and that was that. I only realised this was different when I came home and the neighbour said, 'your dad was taken away'.

But for some reason at the same time, I didn't think anything bad had happened, but then you heard people saying the army had taken him away and I was thinking, 'am I ever going to see him again?'. When you hear that the army has taken your dad away, you think that they might go and shoot him or something, when you're ten years of age you don't understand, you know.

I was in school the day of dad's arrest. The story would have been on the radio and one of the teachers did say it to me. She was nice about it, but then there were other teachers who would, they wouldn't single you out, but they cut you down, they cut you off. I could tell at that age anyway that the teachers were keeping their distance from me, they would teach you alright but that was it. They did their job but I knew they were keeping their distance.

The kids in school knew. There were kids who wouldn't talk to me because their parents would have told them that they knew who my dad was. I'm not saying that it was always people with money or anything like that but the richer kids, they wouldn't let you play games with them and stuff like that. Then there were kids as well who would know and say to me, 'I heard about your dad' and this that and the other. I would have said, 'heard about what?', trying to put it lightly, because they didn't know what to say.

I think the parents of the other children in school told them not to play with me. In this primary school; after school, somebody would go to somebody else's house for dinner. That would be the kind of wee thing that was done. Except that I never got asked around to other people's houses. And so I would be thinking, 'there's something not right here'. I asked my mother one time why this was, 'why won't the others ask me around?' and she told me. This was after it all happened with dad. I knew in my heart why before then but the kids didn't say. In later years, I was old enough to talk with them about it and they told me it was because they would have heard, 'it's Dermot's son and he is a terrorist and he is a bomber' or something. They just thought, 'he's in the IRA, it's bad news, so I'm keeping my children away from this or that'. So I wasn't allowed around to their houses.

I'm just remembering this now, but before my dad got arrested, he didn't tell me exactly what he was involved in but he explained it as something and he said, 'look, don't worry about it'. So I knew that if the kids in school were doing things like that, I kind of knew that my dad had said not to worry. To be honest, I can't remember what it was

that he said, but in my heart I knew why the ones in school were like that, even though I didn't know exactly what was going on.

My dad didn't say, 'you don't tell that', or 'if anyone talks to you, you don't say this', because I didn't know anything about my dad or what he was involved in, but in some way as a child, I was picking up little things because dad was going, or if he would come over with a couple of people, or had loads of people in the house on a certain night. So, as a kid maybe I was just putting two and two together and kind of defended him.

My mum told me everything after dad got arrested and she had to. I knew in myself though because as I mentioned, when dad said something to me when I was younger he must have said it in a way that I was able to understand. Because when he was arrested even though I had it in my head that I would probably never see him again, I remembered he had said, 'never to worry or anything like that, I'll be fine.' I was so young that I can't bring it back to mind what he said, but when he was arrested, I think maybe I was waiting for the day.

All along, I'd have asked my mother; 'is he gonna come back, where are they going to put him?' But she always said, 'don't worry, everything will be fine', stuff like that, the usual mother thing to do. The main question I had was, 'is he going to come back?' I didn't know if he was going to come back at all you know. He'd go and then he'd come back and then he would go and then he would be gone, and I'd be thinking, 'what's going on here like?' I'd only ask about where is he and stuff like that. It was very hard for my mother I'm sure. It was very hard for her having to live that lifestyle, it's not the normal happy family – towards the extreme opposite you know.

People would have asked me about what happened with my dad; 'what did he do?', 'why was he in prison?', 'how did he escape?', 'how did they do it?', 'how is he still out for so long?', 'how is he free now?' and stuff like that. I would answer them, but I wouldn't go into the details. I would tell them the truth. They had probably read stuff in the papers but I would tell them the truth. Whether they would believe me or not I don't know. To be honest, it was the same question off everybody and I got sick of it. 'How did he do it Kieran', and I didn't want to be mean, I would just say 'I don't know', but it was the same thing every time like, so I just told a shortened version of it. But then on the other hand, there was, 'fair play to your dad.'

The teachers in secondary school would have asked me at school. As I was pretty handy at the football, I got on well with a lot of the teachers. They would ask me why he was put in prison. I just said I didn't know. They would especially ask me 'how did he escape?', 'how did he do it?', 'how was he living here for so long?'. I wouldn't say anything, I would just say, 'I never asked anything about it, I don't know.'

So, on one side you had the bad handling of it but there was a good side as well. You were respected. It kept me out of trouble when I was at school, because nobody would bully me or anything like that, I suppose that was a good factor, I never thought of it before. They would have been afraid of what was going to happen if they bullied me, not that it would, but they probably thought it you know.

It was good, it kept me out of badness. When I was a teenager, it kept me away from going out drinking or taking drugs or whatever which was a good thing. It was because of the IRA's attitude towards drugs; 'don't be having that fellow around with us, don't be having him around here, his father is in the IRA' or 'you don't want be going about with that fellow, something will happen, you will be shot' or something like that. I can remember things like that being said I went was in school. I have that image. I did feel left out, sure, when you go to teenage discos, when teenagers hang around youth clubs and stuff like that and you'd hear, 'don't be having that fellow around here', I definitely felt left out. Of course. My best friends were there but you always want to be part of the gang when you are a teenager. But, I just went with it because I accepted it and it was what it was you know.

My sister probably would have had the same kind of thing going on in her primary school. We went to two different primary schools, I went to an all boys school, she went to an all girls school, so I'm sure she would have had the same kind of thing as well you know. I don't think we ever talked about it, or said, 'I wonder where dad is?' or stuff like that. But we say things like that now. It's good, I suppose it brought myself and my sister closer. There was only the two of us.

We all had a protest for him, for me dad, not to extradite him, in O'Connell Street in Sligo. There were loads of us, standing there with a big sheet. It was weird at that age, me standing at the top of O'Connell Street at 11, 'Don't extradite Dermot M' – looking back at it, Jesus! I hadn't a clue what extradition was! It was crazy when I look back and think. There was photos and stuff in the papers and

you would have been going back into school. Of course the teachers would have been saying, 'I saw you in the paper.' I was old enough to know they knew exactly what was going on.

I would have been a bit young to go to the prison and I'd say mum thought I might get a wee bit freaked out seeing my dad in prison at ten years of age. It would have been intimidating. At the time I was trying to understand why he was there and stuff like that – 'sure, it's my daddy and he's done nothing wrong'. I was too young to actually fully understand what he did, or what was going on you know, but that was probably the hardest thing, the 'why is he there?' Every kid's going to think, 'what did my dad do wrong, he's only my dad like, and he's the best person in the world.'

He came out of prison and then he went back, and then he came out, and then he was back. My sister didn't know though, she hadn't a clue, she just thought he was going away on holiday. I can remember that actually, we stayed in a friend of the family's house and he was heading away and it was actually Nicola's first Holy Communion, and she was like, 'why isn't daddy coming?', and mum was trying to explain to her that daddy was off on holiday. Of course I knew, but obviously I couldn't tell my sister because she was too young to understand. God, she was upset.

All of the guards gave you such a hard time, they definitely, definitely did. Like, if I was walking home up to my street, they would drive by slowly and stop and wind down the window and say, 'where is your father?', 'how's your father keeping?', 'right young Kieran, how's things, how is your father keeping?'. Or if I was down town and I met the guards they would always ask questions like 'where is your father?' I wouldn't talk to them. I actually genuinely wouldn't talk to the guards. I would just keep walking by you know. I suppose you could say they did kind of give me a hard time. It happened any time I saw them. Definitely. And this went on for a wee while to be honest. They would always be up there, every single day they would drive up and park outside the house and sit there. You can't do anything about it, it's not annoying you technically, but I remember sitting looking out and they were parked outside the house, like an hour sometimes. At that age, the guards pulling you over and asking you questions. Kids pulled over at 12 years of age and Jesus – you were freaked out!

My dad's identity being out in the open probably made things harder. Dad had set me up for what was going to be ahead when I was

a teenager. When I was about 13, he told me everything. Everything. He basically just put me right. He knew what was going to be said to me, he prepared me, without me knowing he was preparing me. He prepared me for harassment by the guards, harassment by people who ask you questions and stuff like that. 'It's nothing to worry about, nothing to be ashamed about son, and stuff like that.' He would have advised me on what it was okay to talk about and what it wasn't okay to talk about. I think he knew that I knew anyway. He wouldn't blatantly tell me what he did straight out, but he talked about what was said in the papers, he explained it to me, what the truth was. They had put crazy stuff in the papers and that was really when it went haywire. As the years went on you learned stuff like that, he would try and explain it in a way that you would understand, I understood it anyway at a very young age.

Before the arrest, the guards wouldn't have come near the house because although they might have had suspicion they didn't know for sure who he was. I remember guards called to the house, and the same guard always used to call, I can't remember if dad was on the run or if they were looking for him, and there was a bench warrant out for my dad, and the guard used to call every day. We'd say, 'no he's not here', but dad would be up hiding in the wardrobe! He would call every day and he hadn't the right to come into the house or something like that. Dad let me know 'You will be grand, don't worry about it'. I knew the drill at this stage, I knew what to do. And he was like 'Jesus Christ son, you've a better chance of winning the lottery than getting your father in this house'. He still calls, even now, he still quizzes me, and would be smart like, 'how's your father keeping?', and, 'how's things and all that', in a smart way, not like in a formal way but cheeky like – 'ha ha ha how's your father keeping now?'

I would have to pass them on the way home from school. They wouldn't stop me every single day but any time they got a chance they would. There was one particular guard, who I knew because I used to play football a lot and he was involved in the football as well, so in a way, he was trying to get information out of me. He would always ask me questions at football, he would always refer back to, 'how's your father, where's your father?' and stuff like that. He would always try to fish information out of me but I suppose I always changed the subject. I knew what he was doing.

When the guards would call to the house, 'where is your dad?', 'he is gone out fishing', and then the guards would pull me over in the street and say, 'Kieran you must have a whole lot of fish in the freezer there' and then they would call to the door the next time and ask me, 'any chance of a salmon or a trout', and stuff like that. It's true to this day, if I meet them they will say it. They are grand about it though. I know the guard and if I was going through the town with my dad, dad would stop and have a chat with him. And he would stop and chat away. I suppose he was grand with me. He would stop and always try to ask information; I was in the football so it wasn't so bad, but the younger guards now, I would say if they had their way, they would have a rant. I don't know why it is, but they would like still ask, still to this day.

I remember them coming in and searching the house, I was in bed one time. The army came in, the emergency response unit came in and arrested him with their guns and all that. It wasn't just guards like, it was armed guards. There was the army guys, the big land rovers, they were outside the house, they were in the field out at the back, it was like nearly the army was in the street for him. I was asleep. They did it quietly. They knocked at the door, I didn't wake up, I don't know how I didn't wake up. My sister was in bed as well. We didn't wake up, it was crazy. I think if one or two Garda cars came, sure he would have just ran out the back door or something like that.

I asked him what it was like before he was even locked up, growing up and stuff like that. I know a bit about what it was like for him growing up because I lived down there for four or five months of the year and I saw what the Troubles were like. I would have been there seeing riots and police firing plastic bullets and stuff like that because I went down to visit my granny where he was from. It was right in the heart of stuff and it was crazy. So I understood that perspective but I asked him 'what it was like when they arrested you?', 'why did you get arrested?', 'what was it like in prison?'. He told me all about prison and it was crazy to learn all the stuff but good to know it all the same because you understood it. Because at that age when you are hearing so much about what's going on around you, you are thinking Jesus, what is my dad actually? So it was good when he explained, it was good to get the clarification.

It was weird when we were in history class when they were on about the break-out and stuff like that. I remember we were talking

about the hunger strike and yeah, I suppose it was weird in class, thinking, 'Jesus, they are on about my father here'. I never said anything, but they knew. You know when you know someone knows? The teacher did – the guy that was teaching history – he was a sound man. He was a young enough teacher too and he knew the score. He asked me one time about me dad and how was it growing up and stuff like that.

Dad was actually on the radio a couple of times when we were at school. It was lunchtime and you know when you are on your break, you would be sitting around and the radio would be on in the cafeteria, and there it was, me dad, talking about all this that and the other – it was weird. Everyone was grand about it, all the shouting and cheering, about a thousand students in our cafe, and it was turned up an' all. My friends used to work in the cafeteria shop, and everyone was like 'sssh quiet' and then they had it all turned up and everyone shouted, 'go on Dermot' – it was mad. I would have been proud, definitely, I wasn't going to go, 'oh Jesus Christ there's my dad' or this or that you know. I was proud – yes.

It was always – 'he's Dermot's son'. That's the way it was up to a couple of years until I was only about 18. I was Dermot's son. I was proud of him, I was proud of me father, you know I wasn't – 'I want to be known as Kieran'. When you are a teenager, a wee bit, you are kind of , 'I just want to be known as Kieran', but not in a bad way, it didn't affect me or anything you know.

I have my own views, I would be a Republican myself. I never had an interest in getting involved in politics, I really didn't. I remember dad used to watch the news the whole time, I used to crack up when I was a child. I thought 'what is he on?'! I used to wreck his head asking questions, I remember 'why is he asking that dad?', 'why is this dad?', and 'why is that?'. He was just like, 'will you sit down and watch it?'. I don't have a huge interest in politics to be honest with you. I just take it for what it is. My beliefs – that's a different thing – but I have no interest in politics. What I believe in is totally different – I'm a Republican.

I was down the North a lot, I was down while the Troubles were going on and I actually saw what was going on. And because I witnessed myself what was going on, of course you're not going to turn around and say 'this is wrong'. This is a way of life and that's how it goes and you accept it. It's not like you are brainwashed into it,

because you don't get that 'sit down talk' of 'this is how it is'. I always had my own choice, my dad said that to me all the time, 'I'm not going to tell you what to do' and still to this day when I'm voting and stuff, he won't tell me what to do.

(Referring to having moved to a new town)… the question is never brought up, but actually, there was a programme on not so long ago, a couple of months back, and it was about the break-out, and we were having some drinks. It was on the TV and see the names coming up, and it was like 'Dermot …', and a friend of mine was sitting there and he said, 'is he related to you?'. And I said, 'yeah man, he's my father', and he said, 'go to hell.' Then I told him about everything and it was crazy. I suppose yes, it's always coming up.

The guards where I live now I know I'm from Sligo. I don't know if I'm being paranoid, but if you catch a Guard's eye, he's going to look at you anyway and kind of stare at you, that's what they do, but with me being so used to it back home, I would think, 'why is he looking at me?' – weird you know!

My dad, in every way, he's very loyal to what he did, that came first to dad always and I knew that and I understood that. But he was always good to me, I don't know if I was to understand that he put them first, put that before us. But he gave his life to that, so I think I understood that, and that's how it was. I never thought what he was doing was wrong or anything like that. It didn't bother me.

“I wanted to start a new life”

I wanted to start a new life

I am a woman from Africa. I don't want to say what part because it could put my family in danger. My life has been affected by conflict in my country and inside myself. I did not want to leave my children or grandchildren. I had to run for my life. I cannot say how I got here because that could put others at risk. I did not know anything about Ireland. I heard it was a part of Europe. I thought Europe was a rich place with lots of tall buildings. I thought Sligo would be full of skyscrapers. I thought I would have a new life here.

I used to have a business. Now I have no work. I'm not allowed to work. As an Asylum Seeker I get a bed in a centre, in a shared room. The bedding is not changed often enough so I have to wash it myself. I get three meals a day, always at the same time, like prison. I can't choose what I eat. This is nobody's fault. It's the way the system works. If I have to be somewhere else when meals are served I miss that meal. I have no money to buy extra food. When I come to meet you for this project, or to meet anyone outside the centre, I want to be clean, to smell good. I can't afford shower gel. I get nineteen euro a week. Nineteen euro! People say that is shocking. As a woman I want to look good, to wear a little make up, and to fix my hair. I have no money for basic toiletries. I am willing to work at anything. I want to work. I want to pay my taxes. This makes no sense. Why keep me here for months, for years, doing nothing? The only people who benefit are the owners of the hostels.

I hear about Peace III projects getting funding. That is good. But even a very small amount paid to participants or a voucher would make a big difference. I have been asked to tell my story over and over. One time I was offered a glass of water and a piece of bread.

People in Sligo are friendly. I have not experienced a lot of racism. I have heard stories about people saying about us: 'they go around wearing designer shoes.' Sometimes you get good shoes in Charity Shops. If people see you looking well they don't understand that the only place you can afford to buy anything is the Charity Shops. It is humiliating.

It's not just having no money. Its being stuck in this place. Having nothing to do. It is depressing. Sometimes you crave different food, hot spicy African flavours or sauces. But you can't get it anywhere. I crave it sometimes, a simple thing like that, a little taste of home. I used to have plenty to eat. I ran a good business. I would like to run a business here but I'm not allowed. I wanted to start a new life. Now I have no life.

Since I came here my grandson has passed away, my brother was injured and died from his wounds. Sometimes I wish they had killed me too. I would be better off dead. I would be in heaven.

I used to have a good life. I worked hard. I got up at 4am to get my children ready for school. We had to leave at five in the morning because of the traffic in the city. The school was two hours away. Then I would drive to work for eight o'clock. I would have to pick up my children in the evening, go home, cook, clean, wash dishes, wash clothes. I was happy looking after my family. Now they are gone. They have to pretend I am dead. I have lost everything.

I thought I was coming to a good place. I saw a video about the North of Ireland once, about Peace Building and the Troubles. I didn't understand what that meant. They were showing what was happening in those years. I got the shock of my life. I never saw that before. I never knew. Then I thought it was like what happened in my country. The government party fighting with other parties. In the North, the Catholics and Protestant parties seem like two tribes fighting each other. It is a bit better now in my country, but still they are fighting. It is better in the North but still they are shooting sometimes.

My parents told me not to hate anybody. I told my children not to hate anybody, only to love each other. But as a child I was told not to go that way to school because 'those people will kill you.' I did not understand why. I did not fight but I had to leave my home to save my life. If I see you, a stranger, you are not white or black or green, you are a human being. You are the image of God. That helps me; to think like that. People take your house, kill your family. It makes me

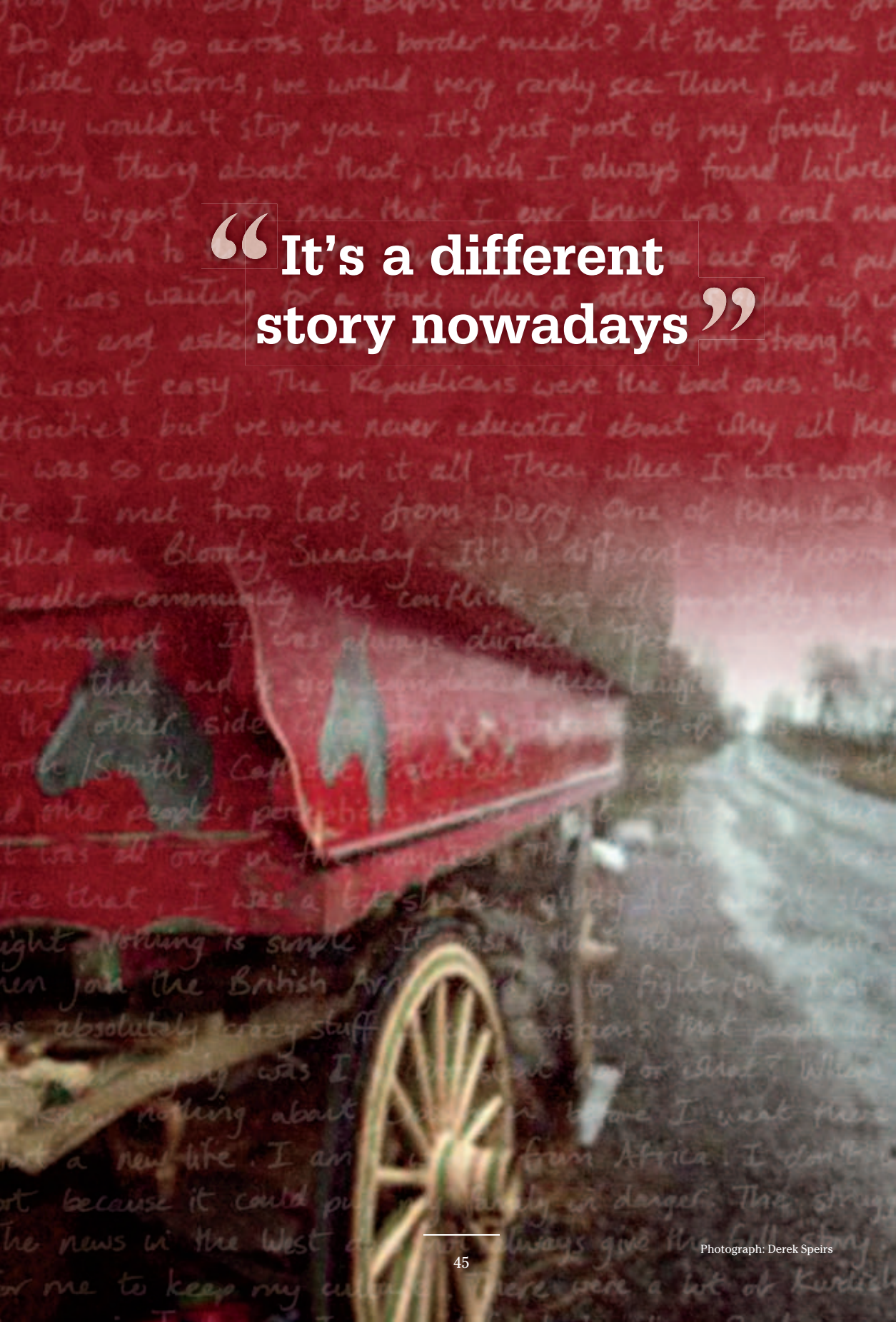
bitter. They say forgive and forget. Can you forget? I don't think so. Some things you never forget. I say I forgive them. They are far away. If I looked them in the eye could I forgive them? I don't know. I want to forgive to help the next generation to live a better life. Because they weren't there. They didn't see it. They are innocent.

I believe like in the Bible that some people have to sacrifice their lives. But you don't do it for you. You do it for the next generation. My generation has suffered a lot. Our children died. People in Ireland say we come here to take their jobs. I came here for freedom, just to live.

In my country we also have a lot of foreigners. I didn't know what a refugee was. Foreigners get better treatment in my country. I can't go back. My family would be in danger. I could lose my life. I don't want to go back. I don't want to think about the North of Ireland and what happened there. It takes me back. I don't want to think about those times. I want a new life, a better life. I want to work.

If I met a politician I would say, Let Me Work. Don't leave me here to rot. Just eating and sleeping and walking around. Like a prisoner: sleep, wake up, eat, sleep again. It's like the parable in the Bible. One person made a seed multiply, one buried it. I want to be fruitful. I could run a business in Sligo, a good business. I know how.

Instead I have to stay here, waiting and waiting. Waiting for years. The government promised change. They have been talking for ten years. Nothing has happened. Nothing has changed. I hope this story helps a little bit to change things.



“It’s a different story nowadays”

Photograph: Derek Speirs

It's a different story nowadays

There's more than one type of conflict affects Travellers generally. You were sound, you were half safe as a Traveller in the North I suppose because the sites – the ones that I would have seen certainly – were always in places that were more on the nationalist side. They wouldn't have been in the middle of loyalist areas; they would have tended to be on the edge of housing estates like Craigavon and places like that.

So that's the North. But there's also the conflict between the mainly settled population and the Traveller population because if Travellers are looking for housing in the towns, settled people don't want them in there beside them, they don't want them in the houses, they don't want to give a Traveller family a house in their estate.

Then if you go into the rural areas, they don't want Travellers in the houses there because it's their area or their townland or whatever. They don't want sites built in their area either, even though the majority of people would say that Travellers need to be housed, and they need sites built and they need proper accommodation. But you get what is known in a lot of circles as the NIMBY virus – not in my backyard. The attitude is 'you can house them wherever it is you house them but not beside me'. So until that attitude changes, there's going to be more aggravation and that equally is causing conflict between settled and between Travellers.

Within the Traveller community the conflicts are all completely and utterly crazy at the moment. There was a time when if there was a dispute it would be settled with the two people that the dispute was with, you know, they would go out, get some sort of fair play, have a few punches, bare-knuckle fighting or whatever you want to call it,

and then sort the difference out, shake hands and that would be the end of it.

But with the next generation, the younger generation, I'm talking about the guys who are in their 20s and early 30s, they are gone from that. The younger generation again too. I suppose because of the amount of drugs; – and drugs would have a lot to do with how people behave. Where once a drunken argument was either forgot about in the morning or you had your few punches in the morning and that was that, now it's all-out war. It's a different story nowadays. They don't want to fight any more – they are looking for blood, and because they are doped I generally believe that the younger generation just don't care. When you're drunk, when you're drugged, you have no comprehension of the amount of damage that you're going to do or that you have done already. It's family against family, because they've been on drugs and they're doped out of their brain and they haven't a clue whether they are coming or going.

There is an overspill of violence. Where there is blood drawn or somebody's been cut or shot, then the other family wants to get their own back, so it's a sort of spiral. It spirals completely out of control because if the father or the brother or nephew or whatever gets cut, gets shot, and there is blood drawn, or a woman is cut or there is blood drawn, then it is a family affair. They want to get their own back and if somebody gets killed – and God mind everybody if somebody gets shot or knifed and dies – then they can never forget it. The other family at some stage will say 'my brother killed your brother or my father killed your father' or whatever it is, and that just continues the cycle of violence on and on again.

There is a lot of people trying to mediate, a lot of Travellers are working hard and trying to negotiate with different families, but half the trouble is going on within families – there's fellas fighting and they don't know what they are fighting for because it's been going on for generations and they've lost the reason as to why it began in the first place. Now it's just because it's a matter of your name and my name. I don't like you because you're whatever name you are, and you don't like me because of whatever name I am, and then we both don't like them because they have a different name completely.

The crazy thing is that at the same time they are getting married in and out too, then on the night of the wedding they are saying, 'my

cousin gave it to your cousin' and all that sort of stuff and then there's more war.

So how do you tackle that? Is there a way out of it? I don't know… it has to be hard on them, the families, but I mean, they have to realise, some of them, that somebody somewhere has to be able to sit down and try and talk about it and try and come up with a solution. Where most people will look at the parents or the grandparents in relation to conflict they forget that it's not always the eldest son who holds the title, it could be the second or the third guy who's calling the shots, so there is a lot of stuff that has to be dealt with, there's a lot that has to be gone through in tackling it. There's no easy answer to it and how it's going to be resolved, God himself only knows.


“Keeping the family secret”

Keeping the family secret

I was brought up in a house with Republican sympathies. My Dad was very angry at the time the hunger strikers died, he would have vocalised that in the house so I would have been aware that there was very strong Republican sympathies in our household. I would have been 11 or 12 at the time.

When you're that age, you don't really think anything much about the fact that some people called occasionally to the house and stayed over. They would have been strangers to me but would have been known to my parents of course. A child has inherent trust in their parents and if your parents felt that it was important enough to have this person in the house, and that they had honourable reasons for having a person in the house, you trusted their judgment. And so, you never asked.

As you got a little bit older, you became more aware that some of the people that stayed in the house didn't venture out. They might have been staying a couple of days, or a couple of nights as the case would be, but they wouldn't go out for a walk or leave the house during the daytime, which I found strange.

You were never told that person A is a member of any organisation or anything but the first few times they would have stayed, mum or dad would have said, 'this is a friend of your dad's who's staying here but he doesn't really want people to know that he's here' and your antenna goes up. They might have said something like 'don't ever mention that 'Pat' or 'Sean' or 'Mick' are here – and they invariably always were 'Pat' or 'Sean' or 'Mick'! By the time I was well into my mid teens I was very much aware that they were involved in the armed struggle and more than likely, that they were wanted by the security forces. But you weren't told in clear terms the reasons why people

were staying. It was something you just gradually became aware of. You got your initial suspicion by virtue of the fact that you knew the political sympathies in the household.

My parents probably knew that I had gradually become aware of who these people were. I would have talked to my father about politics and he would have understood from talking to me that I would have been Republican-minded. I was living in a household with Republican sympathies, a Republican minded ethos and you grew into that and became part of that. You became part of keeping a secret of the fact that there were men, and they nearly always were men I think with maybe one exception, who stayed in our house. To some extent you were proud to be part of keeping that secret and protecting these guys.

Some guys may have only stayed one night and may have come very late, and maybe at times, you were put out of the bed and you had to sleep on the couch because a grown man wouldn't have room on the couch. Sometimes people stayed longer – they could have stayed anything up to a week or 10 days. Some people you would only have seen once, some people would have been coming intermittently to the house and you would have formed relationships with them. But you were always conscious of the fact that you couldn't ask too much about the individual. You didn't want to ask about their background or you didn't want to ask, 'well is their real name actually Pat?', because you knew that it was better for everybody to know as little as possible. The less I knew, the less likely I was to let slip to mates in school.

Of course you had curiosity because you assumed that these were Republican soldiers who were doing something exceptional, whether people agreed with it or not, that they weren't your ordinary kind of guy. There's not a sense of glamour to what they were doing or anything and they didn't come into the house and be kind of – you know sticking their chest out – or saying, 'I'm such and such'.

They would just be different characters; some of them would be fairly outgoing and mad to chat. When they'd be chatting to one of my parents they might have said maybe a bit more than they should have because for some of them it was the first chance they would get to relax, where they could feel that they were comfortable in their surroundings, that they weren't having to look over their shoulder. Other individuals were quite content and happy to sit in the armchair

in the corner, to bide their time for several days or maybe a week or whatever, to keep themselves to themselves. Not interacting wouldn't have been through being ignorant or anything towards the family, we were always treated with kindness, politeness and deference by them. I presume it was more self-discipline than anything else, but they would keep to themselves, watch the news, want us to pick up books, we would get the newspapers for them and things like that.

Some of these guys would have been on the run and would have been afraid to get arrested this side the border because of the possibility of extradition. They wouldn't necessarily have been coming to our house after any specific incident. Some of them would be 'on the run', and might have been for months if not years, so they weren't necessarily having to lie low because of something they had been involved in a week ago on the other side of the border. So, generally speaking, you wouldn't try to link a guy with a specific incident. There were occasions when maybe several men would have been staying in the house, and you would suspect that they had recently been involved in some specific activity. But by and large, it was mostly individuals looking for a place where they could just have a few days to unwind, and know that they were in what they would perceive as being a good Republican house.

Guys who'd been on the run for years would have moved from safe house to safe house. They couldn't stay in one place for too long because if visitors, ordinary social visitors called to the house, you wouldn't get away with saying, 'this is a friend of such and such who just happens to be visiting.' You might get away with it once or twice but not all the time. If ordinary visitors saw the same person there several times over the space of two or three weeks – you would have that person moved on.

There was an instance I remember, it was probably the first time that I would have really realised the calibre or type of men that were staying in the house. One man had stayed in the house for a number of days and about two weeks later one of my parents took me to one side and said, 'you may see something on the news in regard to one of the lads who was here not so long ago'. I said, 'how do you mean?' And it was explained to me that he had been killed on active service. That would have been the first time that I would specifically have known that it was Republicans involved in armed action who had been staying in the house.

I remember at the time, when they reported on the news about the person who had been killed, the inference from the journalists was that this was a person who had been fairly heavily involved in armed struggle and would have been wanted on both sides of the border. So then you began to realise that there was an element of danger. I don't mean mortal danger – but there was an element of threat to the family to the extent that if Gardaí or any other body would have become aware of a stranger being around the house for any length of time, it could have implications. Maybe one of the parents could have faced jail time or the Gardaí would have been watching you the whole time. There would be implications in terms of parents losing work and stuff like that. So there was a realisation that, not only were you protecting the person who was in your house, you were protecting your own family too by not talking about it. The only other people I would have talked to about it were siblings – obviously we were all part of the same dynamic.

I would have assumed that the Gardaí were aware of the Republican sympathies in the house. One of my parents would have been active during the hunger strike campaign and that was tantamount to 'if you're not an active IRA member you are definitely a supporter'. So the house did come under suspicion at times. I think it was in the late 80s, there was an awful lot of activity, there were quite a number of men 'on the run' across the country, the Eksund was captured bringing in weapons, I think it was around the time of 'Enniskillen' and there was basically a massive dragnet across the whole State looking for weapons and looking for men on the run and I remember the house was definitely visited by the Gardaí during that time.

A house search is disconcerting because you are suddenly seeing men on your family property carrying weapons…it was Special Branch, not the uniforms. I know from talking to other Republicans that our house search wasn't different to anybody else's. The house search happens very early in the morning when you're asleep in your bed. Obviously if they suspect that there's someone staying in your house, the optimum time they think they are going to get them is during the dead hours, the bedtime hours. I remember it was very early, sometime after seven o'clock in the morning, so your immediate thing is a sense of, 'what's going on here?' The door is being hammered and you're looking out the window and you see unmarked cars and some patrol cars and you see that there are men out the back of the

house as well. You knew what was coming. I was just glad there was nobody here when they came, so there was very little they could do in that regard. But they were putting down a marker and I think that while some people may have stayed occasionally after that, the amount of people staying would have been less and less and more sporadic.

When they raided the house, they were looking for individuals, so there wouldn't have been that much upheaval. They would have looked up in the attic and outside sheds. They wouldn't have looked through everything in fairness, or turned everything over; the house didn't look like a burglar had been through it. You watched as it happened, you'd have stood in the room and just watched them while they did it. They were very thorough, they went through everything – up in the attic, through every cupboard, under the stairs and they tried to see if was any space under the floorboards – that kind of thing.

There was some hostility from them, but you knew they were just doing their job. Some of them obviously took a bit more joy in it than others. They went through everything systematically, they started at the top and then they worked their way down and when they were finished they left. I didn't feel that the household had been violated, if anything there was just a sense of relief that they hadn't found anybody or anything. It never happened when there was somebody here and that was probably luck as much as anything else because there were some guys that would have stayed a little bit longer than they should have.

It became quite well-known within the local community that our house had been visited by the Special Branch and it immediately earmarked your household. It flagged up to the whole wider community that the Gardaí think that these people are in some way involved in Republican activities. So, where it caused you discomfort would have been that your peers viewed you in a different manner. I would have tried to explain it off – that there were hundreds of houses being raided across the country and that for some reason they had decided to check our house. They thought that mum or dad were, I don't know, Republican inclined. Some guys would have given you a certain amount of stick, you know, 'Ye must be a big Provo family or something, to have the guards coming in big numbers like that'.

I would have got negative repercussions too. It wouldn't have been said to your face, but you knew that in the likes of school, teachers suddenly saw you through a slightly different prism; that you were 'one of them', and at the time Republicanism was very, very much a minority viewpoint here in the South. I can't put my finger on any incident at school where I could say I was specifically discriminated against but I knew there was a different tone to the way that adults dealt with you. You were also aware that kids who would have been mates – their parents would have been saying, you know, not to go to our house, because the guards had been there and obviously 'they are up to no good in that house.' So it did have an effect, but I wouldn't say it was an overly negative one.

I am in no way regretful about what my parents did and I'm quite proud of the fact that I would have, just by maintaining my silence and keeping the secret there was in our house of men on the run, played some small part in republicanism. I have never viewed it as a negative in my life, it's something that I have pride in with a small 'p'. I'm not thinking I've done great service to Republicanism just by being a youngster in a safe house. But at the same time, I'm proud of the role we played in allowing Republicans to stay here when they needed a place to put their heads down, they needed some space with family or with their partner or whatever. Your front door was open.

You might have seen someone that little bit more regularly and that's when we would have formed some kind of relationship with people. You got to know them, although you mightn't have gotten to know their name or their background, though you could guess from the accent where they were from. You wouldn't have known if they were from a big family or a small family, but you would get to know the kind of person they were in terms of be they respectful, or polite, or a bit more outgoing, or talkative, or you would get to know them by what they wanted to watch on telly – you got some kind of insight into them. So, even though I would have known some of these guys for quite a number of years I wouldn't have known their real names. I would have known them by their nicknames or whatever name they used as they moved around the countryside. Basically, you had been asked by local Republicans to keep a person in your house for whatever length of time it was and it wasn't your business to know who they were.

There was one guy who stuck out. He only stayed sporadically, but I was aware that he would mainly have been living in safehouses in the vicinity because you would have seen him quite often. He was a character; and after being in the house on several occasions you got to know him, you knew a bit about his background and you knew from the way he carried on that he was a fairly jovial type of person, he was good craic, he would talk about anything, he would talk about sport, and he would talk about his own family or where he came from or he might talk about what was going on anywhere in the world, but the one thing he never really wanted to get into any conversation with was specifics about the North. It was not something you ever pushed.

I got to know him afterwards and I admired the man for many of the things he went through. It said an awful lot to me. He was never a shallow person but because you only got to scratch the surface, you would just perceive him as being an outgoing person. But once I knew what his name was, I knew his background story and you would admire the person because he has an inner steel that you would never have been aware of.

There was a hidden depth that he would only show to a small number of other people and I'm thankful that he allowed me to see that. He was always very good to the extent that he would try never to turn up at our house empty-handed and by and large these would have been guys who hadn't much money. My mum and my dad would sometimes try to give them a few pound if they were leaving the house because they were living hand to mouth.

They would have to eat whatever was given to them, because they were imposing on your hospitality. They would never say 'I don't like this or I don't like that'. They had to accept the conditions they were in and indeed some of the houses would have been a bit rough in character. They accepted that was part and parcel of their lifestyle. Some houses would have been very swanky with the best of food and the best of everything. But they would never differentiate. There might have been some houses they would have been more willing to stay in than others, but at the end of the day they accepted that whatever house they were put into, the person who was opening their door to them was doing it with the best of intention, so they would have respected each of those people equally.

I remember one of the guys telling me that he stayed in six or seven different houses on six or seven nights. He moved from house to house night after night, and in nearly every house he got bacon and cabbage and boiled potatoes! He was laughing about it and he says, 'after three or four days, you just can't look at another bit of hairy bacon!' But he ate it anyway. Some of the families would be like ours, tight around the house financially. But the dinner was on and if one of these guys was in the house, the dinner got split six ways and there was no questioning that. Whatever we had in the house, that person was as welcome to it as a member of the family.

Being in a small house, we always sat in the living room together. Some guys would be extremely quiet and would watch whatever was on – if my mum was watching Coronation Street – he watched Coronation Street. But you would have eaten as a family and you would have gotten up in the morning and had breakfast together. There were many mornings I would have come down and there was a strange man at the table eating my porridge! Of course, there was more porridge made for me, but you didn't view it as surprising to come down in the morning and to find a man, an adult man, at the table and your mother making him breakfast.

You just treated it as the most normal thing in the world, and he might have said, 'I'm Pat', and I'd say 'I'm Enda', and he would have said, 'are you going off to school?'. He would try in his own way to make some conversation with you, and you knew it was probably more awkward for him than it was for me. He was probably going from household to household and having to strike up some form of civil relationship where he could have a conversation with people in the house – and then maybe having to move two days later to another house and having to do the whole thing all over again. So it had to be hard on guys like that. After a while you got to know how to make conversation with a guy who was staying and to make it as easy as possible for them.

It was probably like having a relation staying in the house for a while, you were a bit more on your best behaviour, you wouldn't be rowing, you wouldn't be fighting over the TV or anything like that while they were there. These guys were just looking for a bit of space or a bit of breathing time or whatever and you wanted to make it as easy as possible for them and as relaxed as possible.

You tried to accommodate them as best you could, and especially if they brought a partner here, or family, you tried to give them as much space as you could. Some of them could be weeks, months without seeing family. If members of their family were coming, it would have to be arranged very, very carefully because there would probably have been some level of surveillance on immediate members of the family. Some of these family members would have travelled quite some distance to come here and if they were seen by local Gardaí they would have been immediately alerted to the fact that a certain person was living or staying somewhere in this region. So you knew that occasions like that were very special to these people. We would try and leave them alone as much as we could, but living in a small house, it wasn't that easy.

By and large, nearly to a person they were men, and most of them would have been anywhere from early 20s to their mid-to-late 40s – mainly men in their 20s and 30s. There were some guys who were a bit rough, who would have cursed, you know, effed and blinded a bit too much. My mother would have certainly not approved because she had kids in the house. But you accepted that this was part and parcel of who that person was and it was more important to keep that person in the house than to say, 'that person is a bit too loud or a bit too rough'. I can't think of anybody who I disliked. There were people you felt indifferent to because they had very little interaction with you – that may have been self-discipline or the nature of the person.

There would have been some people who you worried about after they left because you had formed a relationship with them. You worried about them because first of all, you didn't know if you would see them again, you didn't know if they were leaving the house to take part in some activity, you didn't know if they were just going to go to another safe house, you didn't know if they were going to be arrested 100 yards down the road so you would say to yourself, 'I hope such and such is okay'.

I'm not saying they would have been suffering from anxiety, but there were some people who had more of a nervous disposition. You would have caught them at times looking out, peering out behind the curtains to see what was outside, and me mother or me dad would say, 'get away from the window', or whatever, 'somebody will see you'. It would have constantly been on their minds that sitting here

in one place for any length of time, they could have been opening themselves up to being arrested.

There would have been some guys who you could see were visibly very relaxed, they felt safe. I would assume the ones who would have had a more nervous disposition would have been guys who might only recently have been living this lifestyle. I knew one guy who was several years 'on the run', coming in and out of the house and he was extremely casual. I don't mean casual to the extent that he was parading around inside the house during the daytime or that he was taking unnecessary risks, I mean in the sense that he was comfortable, he accepted that that was his way of life, he wasn't looking over his shoulder the whole time. He would be very disciplined and would only come in and out of the house during night-time hours when there was less chance of being seen.

The first couple of times there was a knock on the door when you had someone staying you would be very jumpy. But it wouldn't be markedly unusual for somebody to come knocking at the door – it could be a relation or it could have been a neighbour living across the way. When the person came to the house first, you would have been told a sort of semi-cover story, that 'this is Pat, or this is Mick or whatever, and he's looking for work in the area', so that if anybody came into the house and said, 'who's your man?', I says, 'he's a guy that dad knew from building sites years ago and he is just down here on spec looking for work, I don't know if he'll be around for long'. So, when there was a knock on the door, you didn't immediately get all nervy and go pushing the guy under the stairs or anything like that. I never really thought about it until now but I'd assume that when visitors came into the house that if there was a strange man there and invariably a lot of them would have had northern accents; my relatives had to have been suspicious. They would have known my parents' political sympathies and they would probably have put two and two together. But it was never spoken about and I've never heard any relation ever questioning my parents about any of these people.

They probably would have thought, 'that's one of them Provos' or whatever but they kept their mouths shut because they may or may not have agreed, but they probably respected my parents' right to do what they did. I assume they knew that it was in the best interests of our family not to broadcast that there was strange people staying in the house. So, I never even thought of it until now but you didn't get

nervous, you didn't start sticking guys into cupboards and stuff like that every time there was a knock on the door.

If the guy stayed in the house more than 24 hours, there was going to be somebody arriving at the door at some stage, so after a while you just got used to how you deal with those situations. You realised that as long as you kept quiet about it, as long as the person who stayed in your house didn't go wandering around during the daytime, as long as you didn't do anything to bring suspicion on the house, there was no point in actually getting your head beat up about it. You had come to the realisation that if the guards came to raid the house, they came to raid the house to get this guy. They would have had the house surrounded and the guy wasn't going to get away. So there was no point in trying to hide the person because if the guards came that far to raid a house they were going to find him.

I would assume they were never armed. I never asked, I never questioned, but I would assume with hindsight that guys who came to the house most definitely would not have been armed. It would have put the house under threat – I don't mean immediate danger from the firearm itself – but it would have meant that all the adults in the house could have been charged with possession of that weapon, not just the person who was carrying it. I would assume it was an unwritten thing that you wouldn't do anything to endanger the household you were staying in because that would break a certain bond of trust. You've opened your door and you are risking your house being raided and being labelled as a Provo house or whatever.

While they were taking a chance that they were going to get arrested, they weren't going to do anything to endanger a household, especially one with children in it, that the parents would end up in jail and basically leave things very hard for a family. I would be relatively confident that any of these people never carried a weapon into the house, not only our house but any household.

I did have concerns about the neighbours saying something. With the best will in the world, I don't think there are very many households anywhere in the country where somebody drives up to the house and it's not visible from somebody else's house. You have busybodies in every community and maybe they are not malicious, but there is this thing about being nosy and wanting to know what's going on in other people's lives. I don't doubt that there were people within our community who were very hostile to Republicanism and

would have to some extent been delighted to be able to ring up the guards and say, 'I think such and such a family is harbouring one of them Northern lads' or whatever. So yes, you were conscious of it.

I don't think anyone ever reported us. There was never anybody caught in our house which would lead me to believe that. But it was safer when you took nothing for granted. By and large, people moved during the night-time hours but if somebody was coming to your house, and you had a fairly good idea what time of the day it was, you would leave the door unlocked, so that that person could just walk straight in.

I can recall one or two times when it happened to be somebody's birthday. I definitely remember a birthday cake being produced for somebody who was staying. This would have been a person who stayed with us quite a number of times and that the family really liked. I don't know how me mum found out it was their birthday but obviously none of their family were going to see them – it's not like they could put a birthday card in the post and send it down to them or anything like that. Me mum – being a mother – would have been aware that he wasn't with his own family. My mum had a few favourites and she might have a treat for dinner. You wouldn't have seen steak very often in our house or a roast chicken during the week, but sometimes, a special kind of dinner might be cooked especially for a guy staying in the house and invariably we all had a share in it too.

You would have seen on occasions, some of them, especially maybe one or two of the younger guys, would be itching to get out. They maybe wanted to have a pint and stuff like that and dad would have to explain to them the problems it would have caused even if they went out for a couple of hours and had a few pints. Once drink was imbibed, who knew what was going to be said.

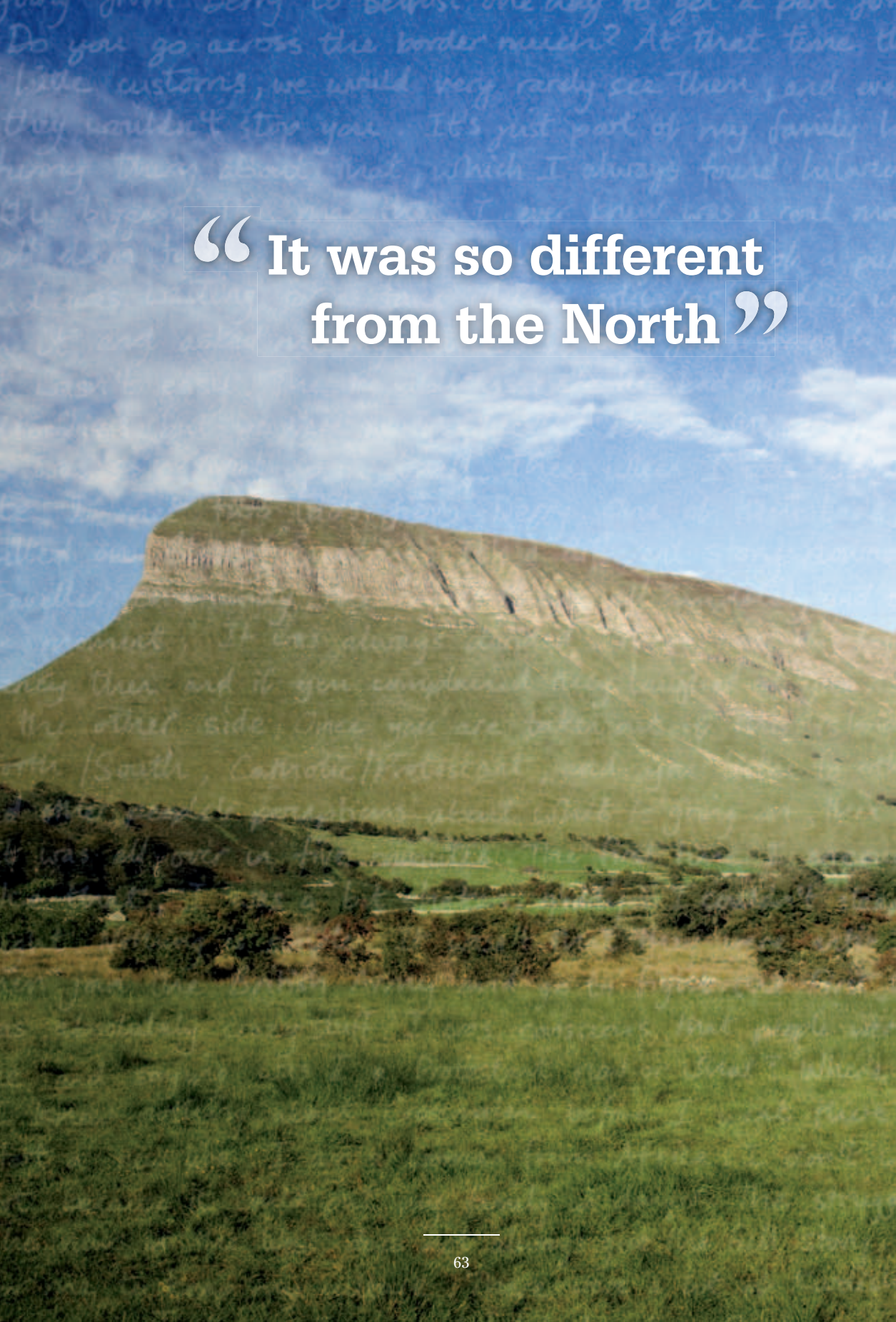
You were part of this kind of collective in terms of keeping the family secret – which was the guy staying in your house. The only threat to that guy was the guards, so you grew to be more conscious of keeping one eye open to see if there were extra patrol cars in your area. You learned very quickly what an unmarked Garda car looks like – it always had a D reg and it always had two aerials. You were constantly keeping your eye out for that if you were coming home from school, to see if there were any cars like that passing up and down the road more often than they should. You did grow to have – I

wouldn't say a hostile attitude towards the Gardaí – but to be very wary because you saw them to some extent as the enemy who would be after the guys in your house.

Being constantly aware just became a kind of a semi-natural thing to do. Most of my friends would probably have viewed the guards indifferently, as most young people do. My attitude wouldn't have been hostile but it wouldn't have been friendly towards them.

The strange thing is, for anybody who hasn't gone through this, they will think, 'this is extraordinary', you know, 'a young person being brought up in a house where there were men who were wanted by the security forces living there' – but it was normal, there was nothing extraordinary about it. The only thing was that you had to make sure you didn't talk about it outside the household.

Dad went out to work in the morning, came back at five o'clock in the evening or whatever time he would finish and we would sit down and have our dinner. Mum would do whatever housework she had to do or get a lift into town and do the shopping, and the guy was left behind in the house. You came in and he was sitting there and he would say 'how are you doing?' and you would chat – it was normal.


“It was so different from the North”

It was so different from the North

I am one of 10 children. They're all gone now, I'm the only one left. My father was in the First World War and the Second World War and a couple of my brothers were in the Second World War. I was on the Air Force then. I met my wife when I was home on leave. She was working in Tyrone, looking after two twin girls for a Protestant family. We fell in love and I went back off leave.

My wife was a convert – she did it of her own accord before we got married. Some friend of hers used to give her the Messenger magazine, that's what started her. When it was found out that she was going down to the convent getting instruction in Tyrone, the Minister came to the house she was working in about it so then she packed up and went home to the South.

All her people were Church of Ireland, all lovely people. Sligo people. Her brothers had all been in the Navy, and one of them in the Air Force. Her mother was a lovely woman, a Christian woman. She used to read her Bible every night and never turned a soul away from her door. There was a lot of Travellers at her funeral. The first time we came home after we were married, her mother and father said on the Saturday 'which church are you going to tomorrow'? Her mother said, 'I don't care which one it is as long as you are both going to the same one. And as long as the children will go to the same one'. Evelyn said, 'I am going to Mass, I am a Catholic now' and they said, 'that's all right'. It was so different from the North.

When she came home to the South Evelyn answered an ad for working on the buses in Birmingham. Herself and a girl from Galway both worked together. Nell was her bridesmaid and Nell's boyfriend was the best man.

We got married on a Saturday in June 1948. I got weekend leave to get married. I got out of the Air Force in the September and we stayed in Birmingham for a while, but it was impossible to get living accommodation so we came back home. You had to reside there in Birmingham for five years before you could even put your name down for a house, never mind get one. My mother told us that they were building new houses at home in the North, so we came home. We had the one boy at the time. We went into a Nissan hut in what had been a prisoner of war camp, along with quite a few other people, Catholics and Protestants. We got a Council house then.

I was working in the linen factory but you would get short time in the summertime; you would work three days and be off two. You got three pounds for working the three days and you had to accumulate 12 days then, on the dole, before you got any money from them. But you never ever accumulated 12 days because the factory took you back again before that.

The rent was three pounds nineteen and ninepence a week and we had three children. My parents helped us. My father was living in a house belonging to the Church at the time. He retired – he was a tailor – and moved into a British Legion house and we got his house from the Dean. The rent was only ten shillings a week. It made a big difference. Times were tough.

Now and again I would play in a band. I used to get three pounds for it. And I carried that three pounds with my life. If I had no cigarettes I wouldn't break it, I'd bring it home. Evelyn had an agreement with the school that we paid up their books during the year, whenever I had the money. Our whole emphasis was on educating the children – boys and girls – to give them a chance in life.

We often wondered later had we made the right decision in coming home from England that time. My wife being a convert didn't help when I went looking for jobs in Tyrone I can tell you. Too many people got to know it. When you went looking for a job in the North you had the one stroke against you always anyway. 'What school did you go to?' was the question if they weren't sure about your name and that.

So I had spells of work, and quite some spells of unemployment too. I worked in the linen factory, I worked in a grocery shop, I worked in a print works. I worked in Moygashel factory which was a big linen factory but you went in there on the lowest, and you never rose above

that. Because you were a Catholic. You would have a labourer type job should you be there all your life.

I worked for a fella at a depot one time and I was sacked, just told 'we don't need you anymore'. I got six pound and half a crown a week from him. I got the extra half crown about three years previously, and for that half crown I had to work at the house on Saturday at the garden, and every other Sunday I had to take the boss's car up to Portora, collect his three sons and bring them home. All that for an extra half crown. So six pound and a half crown I was getting. He sacked me and I went on the dole and I got £11. Then at the end of the year you went on to what was called National Assistance. That didn't pay as much so I went down from £11 to £5 and some odd shillings.

Mind you, you couldn't have worked for your Catholic folk because they wouldn't pay you. I never worked for a Catholic only the once and I was paid peanuts. Catholic employers treated their workforce worse: you were discriminated against there too, as a worker.

And, people couldn't understand this at all you know. Especially later when we went to England and told people about it. They couldn't even understand the voting system for local councils, where, if you were a business owner, you had a vote, you and your wife for the business premises and for your own house, and depending on the rateable valuation of the property, so many of your employees had a vote there too as well for their own homes. So you hadn't a pup's chance of ever being on an equal footing with them, although our area was divided equally, half and half Catholic and Protestant.

I applied for a job in the Post Office. I used to work there at Christmas, when they took on extra help. Part of the qualifications for getting a Post Office job in the North was that you had to be an ex-service person; that was the priority, if you had that you were in, you know?

I remember one Christmas saying to the postmaster 'what's the chance of getting a permanent job?' The assistant postmaster was present and he said, 'as long as we are here there will be no papishes working in this office'. No humming and hawing about it – he just said it straight out.

So I wrote to the Postmaster General and talked about discrimination, because there were two vacancies and you had to be able to drive or ride a bicycle or both, which I could do. So I was turned down and these two blokes got the job – one fella couldn't

drive and he walked with a bicycle because he couldn't ride it. The other fella – they got rid of him after six weeks because he could neither read nor write and everybody was getting the wrong mail. So I wrote off to appeal this to the postmaster general and after, oh it must have been three months at least, the answer came back saying that on each and every occasion there was a vacancy, it was given to those best qualified. That was around 1960. Before the Troubles at all.

I lived with that from day one. As I say it was bad enough if they knew you were a Catholic, you knew you there were jobs you would get and jobs you wouldn't get.

My brother came home after the war out of a prisoner of war camp, and the personnel manager of the factory came up to welcome him home. He said, 'Now, when you want a job come down and see me'. And the brother says to him, 'listen, if you had given me a job before I joined the Army I wouldn't have been a prisoner of war for four years. You can stick your job'.

I ended up working in the local hospital from the dole. The girl in the dole office said to me 'you know they're looking for men in the new hospital'? I said to her that I had applied for a job. I said, 'I don't hold out much hope but', I said, 'I have two letters in my pocket here'. I had no letters! I said it because the manager was standing behind this girl. I said, 'I have one to the Queen and I have one to the Prime Minister because I already know who is getting the jobs so I am quite prepared to get turned down'. At this the Manager disappeared into the office and I could see him on the phone.

So I had my interview at the hospital anyway and Matron put every obstacle she possibly could in front of me – how dirty some of the work could be you know, people messing beds and things like that. I said, 'well, I have 10 children; I have changed nappies, you name it I have done it, it won't worry me in the least'. I got the job. I got it very reluctantly but at least I got it. But if I did, I got every dirty job that went with it including acting for four years as mortuary technician which meant post-mortems, autopsies – and without any training I might add. I did that for four years.

I worked on the medical wards. That was heavy because you were seeing the same patients day in and day out. I tried several times to get a change off the ward but I could never understand why I couldn't get it when others could. And I never found out until I left that the consultant physician always blocked it. When I asked why he said,

'you were better than medicine to the patients'. I used to have a craic and a laugh with them.

I remember the last post-mortem I did, there were two fellas and a girl killed one Saturday night in a van going home, where it left the road and hit a tree. The girl was my second cousin. The State Pathologist was up doing those three post-mortems on the Sunday and I was there working at it alongside him.

On the next day Monday, I was over at the canteen getting a cup of tea in the morning and a couple of the Protestant lads there, one of them said, 'you had a rough day yesterday'. I said I had three to do, and that the girl would have been a second cousin of my own. They said it was bad enough cutting up a dead body, never mind a relation of your own. I said, 'how do you manage, when you are doing them? He says, 'what? That's not part of our job, we don't do that'. They had exactly the same job that I had.

Four or five days later there was another one and I was on my day off. An ambulance man was sent to my house: 'Matron says to tell you there's a post-mortem at three o'clock this afternoon'. I said, 'I'm on my day off, Charlie'. And he looked at me if it as if I had two heads. 'But the matron said…' I said, 'will you tell her I'm on my day off; some of the rest of the fellas will probably do it' I knew damn well that they wouldn't.

When I went in the next morning there was a message to call to Matron's office at nine o'clock. I went in and she devoured me. Oh she gave me dog's abuse. And I let her get on with it, and when she stopped I said, 'now Matron you have said your piece and I'll say mine. I'm the only one that has to do that job. I was never trained for it, I had to pick it up as I went along, but none of my Protestant colleagues has to do it. Can you explain that to me?' 'Get out' she says.

There was no fair employment agency then and if you complained they laughed at you. It was discrimination right left and centre.

Whenever they disbanded the B Specials and started the Ulster Defence Regiment, myself and quite a few other Catholics and that's including a couple of brothers of Austin Currie's, we all joined up at the one time. His brothers left it later for various reasons but pure intimidation had a lot to do with it. I was fortunate in that I joined it and went on to be full-time.

I have always considered myself to be Irish. Many's the time I reflected what difference it would have been if I had stayed at the

hospital until I retired. I probably would have been far better off as regards the Troubles. No side was picking on you, you worked in a hospital, you were sort of a neutral person, because you were treating both sides. You got that bit of respect. As I say, if I had have been decently treated I probably would have stayed there. But when you're trying to rear ten and educate them and that, another pound was another pound.

I joined the UDR, because it paid me, believe it or not, 30 shillings a week more than I was getting in the hospital and doing all the dirty jobs. I joined it to get out of the flipping hospital.

We hated the B Specials. My own next door neighbour had stopped me night after night coming from the dance or that, and asked me 'what's your name?' You know, living next door, the house right next door to you, and if you said anything, you know you're told 'don't be cheeky, what's your name?' I thought, and friends of mine thought the same thing, which was that when they got rid of the B Specials and were starting the Regiment it would be a chance for the Catholics to get in. I often said afterwards, if the Catholics had joined in numbers then they could have run it. They could have had uniforms, weapons and paid, and they wouldn't have been complaining that the only cars and people they stopped and hassled were Catholics.

But of course it didn't happen. A lot of people were afraid you know. A lot of people were afraid to join it. A schoolmaster friend of mine said to me once, 'I don't know how you can take their money'. I said, 'who's paying you? What's the difference?' 'Oh there's a difference' he said. I couldn't see it. So there was quite a few Catholics did join at the start, but gradually there was that many Protestants, and nearly all ex-B men that came in, it was made obvious to the Catholics that they weren't wanted. I often had it shouted after me, but you could never see who did the shouting, 'this is a nonsectarian Protestant force'. They were ignorant so-and-so's.

When I was promoted, a woman I knew had just lifted the phone to make a call, and in those days you could get onto someone else's line by mistake. She heard a conversation going on and one fella was telling the other fella about me getting promoted. He said: 'over my effing dead body he will'. When she told me the name I knew immediately who she was talking about. So that was the situation.

Of course they all knew too that my wife had been Church of Ireland, and converted to being a Catholic. That was another stroke

against me. The way they looked at it was that because you married a Protestant you must have made her turn.

They didn't want a Catholic in the UDR. You always knew you had to watch your back but I was high enough up in rank to be able to cope with it. They were very nice to my face and I knew that, but then again you see I was in a position where they really couldn't get at me. I was doing too good a job where I was too. I had responsibility for too much: ordering weapons, ordering ammunition, things like that. I was dealing with more things than you would normally expect a Catholic to be dealing with in what then was basically a Protestant force. I could have got rid of them maybe quicker than they could have got rid of me if they tried to do me any harm, but they never did, because they knew I was too well in. I was close to the highest ranking officer at the time, who was a Catholic. His wife used to call on my wife and they were always very sympathetic because he knew what it was like to be a Catholic in the UDR.

When I joined, I saw it as different because you were working for the Army and so you were dealing with English people. They were in charge and they would have traced your background and found out that your family background was an Army background. You could be trusted in other words. You are well checked out before you are taken on. I was told at the very start when I got the job 'It is because we know we can trust you'. That was the British Army people on account of my family's service.

The Army never expected the UDR to last more than about seven or eight years. It replaced the B Specials and they thought that they would put so much discipline into them in the UDR that they would get rid of it too. But it wasn't until later on that they put Army discipline on it and the other ones weren't as keen on joining then, and then eventually when they made it the Royal Irish Regiment, when they could be posted anywhere, they were gone. It was like during the war, when Protestant families on the street were I lived, as soon as there was talk about conscription they were packed already for heading to the South, because De Valera had done away with all that.

There was a fella at home, a Protestant fella and one time he had been in the Enniskillen Fusiliers with a brother-in-law of mine that was killed in Italy. He stood for the Labour Party in the local election, and he was out in this village when a Protestant Minister – who was from Cork originally – said to him 'you are wasting your time coming

out here, we are good Loyalists'. This fella answered – he was from Boho up in County Fermanagh – he says, 'it's not the Crown you are loyal to he says, it's the half crown'!

He had been in the Orange Order and everything and scrapped the whole lot. 'I have fought with Catholics' he said, 'religion never came into it; they watched my back and I watched their back'.

Evelyn was frightened that something could happen to me. I remember I was going out one night to start the car to warm it up. We were going to play bowls. As soon as I got into the car, I just turned the key and this boom went up. I thought myself 'it's the car'. I was looking down to see were my legs still there. Evelyn says to some of the children, she says, 'they've killed your father'.

But it wasn't me, it was two lads that were moving a bomb up at the end of the street.

But I knew one fella in particular, as he got into his car and turned it on, and lost the two legs from above the knee. And he wasn't in the UDR, he wasn't in the UVF or anything at all, he was just a Protestant man. It was just a sectarian attack.

We used to live next door to a pub at one stage, it belonged to a family that had three pubs round about. The IRA were always asking for protection money, and because they refused to pay they blew up the three pubs.

Another dear friend of mine and his wife, they locked the door one night and told him – right in the middle of a Catholic area like, it's not as if it was a mixed area even – that for a pound a week they would watch his property and no harm would come to him. He says, 'I've lived here all my life, no harm would come to us, we haven't an enemy in the world'. That night they broke every window in the house. They came the next day and told him that if he had have been paying up that wouldn't have happened. So he boarded up the windows rather than pay it.

I was approached very subtly one time. People knew the job I had and I was asked 'Would there be any spare ammunition?' I says, 'no I wouldn't have any spare ammunition'. That was all there was to it. I always knew the fella was involved you know but I thought I'd rather it be on his conscience than mine.

Dunnes were building a big shop in one of the streets, and the IRA had fired at the boys that had started working on the foundations.

And then put in for protection money. Dunnes pulled out and there is still a big lump of waste ground up there.

They were some times of it. I remember a woman that had been a neighbour of mine – the husband was lifted and he was held for three days so for the three days the Sinn Féin crowd brought groceries and all to the house, got her coal and everything. She said, 'I hope they keep him in, I never was as well off in my life'!

I remember a supermarket in Dungannon and every Friday there used to be this bomb scare, but it was noticed after awhile that these same three women were rushing out with their trolleys full. A notice was put up that should the alarm go off no trolleys were to leave the shop. So the bomb scares stopped!

A wee woman up on my estate, I remember reading in the paper one time she got two and a half thousand. A bomb went off somewhere, and she said she got such a shock that she fell out of the bath and hurt her back. My other neighbour said, 'that's miraculous for she was sitting drinking tea with me when that bomb went off!'

There was lots of scams like that went on. My next-door neighbour – a bomb went off up the road, and the television wasn't working well so she flung it on the floor! She got a new telly off the insurance. It was ridiculous the things that went on!

But then again there were young people that was lifted off the streets and locked up, and they knew nothing about guns or bombs, but they knew all about them by the time they got out again.

I remember internment too, ah, that was desperate. I knew people that were lifted and some of them I would have had my doubts about, but more of them I knew was involved in nothing. I remember I used to tell the man I knew in the Special Branch about it. He says, 'we're not lifting them it's the Army'. He said, 'all it takes is for somebody to ring them up and tell them that a person sympathises with the Provos and they'll be lifted and thrown in'.

Every time the Scotch regiments came to Northern Ireland there was trouble, every time. The English regiments you put up with; you got the odd bad egg but the majority of them were decent enough. But once the Scots people arrived that was trouble. Me being in the UDR was really no protection from that sort of thing. When our own children were coming from school, from a Catholic estate they were always stopped by the troops, and they were getting a lot of hassle from the Army.

It turned people against them. I used to say to the regular army officers 'if you treat the people decently you'll have no problem with them, but if you start on them just because they are Catholics, you will get their backs up and then they'll be anti-British'. The people that were anti-British at that time were a minority really. People were anti-Unionist, they weren't anti-British. People would have voted for the devil before they would have voted for a Unionist. It was a protest vote, a lot of the Sinn Féin vote.

I remember telling people in England that I was working with what it was like in the North and they just didn't believe it. 'Oh no, it couldn't be like that'. I remember talking to Mervyn Rees when he was the Home Secretary, and I was in the UDR. He talked about the situation in the North and where it had gone. 'Well' I said, 'there's nobody really to blame for this situation in the North apart from the British Government'. And he looked at me. 'How do you make that out?' I said, 'you were all aware of the discrimination that was going on in the North. All knew exactly the position the Catholics were in, and nothing was ever done about it'. I said, 'it was like they said – a Protestant Government for a Protestant people. Paisley said "no surrender never, never, never" and you all sat back and listened to all this. Nobody ever did anything about it. People protested, but if you did you were told it was a matter for the Northern Ireland Government. We tried but it was a waste of time. Then when it all blew up in your face…'

We lived in a Catholic area then. I must say that for the majority of my neighbours, it made no difference me being in the UDR, because I came from an Army background so they were not surprised I would join up. One of my brothers who'd been in the army and had been a prisoner of war in the last war lived on the estate, and the majority of people, you know, they would say to you 'watch yourself, watch yourself'. And then you had the other ones who would say, 'how're you doing' with a big smile – and they were the ones you had to watch.

So I worked gradually up and went into the Quartermaster's Department, supplying everything to them. I sometimes acted as Quartermaster when they hadn't got a Quartermaster, because the Quartermasters were all regular soldiers from England who would come on a three-year appointment. The Quartermaster's Department accounts for everything that the Army uses from bootlaces to rifles. Even the food.

Every couple of years you would have the Ministry Inspectors. I always got a good report and then one year I got what they call a 'mention in dispatches'. It's an oak leaf that you wear on your medal ribbon for 'distinguished service'. I remember we had a Colonel came with his wife. They were English Catholics. He said to me 'I see you've got a mention in dispatches, I have one too' he says, 'what did you get yours for? I says, 'I'm not sure sir, I think I got it for being a Catholic'! He roared laughing. I had the trust of my senior officers.

I loved the job. I'll be quite honest with you, I loved it you know? I was desk-bound, I wasn't out running the roads, and I was behind a desk all day. I never ever really thought of myself as being in danger. I wasn't annoying anybody stopping them on the road, I looked after the handing out of weapons at night to boys going out on patrols but I was never out on patrols myself. From that point of view, I felt safe, you know?

I wasn't surprised that some UDR men were targeted because I knew that they were so bigoted that they would have stopped Catholic cars and they would give them plenty of hassle.

I remember one particular family, and this fellow was stopped one night by a particular patrol, and they found bullets in the boot of his car. His father approached me when I was at home and he said, 'my son never had bullets'. I said, 'well I'll see what I can do – I don't know what I can do but if I can do anything I will'.

So I went to this friend I had who was on the Police Special Branch, and I asked him would he by any chance be able to get me one of the bullets that was found in X's car. He said, 'I have a couple of them in here as a matter-of-fact'. So I got them and I compared them with the ammunition that we held and supplied and it was UDR ammunition. They threw it into the car on him you see? They never thought anybody was going to check but on the base of every bullet there's a date and a number. I went to the Colonel who just happened to be a Catholic, and I told him 'that fella is as innocent as the day is long, that's one of the bullets that I supplied'. The fella got off.

I would hate to see anybody being accused wrongfully. My conscience wouldn't let me sit back and do nothing, but I always did things in such a way that nobody could say the information came from me.

As for the patrol that was out that night, well they were all chased and put out of the UDR, about 10 of them. I remember a fella in the

Regiment that went into an empty house where there was a risk of explosives. He was told to stay out but he went in. He had a torch. There was a bomb with a photoelectric cell in it, and as soon as he put on that torch it went up and he was killed. There were a lot of wreaths from the UDA and the UVF at his funeral.

There was another crowd was the same, involved with the paramilitaries, and the army wondered how the hell they were going to get rid of them because there were so many of them. There were scores of them. I said, 'bring them in some night to check their weapons, and when you get the weapons hang onto them'. That's what they did. They got rid of a whole platoon. They were all UDA men to the backbone.

I never thought of joining the police, I don't know why. But I knew some very good Catholics that were policemen. One fella was got after a phone call came in one night to his police station looking to get a message to a family that lived outside the town, up a lane. The family had relatives in Monaghan and one of them had died very suddenly. This fella went out immediately, him and another policeman, who was a Protestant, to deliver this message to the family. When they turned up the lane they were opened up on with two machine guns, each side of the road. Ambushed. That was in 1975. The two of them was killed.

I could never understand how a Catholic could take somebody's life, and not even give them time to say a prayer, you know, not knowing what way they were, at peace with their God or not. To have that on your conscience to me would have been something shocking. We were all given a weapon for our own personal protection in the UDR, but I never carried one. If they were going to shoot you, they would shoot you, and I couldn't see myself shooting somebody else.

Anyway it all went well until 1978, when they reckoned then that it was time that there were no Catholics in the UDR; the IRA thought it was time that they all got out of it. So this threat came to me. I knew the threat had come to other members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and some of them I wasn't surprised at because I knew what their attitude would be to people on the road, especially Catholics. Others I was very surprised at because they were very nice decent people, some of them were ex-service people like myself you know, and I knew it wouldn't be because they would insult anybody or that.

It was intimidation from the Provisionals that made most Catholics leave the UDR. They were all targeted. Several Catholics were shot. By the time I left, there might have been a half a dozen Catholics in the battalion. Most of them had been on the services, been on the army or that, and come forward again. There was no work.

We used to put up with a bomb scare once a week at our house. When this news came for me, they made an arrangement whereby they wanted me to stay in the house myself with three SAS men, and then when this fella came to shoot me they would shoot him. I knew who this fella was; he had been my neighbour, a Catholic fella. I got a terrible shock when I heard who was coming to do the job. They knew who this bloke was because the army always had spies inside the IRA; most people knew that. I said, 'no way'. I said, 'I have brothers here and their families and that's a risk I wouldn't be prepared to take'.

This warning came from military intelligence on a Saturday afternoon at four o'clock. I was out of the house at half past four and I was never back into it again. The family were taken out of it that night, about half five, because they said there was a risk that if they couldn't get me they might hold some of the family hostage to get at me. So they were all taken out, and that was on Saturday. We spent the Sunday in the Army camp and on Monday the family all went off on the boat to England. I left on the Monday and arrived in England on the Tuesday. We were in temporary Army quarters.

Once we were in England we were out of the way as far as the Provos were concerned. At that time they were happy that they got you out of the country. So from that point of view the only reason the IRA wanted rid of me was that I was about one of the last few Catholics in the UDR in the North of Ireland and they were going to get rid of us one way or the other.

When we arrived in England we were told by the Army 'don't you worry, we will look after you'. Until it come down to it and then there was no looking after you. You would be told that you were in the Ulster Defence Regiment, and that's not the same as the army because they never served outside of Northern Ireland. But I proved them wrong. I went into the Army headquarters in London to see this General, Commandant of the London district, and I brought my warrant card with me. Down in one corner it says, 'Warrant Officer Second Class, Regular Forces'. So I stuck that in front of his nose.

We had been staying with my daughter but there was not enough room for us all. Eventually we got a flat on an army base, army quarters with a six month stay, but that was all I got. If I hadn't agitated on my own behalf I would have got nothing. If I had been in the civil service or the police, I would have walked into a job and a house. I knew people that left, policemen and civil servants that was forced to leave like we were, and they walked straight into the civil service and the police in England.

All our stuff was left behind. We eventually got it but well, we didn't get it all, we got bits and pieces. You expect that sort of thing, unfortunately. A fella I knew at home, an Army fella, he arranged for us to get most of it.

We moved out of the Army base after six months and got a council place. And we spent 13 or 14 years there. I worked in an electronics factory. Evelyn hated it. When she left it nearly broke her heart, having to get up and go like that with the children.

But then, she eventually realised you know, that from the children's point of view, they were going to get a better chance in life.

Afterwards, looking back on it, she said apart from me not having been killed, they did us a good turn. The children got work without any problem. Nobody asked them what school they went to. If they had the education and could do the job, they got it. From that point of view it was great. Thank God, they all did exceptionally well in life.

When I look back at the Troubles and the killings and all that, and see them all sitting up all smiles up there, Sinn Féin and them all, I think to myself, all them lives lost for what? Look at them Sinn Féin boys now, all sitting up in Stormont drawing their salaries. Hypocrites.

I was with the British Legion from when I left the air force, and I was services secretary. If an ex-service family was in trouble, especially during Christmas time, you helped them out financially or whatever way they needed. Mostly the clients I had were Catholics, but there was Protestants too. I helped everybody, it made no difference. Some of these ones were the greatest Sinn Féin supporters, and I thought, of all the bloody hypocrisy! A big hamper, bags of coal and all at Christmas time!

I never would have viewed the IRA as an Army, because by and large armies don't attack the civilian population. There was over 3,000 civilians, the majority of them Catholics, many who died by the IRA, never mind the ones who had died by the UDA and the UVF. I don't

know how they did that; I often thought to myself, how under God are they going to meet their maker with all that on their conscience? Like these Disappeared, that's buried away in bogs and nobody knows. Even if somebody belonging to you is killed, you'd like to be able to think you can bury them and go and see the grave. Not wait for years and years, or forever.

I couldn't be killing anyone. No, I couldn't have killed anybody. I could have fired a shot at them, you know, but it wouldn't have killed them. My conscience would never let me do that. When I was in the air force during the war I wasn't involved in that side of it. I was in stores, looking after equipment. I would have it in my mind – if you kill somebody, are they prepared to die? You would hate to send somebody into eternity that wasn't prepared to go. I am not a saint – anything but! But I try to do my best, let's put it that way.

I could understand why some people went that way though. I would have liked to have seen the country united. I still think it would be better as a united country.

Looking back, it's just life, these things happen for whatever reason. I have regrets and I have no regrets. I have regrets the putting the family through what I must have put them through. I have regrets about that. But then again, when we left the country, the family all did better. So from that point of view, it was completely worth it.

The thing about England was, people didn't give a damn about what church you went to, or whether you went to church or not. If you can do the job you get the job. You know, we found that very strange.

The Troubles raised a terrible divide. But then again, it always was divided.

Although, I must say, my Protestant neighbours before the Troubles, at Christmas time they would have been making up wee parcels for my children, which was lovely you know. But all that went out the window then once the Troubles started. Politics divided people.

My family was very lucky from way back. If a Protestant neighbour died my father went to the church to the funeral. At that time it was frowned for a Catholic to go into a Protestant church. My father always maintained that if you go into a church and say a prayer, you are praying to God, you're not praying to Protestants, you are praying to God. And he always kept that up, you know, and we were brought

up the same way. Politics was really never discussed; it was a thing to be avoided. The attitude was that politics was not good, not decent. Avoid politics if you can. But it was very hard to avoid it. I remember the old Canon saying Mass one time, and he says, 'it says here, say something about the coming election'. The local nationalist MP was sitting in the front row with his wife. The Canon says, 'Say something about the election? I don't trust any of them'. He wasn't far wrong!

When I retired in England I never considered going back to the North, not for one minute. One of my boys came back for a while, he worked in a factory and he was the only Catholic ever to get a job on the maintenance side of that factory at that time. He was an engineer. Then he left and he's worked abroad ever since. I missed home in a way, but I still have close friends there, including close Protestant friends that I keep in touch with. Some of them I served in the UDR with and some I ran about with at school and we are still close.

I often thought to myself had I stayed what would I have done when I was retired out of the UDR? I wouldn't have been any better off for getting a job, I was still a Catholic. But I could still have been a target, so in that respect it did us a favour in the end, and the children all did well. I have been back up North once things quietened down, but before that I would still have been worried.

But I found a big difference when I came to live here in the South.

I love being here. I love Sligo. I love the people. I loved coming to somewhere when nobody wanted to know what your religion was, or that it mattered what your religion was. It's great. Even with the in-laws and all, it never made the slightest bit of difference – religion; it's your own business.

When my wife died, my eldest son thought it would be lovely if she was buried in her home parish graveyard with all her family. Coming from the North I said, "that's hardly feasible', but we approached all the relevant people and no-one had a problem on either side with it. So she is buried in the graveyard in her home place, in the Church of Ireland graveyard. She is the only Catholic in it. There'll be two of us in it when I go.


“If I was born
on the other side”

If I was born on the other side

I was lucky to be brought up in Sligo, I think Sligo is a beautiful place, but if I came from Newtownabbey, or East Belfast, wouldn't I die for my flag, wouldn't I put the Union Jack around me when I see that these invaders from the South, whose population is increasing, are moving closer to us? Wouldn't I see it as the enemy banging on my door? Wouldn't I defend my parents and my brothers and sisters and my patch? I could be doing that if I was born on the other side.

It was them and us, you know? There was a huge them, because it was just the Catholic community that was the 'us', and then you had the Protestant community, with the soldiers, and the police force and that was 'them'. The Catholics in the North, my family, were probably nearly like the blacks in America or something, you know? The whole system was weighted against them.

And that's what I grew up with. If you're dealing with a police force that you see as your enemy, how do you report simple things like a burglary or a car crash – if you are calling your enemy? You knew these people were not on your side. So a line was drawn in the sand about who was on one side and who was on the other side.

When I was 17 I went to London. And I ended up sharing a room with a fella that was a good Protestant East Belfast man. He was the same age that I was, and we went out for months, and drank, and worked together and Northern Ireland wasn't mentioned, until one night he said to me, in a pub, we had only had two or three drinks, he said to me 'can I ask you a personal question?'. I said, 'go on'. He was a bit smaller than me and lighter than me and I would be well able to handle him, so he got a wee bit afraid then and he said, 'Ah I'm not going to ask you because you'll only get upset', and I said, 'ask me the question'. He didn't ask me the question for a while and

I actually thought that he was going to ask me was I a homosexual or something like that! So I nearly bullied it out of him then, I said, 'ask the question or I will break your jaw'. So he said, 'all right, all right, how long were you in London before you got used to wearing shoes?'

After that we had a chat He went to school in the 70s in Belfast and he said, 'we were told in school that people in the South had no tar on the road, no electricity, no phones, no shoes on their feet, that they all ate potatoes and they all burned turf, and that they did nothing else'. And that was his perception of the people of the South. He wanted to know how long I was in London before I got used to wearing shoes, because as far as he was concerned I never had a pair of shoes until I got to London!

That changed things for me because here was a person who was from the 'other side', who was 'the enemy', but it wasn't his fault, he was in a system where he was taught all these things, and now he was a young lad in a strange city the same as myself. We worked together, we had a drink together, and we had a laugh together. But he was educated in one part of the island and I was educated in the other part. Complete strangers we were, but sure, how would you go blaming him, if that's what he was brought up into? And I suppose he would say the same about me.

It opened my mind, being away from this island and working with all kinds of people. I worked in a factory with 240 men, there was only five of us white, the vast majority were Jamaicans, people who went over in the 1950's and had been there 20 years. They were lovely people. People that arrived from Jamaica that would have been in their 50's and 60's, and many of them looked after me. And I was very lucky that two foremen in the whole place were actually from Castlerea in Roscommon.

Once you are taken out of this island and away from North/South, Catholic/ Protestant, and you listen to other people's opinions and other people's perceptions about what is going on, then you realise things. You are looking back at Ireland from a distance, and you realise that it was ordinary people that you put down as 'a Loyalist Protestant'. They are just ordinary people that have to go to work,

pay the electricity bill and get sick and get on with life the same as you. Then you realise that it's what we were told and what we were fed – and that's on both sides of the border – that kept us apart. Of course as you get older and you realise that there was a reason for keeping us apart, because there were people making money out of it too. You mature and you grow up – it was crazy for 30 or 40 years slaughtering each other, for what? Pure madness.


“We only had the Provos”
O'Neills

We only had the Provos

I was a uniformed guard on border duty back in the 70s and 80s. I was a detective on the border as well so I had a long number of years service in total. Back in the 70s it was a very dangerous time there; shootings in the North, people going back down to the South after the shootings straight from the North. At times we were told not to go into the North. We weren't permitted because we were targets at one stage and there were certainly parts of the North we wouldn't go into – it wouldn't be safe. We were targeted by the PIRA. So if we were in the North we were legitimate targets – we were classed as security personnel.

We would have stopped people that had been doing a recce on an area coming back down again. We would have stopped people going North we believe might be doing something. When we stopped them they turned and went back, went away again. That would have happened on a regular basis. Some of them would be known to us personally, some wouldn't be from the area but they would be known to other members of the Gardaí, they would be PIRA people.

We would talk to them, sometimes we arrested them, and sometimes we wouldn't have reason to arrest them. In those times people were arrested on a very regular basis, Section 30 of the Offences Against the State Act says that all you had to have was a suspicion, and suspicion is a very, very wide word. You could arrest anybody on suspicion – it's still there actually – but it's not used now like it used to be, but it was used very commonly back in the 70s and early 80s at the border.

We were not really in huge danger say at a checkpoint, we weren't targets down here. They said we were legitimate targets once we were in the North but we weren't a target down here. Now in saying that I know members that were confronted in toilets in hotels and things like that – assaulted in toilets. I know a Garda whose car was later burned out following a confrontation he had with a PIRA member. They were different times, way different to nowadays.

You would have a sense of anxiety in certain areas, if you were on your own in an isolated area along the border, you would – but in the main – where we had our checkpoints on the main roads there'd be no sense of fear because we weren't targets there. But certainly if you were up in a quiet isolated area, you wouldn't know who would come along there at night-time. It would be confrontational I'm sure if someone came along and tried to get away if we hadn't many people on the ground. If you were in an isolated area, you could have eight, nine or ten border crossings. Some of those would only be dirt tracks, but you could walk back and over, you could drive back and over, you could go back and over on a motorbike. You might not be able to get back and over in a car. They were used both by the PIRA and smugglers and it wouldn't be a nice spot to be late at night on your own, or when I say on your own, with two uniformed Gardaí in the patrol car. There would be areas and times when of course you wouldn't feel comfortable.

I recall an incident that happened, it was a shooting in the North, it wasn't reported to us at the time and our marked Garda patrol car was out in an area only a few miles away and a car came along. There was a major confrontation, we had three people in our car and one was badly assaulted. The three got away and we had a good idea who they were – they weren't from the locality – but we knew one of them at the time. He was an active service IRA man from the south of Ireland who was attached to an active service unit along the border at the time. He was arrested afterwards but we had no evidence on him and because it was dark – we couldn't identify him.

If you had a special operation on, you would always be accompanied by the army, other times you'd be accompanied by armed detectives as well but a lot of times along the border they wouldn't be available to you. It would only be selected areas and selected times. Now in saying that, at some of the permanent checkpoints there would be army personnel on a permanent basis, they would be tucked in there with sandbags.

The IRA never took on the army, if the army were with us anywhere, they never took us on. If you look even in this day and age, the dissident element is here and if we have an army escort, for example with the big cash escort around the country, they are never touched. I can never remember anywhere on the border the army being taken on at the checkpoints, or shooting at them. So if you had the army with you, you were quite safe.

I never felt that uniformed members should be armed and I still feel that they shouldn't be. I would say if you asked the younger members nowadays, they would probably say in the main that they should be armed. But once we're not armed, we are not targets. If we were armed, we would be shot on sight. We have had some unarmed or uniformed members shot. But if we were armed I think we would have had a lot more uniformed members shot.

I think being armed would have changed the nature of the situation back in the time of the Troubles, I would say that we would have been targets if we were stopping people either coming back or on the way up doing something. I don't know if Gardaí on the border had a different perspective on this than Gardaí down the country because the IRA training units were down the country anyway. Most of them trained away from the border. There would be active units away from the border doing bank robberies and hold-ups and all that. They (Gardaí down the country) would be in danger if they were armed as well. I would like to qualify that – I was armed for about 12 years as a detective so I am well aware of what it is to be armed and what it is to be unarmed – and I firmly believe that we were far better off in uniform not armed and I still believe so.

After the Shannon's Cross incident (referring to an incident in Co. Roscommon in 1980 in which 2 members of the Gardaí were killed in a bank raid) there was uproar in the country at the time. There was outrage.

I would say that the PIRA at that stage knew they had got it wrong. It's different now to those times – those times they would have had support around the country – in every pocket of the country. But they need to have the community behind them and with that shooting I think they turned a lot of the community against them and it didn't work for them. I'm sure they would say that it shouldn't have happened either. It was a major turning point in the country in relation to the PIRA and ourselves. It was maybe the PIRA deciding on damage limitation and saying, 'look, this cannot go on because we let the community be against us'. I wouldn't say they would be overly concerned about confrontation with us but not having the community behind them would be the biggest problem.

It was a new concept at the time to shoot Gardaí when they were going away from a robbery – it was pretty ruthless – but I think at the time everybody knew that they couldn't continue in that vein. They

couldn't go shooting Gardaí on sight. If they did I think we would have had to go looking at whether we would be armed at that stage. It would have changed things around completely and if it continued I'm sure I would have a different perspective in relation to uniformed members being armed.

One of the Gardaí was armed and he was in plainclothes, but there was a uniformed Garda killed as well, it was a marked Garda car that they shot at and they shot at will. They riddled it. That would have been a turning point for the IRA – either we will continue doing this, we will take them on every time we meet them, or it was wrong. And I would say public opinion dictated to them that it was wrong and it didn't happen again or immediately afterwards anyway.

My family wouldn't really know much about my work. If I went off at night someplace they wouldn't know where I was going. I come from well away from the border. The concept of the border in my home place would be like a different country. They wouldn't know anything about it. The family wouldn't think of the danger or know danger or anything. They might say 'is it dangerous up there?' And you say 'it's not, it's okay' and that would be it then. They wouldn't be concerned about me or anything like that. If you are a bit concerned yourself you shouldn't be telling the country about it and especially your own immediate family; you shouldn't concern them as well. That's my opinion anyway.

When you reside in a small community everybody would know you, but there would be places I wouldn't go, there would be public houses I wouldn't go into, there would be functions I wouldn't go to. I had a few confrontations but I took them on head on, I wouldn't stand back from them and you'd be surprised sometimes the assistance you get from other members of the public. I was involved in a GAA club and I remember once I had a bit of a confrontation but the other members of the club rallied around me and he had to back off.

These incidents were occasional but you would have to select places you would go at times. You wouldn't go into every place in those times. You would have to be careful. I know that at discos you would be careful when you go to the toilet at different times. You would just have to mind yourself. This eased off in the mid to late 80s, the problems were mainly in the 70s and mid-80s I suppose with the H-blocks and that.

I was covering a large border area. We were treated fine by local people – no problem at all. We were working with the support of the local community. I was stationed once in a border town. In those times

the pubs in the North were closed on a Sunday and this particular town in the South was full every Sunday evening from about eight o'clock in the evening – it was all Northern people that came down and they would almost all be Catholics. They would come down, and they would be a bit different when they were going back up alright, a bit more brave. That time we weren't breathalysing drivers like we are nowadays. It was the old drunk driving where you had to walk a line and touch your nose and all that. There would be very few prosecuted for drunken driving but they would be a bit more brave on the way back than they would be on the way down. Some of them would have a bit of an edge to what they would say to you. They would be much nicer going down. You would know the people coming back and over and you would nearly expect from them that they would give you a bit of a dig before they would leave – the bit of green had to come out. You wouldn't be shocked when you would hear one or two comments – the next day they would hardly remember it.

They wouldn't all be that way now – generally speaking we would have a very good rapport with the people in the North. When I was on the border I had tea in as many houses in the North as in the South.

There was no danger involved in it. Usually, the comments would be 'Free Stater 'and all this sort of thing but you would say you were doing your job, you know. You would ask them what job they were doing as well – some of them had never worked a day in their lives. You take people that were involved in dissident activities back in the 70s and early 80s, they never worked. They were 35 or 40 years of age when the Peace Process came in, they were going around shooting and robbing and everything like that and never worked a day. All of a sudden there was a Peace Process and they had to do a day's work so it was a bit of a shock to them as well I'm sure.

I was there to keep the peace and prevent anything happening related to any bombs or shootings going across the far side. Say, if a car was coming down south we would search it and if the car was going up north we would search it. Sometimes we would hear about movement of stuff going north and we would search the vehicle going north as much as the vehicle going south. That was our main job. As regards the whole politics of it I suppose, we didn't think about it, it wasn't our job, we just enforced the laws that we were given and it was somebody else's job to deal with the politics of it. I don't think we would have even considered the politics.

We were there to keep the border safe on both sides. There was a time when we just checked, in the main, people coming south. The ones that were going north they weren't really of much concern to us until maybe we would hear that stuff may be moving north and then we would search people going north as well. But we were more concerned about people coming south and about minding our own patch.

We would have no contact with the RUC or British Army, maybe except at meetings level, organised, formal meetings and that would be with the RUC. We would meet them occasionally, very occasionally, on the border but back in those times you wouldn't meet them, you wouldn't want to be seen meeting them. We would have formal meetings alright, about every month or six weeks at a different level again. I remember once meeting the sergeant from the adjoining station, our counterpart from the far side on a border crossing. He asked to meet us. We said, 'what do you want?' We thought he had something urgent to deal with and he said, 'oh no just a chat' and we said, 'no, not any more, but if you have a problem to bring, address it at the formal meeting and it will be dealt with there and come back to us that way'. We told him we wouldn't meet him again in public, it wouldn't be done, it wouldn't be seen to be done in those times.

We were accepted where we were in the South by our own community and I don't think we would be accepted if we were seen meeting the RUC on a regular basis at the crossings. The local community would be nearly all Catholics and we wouldn't want to be seen talking to the RUC openly. I can't remember it being a formal policy but even if there was a formal policy that we could meet them and rendezvous with them at border crossings openly, I don't think we would do it, I wouldn't do it anyway.

The formal meetings were very cordial. It was the sharing of information. It was like one police unit we would say. There would be sharing of information in relation to things that would be coming up, and what would be likely to come up, and how the investigation was going. They had the same problems that we had generally speaking. They had a problem with dissidents and they had Loyalists and Unionists, we only had the Provos, so they probably had far bigger problems than we had. They were targets at all times – by different dissidents at different times – by both sets of Loyalists and Unionists. We hadn't that, we were never targets really. We had a few occasional ones but we were always told that they weren't sanctioned by the Army Council, all those shootings. But they were live targets at all times, they had to move house and

everything and you would have the person you would be meeting this month and in a month's time they would be gone to the far end of the county, of the North, because they had to move because of some threat to them. We hadn't that. I remember once an old sergeant saying to us about the North and the South and he said, 'leave it to them' he said, 'can you imagine us going up to serve a summons in the Falls Road or up in the middle of Belfast, the work we would have to do'. We could walk anywhere in this country, anywhere to any house, any estate or street – they couldn't do that – they had to have a huge operation to go into a house, they would have to block off the whole town nearly because there would be snipers or whatever around the place. They were police people the same as ourselves at the end of the day but they were in a far more dangerous position than us.

We would have enjoyed friendships and we may have met informally very occasionally, maybe once, maybe twice a year, with some few of them – very informally.

There were no threats from Loyalist paramilitaries, not in our area, but other areas had it along the border. I mind they came and took over a Garda station at one stage, up in Monaghan. Peter Robinson was one of them. They came in and went into a Garda station and took it over and said there was no law and order in the South. He was arrested. It's a small country station, I can't remember whether there was a Garda, did they break into it or take it over or something like that. There you are – 'there's no law and order down here at all, we have come from above, we have shown you what we can do.' Paisley came down and brokered the peace anyway, and then he went back up across to the North. His emphasis was 'peace' and 'thank you' and everything and as soon as he got across to his own patch he turned round and said, 'there is no law and order down there!' It was just a publicity stunt by Peter Robinson.

We operated a fairly tight regime along the border with stuff coming in. Every border crossing was manned, every single one where vehicles could come down, and we kept it fairly tight. But at different times, there would have been a rumour or threat that something may happen and we just upped our level for a while, until they had moved off then again. But I don't think we were awfully concerned, I can never remember a huge concern about Loyalists.

The IRA – I suppose we knew what they were doing and what they were trying to achieve. And I suppose if there were atrocities, we tried

to prevent it or stop it, or if they were planning ones, we searched houses and searched cars and searched people and did all that to try to stop it. If we searched a house, an IRA house, and we were talking to the occupant there and if he said, 'that won't happen', I would be happy that it wouldn't happen. You would accept that, there would be respect in that sense alright. But respect for what they did – I couldn't condone the killings and stuff like that.

At those times when you had active service units, half of them weren't from the border. They came up from down south, Limerick, Cork and everywhere, Kerry, and some of them spent a number of years in an active service unit on the border. They wouldn't be from along the border so they would move from safe house to safe house in different counties along the border, maybe back 30 miles back from it. As such you would have very few active IRA people from the border and in saying that you would have loads of safehouses there where they were staying.

I remember a bomb going off and a number of RUC officers were blown up. In those times the British Army or the British authorities' places – RUC stations – would have been in housing estates to keep them safe from people; that they wouldn't target them with bombs being lobbed into them. This police station was built in a housing estate on the border and three or four of them were blown up. I remember a woman coming down south, a nice quiet fragile woman, she had four kids under five and all she had was remains of brains and everything blasted up against the gable of her house. She had lost her husband and had four kids. I couldn't condone things like that. Let alone the families of the people that died and I'm sure no matter how she felt about the border or about the IRA, or about whatever, Loyalists – she couldn't condone it either.

I recall on one occasion, a car coming down from the North about three o'clock in the morning and this car pulled in front of us. We were in a hut or caravan at the time manning a checkpoint. This car pulled in front of us and it was on the main national primary route, and he got chatting to us anyway, he was an RUC person. We could see the RUC station from where we were standing, and he was seven years in that station, and that was the first time he had crossed the border. I wasn't an hour in my own place before I was across the far side, in the North. He was seven years there, and he had had a few pints taken, except for that he wouldn't be down there. It was a real bravado thing – 'I am

down south', I said, 'how long were you over there?', 'seven years; it's my first time down south' he was saying. I couldn't believe it.

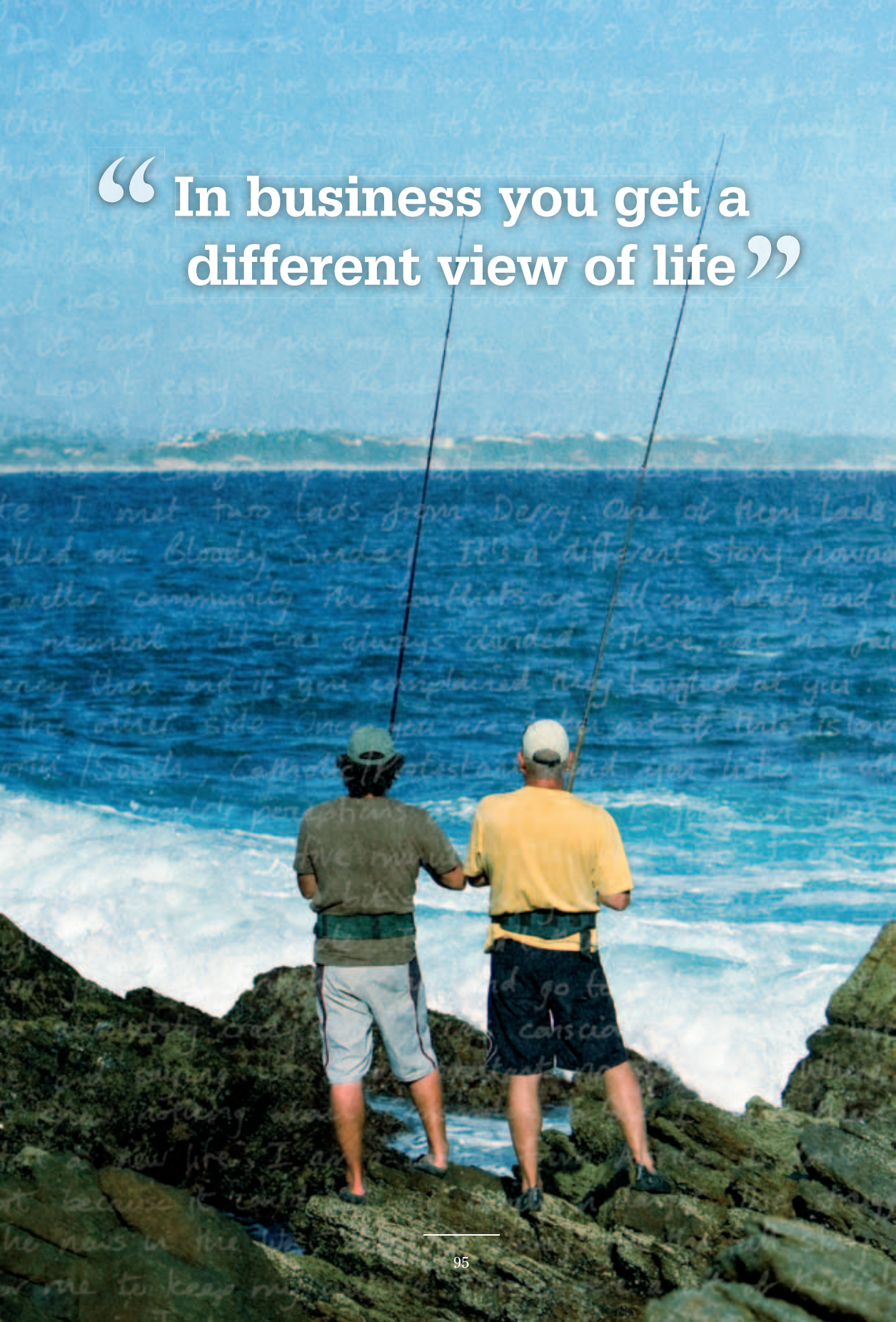
The RUC had a really hard time. They had broken marriages, alcoholics – we all had it – but they had a huge amount of that. They went from work to the pub and back again and they had certain pubs they could go to and all that.

I don't deal with North and South now, I don't deal with the PSNI much now. I did a lot in those times, and afterwards I did as well, after the peace, up to about seven or eight years ago I dealt with them, I would have contacts from there all the time that I could ring.

I remember doing some joint work with members of the RUC a number of years back. When we met in the South we had a great time and when we had our business done we went off for the night and had a great time. But we were up there for a few nights and one night I said, 'are we going to town tonight?' but it was such an operation to go into town. We had to get into a bullet-proof van with darkened windows in it. Six of us went in, one person didn't drink all night, did the driving, they wouldn't even have another driver.

I remember at one point being in Belfast; 'no we cannot go in here', 'no we cannot go in there', and they picked the pub we were going to. Then we had to sit in a certain place and one of them watched and minded us the whole time. That was in more recent times. That's the way they were. That's the way they had to go on a night out. When I saw that I thought 'God we hadn't that', okay as I said earlier there would be places we wouldn't go to at different times and places that we would be careful at discos back in the 70s – but what they had in more recent times – we hadn't that even in the 70s. It was very different for them. That would be my memory of them; I don't know how they survived there. It was fierce hard going. And I would say that they couldn't hide their work at home because they would be saying, 'lock the doors now tonight' and 'don't do this, don't do that.' It was different for them.

There would be a sort of healthy respect between the Gardaí and the Provos in those times. There would be a healthy respect definitely with the genuine Provos. Now the far side fellas shouting and a few pints in them – that would be different. You wouldn't even tolerate them, you wouldn't see them at all, but say the genuine Provo, I would say there was a healthy respect there on both sides. Not to respect what they were doing, but respect for the person, and I would say it was vice versa, I would say so.


“In business you get a different view of life”

In business you get a different view of life

My grandfather was a Home Rule politician for Lisburn Borough, and while I was quite interested in politics, my mother forbade it completely, because my Grandfather Bell lost his business and lost his farm, as my mother called it, politicking. He spent more time at politics than business. He had a public house which was unusual for a Quaker. But they worked hard to make money for themselves. My mother could see our business going the same way as her father's business, but it gave me probably a broader spectrum of life than the average Protestant who was encapsulated within a smaller group, and maybe he had to keep his head down because there was no doubt, in the '30's and 40's and 50's, and 60's, we were basically a minority and a looked-down-at minority and in many ways considered as not really Irish. If we were Protestant we were considered to be pro-British. You couldn't be pro-Irish and Protestant.

There were a lot of false assumptions. For example in 1978, in the little shop down from our shop, a newsagent, it was the 25th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth's accession, and there was a portrait of the Queen in a black flowing robe, I was getting the paper and a man was there and he pointed to the Queen and he said, 'that's the woman you take orders from', and I said, 'what do you mean', and he said, 'she's the head of your church.' I said, 'she's not, she is head of the Church of England and I belong to the Church of Ireland, she has nothing to do with us, I take orders from the government.' He was taken aback. 'But' I said, 'if your Archbishop McQuaid told you to jump and the government told you not to jump, you would jump.' I had more freedom as a Protestant, more freedom of conscience. That was the difference between us.

I was never afraid to talk out, but we did feel restricted in many ways and I always maintained that our own church leaders were never positive enough, they never told us we had an ancient tradition which was as good as anything. I remember a statement made by Archbishop McQuaid at the start of ecumenism; he said he would welcome Protestants back once they renounced their religion. Archbishop Sims, who was the Archbishop of Dublin at that time, he was very polite and very gentlemanly and very quiet spoken, and his answer to that was, 'well you know we are all going to be one some day'. But, what leadership did that give to our young people? The Roman Catholic priests said, 'if you are going to get married, you must come to us, your children must be raised as Roman Catholics' but I felt there was no direction from our church leaders to say 'you must stay within your own church.'

Now it always bothers me to say Catholic when I mean Roman Catholic, because I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, which all Protestants say in their creed, and to be called a non-Catholic is insulting to me, very insulting, but I know most people don't see it that way. I believe we've got to become a society where everyone is equal, where we treat each other with equal respect. When it comes to interchurch marriage or mixed marriage it doesn't bother me. My daughter is in an interchurch marriage. I couldn't tell you how many cousins are in interchurch marriages, so no, it doesn't bother me. We are so small in number; we are bound to be assimilated. But, at the same time, it's sad to see the doctrine that I grew up with being rejected, the doctrine that my child and grandchild was growing up with. Then they marry in an interchurch marriage and one or other of them has to reject all that they learned and say, 'now what I learned isn't that, but I have got to reject what I had and go with you, or you have to reject what you have and go with me.'

Back in the 60's if the Roman Catholic partner came to join the Church of Ireland we were afraid to welcome them because of repercussions. We had one lady, a very faithful attender. They were quite well off, well-to-do and she had a servant. That servant only lasted until she went to confession. What I learned was that priests would say things like 'don't work for her, she's a lapsed catholic, she's left the church, she's not worthy to be worked for' things like that. It was a kind of prejudice and discrimination that wouldn't be allowed legally now but back then it just happened as a matter of course. That lady lost good workers.

There were other repercussions for her down through her life. She died just recently, her husband died a couple of years ago, but her children are still living. They have left for England now.

The Ne Temere decree meant that children of mixed marriages had to be raised as Roman Catholics. The Protestant partner had to agree to it. With the strong pronouncements of Archbishop McQuaid there was no sense that you could marry a Roman Catholic girl and bring her with you into the Church of Ireland. You felt it wasn't allowed by the state, because pretty well, as I said, when Archbishop McQuaid said, 'you must do that,' the state agreed with him. There was a court case in 1950 that showed that the state was fully behind the Roman Catholic Church's position. You had to agree to educate and raise your children as Roman Catholics and in some cases Protestants were expected to convert to Roman Catholicism. So if you married outside your own church you were going to be lost to that church.

In those days, that situation had a detrimental effect on the Protestants. When my daughter was going forward to train as a nurse, we had one minister, not Church of Ireland, and he organised nearly every young Protestant person who had left school to go and work in the North of Ireland. My daughter applied for the Adelaide Hospital in Dublin and she applied for the Royal Hospital in Belfast, She got both, and she was going to the Royal because her aunts were in Belfast and she had no relations in Dublin. Then about a month later word came – 'sorry we can't take you, because we have the new rule that we cannot take citizens from the South'. Now that would have been about 30 years ago. She went to the Adelaide but a lot of my daughter's friends went north to get jobs.

Going back thirty years or forty years, it was a bit strange doing business in Sligo. Almost 70% of shops in Sligo were Protestant owned and they depended on 90% of the Roman Catholics for support, which they got. But there were Protestants who would go north to buy a tie or to buy worms for fishing. A lot of Protestants just wouldn't spend their money in the South; – that would mean paying tax to the Irish Government. It was something they grew up with and it's very hard to change. Some of my own friends will only buy paint in the North or they'll go there to get their teeth done or their eyes tested. It changes depending on the economic situation. Years ago when petrol was cheaper here, everybody came south. When we had near parity with sterling thousands of Southerners shopped up North. My own belief

is that you cannot have a viable town without the businesses that people want.

We have got to change with the times. When I was growing up, some of the old family members came in and said, 'oh if your grandfather could see the place now he would turn in his grave because all the things that he sold that you're not selling', well I said, 'if we were trying to sell what he was selling we would be gone out of business, you've got to change'. I'm a business man. I understand that it's natural for people to try to get the cheapest price for everything. Sligo needs vibrant businesses I have criticised Sligo all the time, I have written to the Chamber of Commerce, they don't even acknowledge my letters. You have to give customers what they want. Times have changed.

I have seen a great deal of changes in business practice over the years. I don't think I could survive in the present, although I did for many years, but then, my mother supervised me until she was 87. I would tell her that it was time she retired, but no, no, she wouldn't retire! So when I was 65 I said to my son 'if things go well, carry on, and if they don't go well you have a good site.'.

My family has had a business on that site for 200 odd years. I could give you my family history back to 1580. I think I'm the 13th generation from that, but I'm still, you know, a 'blow in', not 'truly Irish', according to some. A lot of people don't know their history. There's a lot of ignorance out there. You see 90% of the people are descended from the English stock that came over. Mostly they would be soldiers from the time Cromwell was sending people 'to hell or to Connaught.' There were no men left east of the Shannon and everybody, practically everybody is of mixed stock. The only true Irish people now are the McDonagh's and the Wards and the people that are looked down on as members of the Travelling community. They are basically the old stock. If you look at a map of Ireland of 800 A.D. and look at the names, you see the Wards and the O'Hara's etc. Then you have the McGowan's who changed their name to Smyth with a y, to save their lands. There are a lot of misperceptions about people's identities. We are much more of a mix than people realise.

There are a lot of misperceptions still about Protestants and Masons. For instance, I've heard it said that the British Legion is a Protestant club. I've heard the Masonic order referred to as a Protestant club and the YMCA and the Orange Order. I've said to people 'yes, your Orange Order is a Protestant Club, but it doesn't exist in Sligo'. The Orange

Order did have a hall next door to the library years and years ago, but I think it vanished in the late 20's because there was just no support, but the Masonic order is not a Protestant club. If you go to a Roman Catholic country it is purely Roman Catholic, if you go to Russia it's orthodox, if you go to India there are Muslims and Hindus in it. But when you come to Ireland it is 80 percent Protestant. A lot of people don't realise that at least 20 percent are Roman Catholic in the Masonic Order in Ireland. In Sligo, we never list the religion, but I would say that we are 25 percent Roman Catholic in our Lodge in Sligo.

People often confuse the Orange Order with the Masonic Order. I gave a talk on the radio some time ago and I said I couldn't understand how a good Protestant, or a good mason, could be an Orangeman, and I couldn't understand even more so how a good Orangeman could be a mason, because one is narrowly defined and the other is broad-spectrum. But you do get that, and in the course of that radio interview, I talked about Alderman John Fallon, who had been a First World War Veteran. He was chairman of the British Legion in Sligo; he was an Alderman for 40 years. It is my belief that he had never been made mayor because of his association with the British Legion. The British legion was an association for ex-servicemen and women. Anybody who served in the British Army was entitled to receive help if they needed help from it, it didn't matter about your religion, class, creed or anything. It was only in the last few years of his life that they eventually capitulated and made him mayor of Sligo, and I think he would have been mayor 30 years earlier if it hadn't been for his association with the British Legion.

I remember back in the 70's we did good business with people coming down from the North in the summer to fish. We sold guns and fishing tackle and you would have a bit of banter between two men coming in, and one was obviously nationalist and one unionist, but we wouldn't know it until one fella would be looking at the guns and he would say, 'Jeez if we had those up North we'd fairly… ', and the other fella would say, 'ah they'd be no good to you, we've far better than that', and there was friendly banter like that.

Then we were raided by the IRA. One night the doorbell rang and my mum went down to it and opened the door and there were four outside. They put a gun in her ribs and told her that they were going to take the guns. My mother asked them what they wanted these guns for and they said, 'to shoot UDR men and Protestants.' And my mother

said, 'well I'm a Protestant why would you want to shoot me?' And she argued with them.

Now her brother was the treasurer of a Quaker organised fund for the rehabilitation of people who had been chased out of an area, and at that time he was saying that he had 5 million in the fund – and this would have been in the late 70s, and he just couldn't get rid of it. There weren't enough applicants. And my mother was arguing about this and telling them that if they wanted there was all this fund and one of the younger men was going to start arguing with her, with my mother, and one of the other fellows, obviously the leader, just put his hand up to his lips and said, 'silence, no arguments', in case he would let something slip.

They stole the guns but they didn't harm my mother. They were very polite, very gentle with her. They were going to tie her legs together and she said, 'I have varicose veins.' They said, 'well put your knees together', and they strapped bandage tape around her knees and her hands. Dad always had a scissors in his pocket for use when he'd go fishing and he was in a chair with casters, so he rolled over and she took the scissors out and she cut him free and then they were loose five minutes afterwards. I got a phone call from one of the raiders saying, 'Would you go into the shop, your mother needs you'. So I went into the shop, but by this time my mother had got free and she had gone into the pub next door because they had ripped out her phone and she had rung my sister and they had rung the guards and when I got in the local Super was interviewing my mother and talking about it.

My mother said, 'one of them must have been a woman because she was wearing about size 3 shoes, and if it had been a man of that height, the shoes would have been much larger.' She had been a draper in Anderson and McCauley's in Belfast before she married my father. She was very observant. The guards were confident they knew who had been involved. The guards knew everybody.

Two days later we had a verbal message from one of the local Sinn Féin Cumanns. They sent a message of sympathy and apology that please be assured that it was none of their branch that were involved in it. But to me if you were involved in Sinn Féin you were all one and the same.

It affected my father. He was 85 at the time. I wouldn't say it tore him apart but you could see it affected him. He would come into the shop and I might have sold somebody a gun and he would tap me on

the shoulder and he would say, 'see that thing, get rid of it, throw it in the river.' He never talked too much about it, but I suppose it did have some effect. It didn't seem to have the same effect on my mother. She had sort of said her piece and she was happy that she had argued her piece with them. We carried on with our business, selling guns and fishing tackle and never had any other raids or any difficulties after that.

I remember the time in Mullaghmore when Mountbatten was killed. It saddens me greatly to this day. I knew Lord Mountbatten; he used to come into the shop. He was a tall gentleman, he would come in to buy fishing tackle, and he was polite, he was friendly, he was as good as any other customer, not a pompous person at all. It saddened me greatly and it made me so mad he couldn't have been protected better. I know he said he didn't want protection, but why was his boat not protected at night when they obviously planted a bomb on it? That made me very angry.

I never discussed it with neighbours, no, I don't think I've ever discussed my attitude, or asked them to discuss their attitude because I wouldn't like to hurt them, if they saw that my attitude was different, a lot different from theirs. I wouldn't want them to feel that because I was different from them that I would not like them or they would not like me. We can live together as good friends.

My plan to solve the problem in Ireland was to have a referendum. Then anybody who wants to live under the Queen – off to England you go. Pay them compensation, and off to England, and I think there would be absolute panic and pandemonium for three or four years and after that it would settle down. You see to my mind, the country should be all one. Basically, I am of Republican sympathy, that if you want to live under the Queen, go over to England and live under the Queen, you shouldn't be over here. We are Ireland. You can't live in Ireland and call yourself English. You can't live in Ireland and pledge allegiance to the Crown, to my mind. If you want to be Irish, be Irish.

People who know me have classified me as a Protestant Republican. I suppose that's why I get on with the people around me. I haven't become insular shall we say and then of course in business we depended on 95 percent of our customers who were from the Roman Catholic population. A customer was my lifeline, I couldn't afford to abuse a customer – they were the best of people coming into me, no matter who they were or what they were. I had to give a good service

and I respected them coming in to buy, so that in business you get a different view of life shall we say, you don't become quite as insular because you are depending on all the people in the community.

I think 30 years ago, 40 years ago, if the border had been taken away, the North of Ireland Protestants would have taken over the whole South because they were better business people, in many ways. They would have run the country better than it was run, and better than it is run – honestly, I'm a very unhappy person about the way Ireland has been run. If I ran my business the way the country is being run at the moment the bank would have closed me up years ago. But it was far too many politicians, everybody in the country has a friend who is a politician and you can't get anything done unless you go through the politicians, even though they should have no say in it at all, things like planning applications and getting pensions for constituents. If we had less TD's, if the politicians in the Dáil did their job as legislators, and if local councillors had more power around their local area then the country would be run far better.

There is a lot of bad management, mismanagement. I write letters. I try to get other people to write letters but they say 'what good is it?' I've written and complained, drawn people's attention to trolleys in the river, to scrap metal in the car park, toxic waste in the middle of the town and lots more. It makes me agitated. There is an awful lot more could be done but it seems that anything above the line from Galway to Dublin is not worth doing. Sligo people are second class citizens. I'm proud to be Irish, I'm proud to be from Sligo but when it comes to protesting about things that matter in the community, that affect people's lives I feel I have always been a lone voice. I generally speak up. And I am generally ignored completely. I am aware of an awful lot of things that could be better but my involvement in Masonry is taking up most of my time.

I was at a Masonic meeting in Omagh, and I went out to Pomeroy and the building housed the Orange Hall on the ground floor and the Masonic Hall upstairs. Now, upstairs was nicely carpeted and furnished and downstairs was a bare room and there were 10 or 11 black plaques around the wall. These were to the memory of John, brutally murdered by the IRA, to the memory of George, blown up by the IRA, and I said, 'how can these people ever live in peace, with these sort of plaques?' It's going to take an awful long time for those memories to fade while they are sitting there. I never sort of realised, because you don't see

that in Masonic halls, but in the Orange halls it was all around; instead of photographs, there are these plaques. That's what affected me. Things like bombings drive me around the bend, but there isn't a thing I can do about it. There are times that I would wish that I could get an insight into it and get the people who were responsible brought to justice. It bothers me to see prisoners released under the Agreement, to see people released after five or six years, committing murders that affect people for all the rest of their life.

My son was in the British Navy, and when he come home on leave the guards would come out to see if he had arrived home safely and they would ask us to look under the car to make sure there wasn't a bomb under it. We accepted it as part of their job. The Navy personnel weren't targeted as much as the Army and the Air Force. One day the guards came out to check the house, he wasn't home, he was fine. But now, if they had put a bomb under his car and he had been blown up, I don't think I could ever forgive them, the way Gordon Wilson did – he forgave them the week after his daughter had been killed by a bomb. I don't think I could do that, I'm different.

Even though I describe myself as a Protestant Republican, I wouldn't be in support of the IRA campaign of shootings and bombings. I wouldn't support that policy because I follow the policy of the Masons. When you join the Masons you take on an obligation to never to do anything in contravention of the powers of the state in which you reside.

My own family has lived in this area of Sligo for hundreds of years, back before the Famine. We know from first hand that there was no famine in Ireland. The British starved Ireland during the famine. The native Irish were starved to death to provide profit for the landlords, and we were exporting many hundred thousand tonnes of grain during the famine years.

Here where we are sitting now is a smallholding of my father's Uncle Dan, and he had a house and farm nearby. He was told by his landlord to slate the house, it was a thatched house, he said he couldn't afford it and the landlord said, 'well, be out of it next week' and it wasn't slated for 40 years. So I have no sympathy for the landlords.

My father used to play soccer in 1900, down in Drumcliffe with his friend. He was in the house one day and his friend's mother was saying that when she came in as a bride to the house, one day the landlord was out shooting with his friends, and a sudden rainstorm came on. He trooped into the tenant's cottage, their cottage. The landlord and his

friends were cold and wet, and sure the people of the house went down to the back room and got each of them a thimble-full of whiskey. The agent came the next day and doubled the rent because a tenant was not supposed to be able to afford spirits. Now, you know, no wonder the hatred is there, but the big problem was, our landlords were English, of English stock, in England the landlords were English, in France the landlords were French, in Germany the landlords were German, but in Ireland the landlords were English. That hatred is deep-rooted.

I don't have any allegiance with the English. Everywhere Britain has been she has left a legacy of hate, all over the world, like in India and in Australia with the Aborigines. If a couple of my cousins were here they would shoot me if they heard me saying that, but I have looked at that and I have seen that the British have left a legacy of problems everywhere. I'm Irish first and foremost, others who live here must respect the state, same as I have to respect the state, you bear allegiance to the state in which you reside always, if you are coming from another country, you will bear allegiance to your own state first but you must have allegiance to the state that gives you your livelihood.

Masonry is hard to describe, absolutely hard to describe. We raised 890,000 euro two years ago which we divided up between the Samaritans, the Laura Lynn Hospice and the Northern Ireland Hospice and the Taoiseach handed over the three cheques. There wasn't a photograph or a square inch of newspaper reported that, but if you get something negative or some misperception, it will be published. You hear it on the radio that the Masons are devious or they are organising things underhand, but there's never been a case before the courts about such things. There is no such thing as an oath in Irish freemasonry but there is an obligation. The secrets we have are the CV's of the masons of old, there were no written CV's then; your CV was your handshake and the word. If you were a top-class man earning top class pay, and you went and you gave the wrong word, well that's not top-class, so you can't afford to be paid top-class.

It's the workmanship that matters. Look at Hyde Bridge, built by men who couldn't read or write properly, the masons of 150 years ago. Look at the old palaces, churches and cathedrals, Notre Dame, St. Peter's and the like, several hundred years old all over Europe, built by men who couldn't read or write. They had to be absolutely professional in their work. In the old days it might take 50 years to build some of these magnificent places, and in those days there would

be accidents, maybe the father would be killed so the rest of the masons would look after the family and children, and that is still our benevolence today. We educate five or six hundred children and assist over eight hundred widows.

There is ignorance out there as well. I heard someone say the Masonic Lodge is 'the Protestant version of the Knights of Columbanus'. I thought to myself 'it's time I got this changed, because that attitude – what they think of us, is completely wrong'. So I'm organising an open day up at the Lodge, inviting the head of this that and the other to come and listen to me and ask questions.

I would like to see things simplified. I would love to see a country where we observe the law more than we do at the moment. It drives me round the bend. I don't talk about it. I don't raise it, but then you see, it's all back to masonry. We are not allowed to discuss religion or politics in masonry, because they are two things that good friends can fall out about. 50 years I've been in masonry, and through the years you become your own person and let them become their own person. As long as we can live in peace with one another, we don't have to bring politics into our lives.

Whether we talk about it or not, tell stories or not, I think it will take a long, long time to change attitudes in Sligo with Protestant, Catholic, Quaker or whatever. I would say that it's probably very, very slowly coming closer together, but on the other hand, scratch the surface and you will see things that frighten you. I played golf with a man for years, and I was down at the golf club one night, sitting here and he was sitting over there with his back to me and something came up on the radio or the television, 'God', he says, Protestants aren't really Christians'. You know? And he was almost a good friend of mine…Why do they think that, just below the surface? And can they ever get away from thinking like that? If that remark is told to a child, the child remembers it.

Other attitudes need to change too. If I go back, my father used to tell me that back in the old days the Roman church told its people that it was not a sin to evade tax, because the tax was an English tax, and I think that an attitude that the evasion of tax is not a criminal or civil offence is still prevalent. My uncle, who was an accountant told me 'the first thing you do is to pay your tax, that's an obligation, because there's only two things you can do if you try to hide money from the taxman and that's eat it or wear it', and he said, 'if you do anything else with it they will find it'. I think the Protestants in general, would

be more law-abiding that way, because that's the standards that we grew up with. But the deep-seated anti-establishment attitude of the Catholic Church, it takes a long time for that to go away.

I was tempted to vote for Sinn Féin in the last election. What I think about the bail out and the economic situation now in 2011 is that it might actually work if Ireland were to default. I was talking to somebody the other day about it, and I was saying, the Irish land commission bought this land from the landlords in 1870 – this land outside my window here. It was paid back to the land commission over 90 years at seven pounds a half year, £14 a year. Now £14 a year in 1870 was a lot of money, a lot of money. My uncle Dan had to pay to buy back his land from the land commission who bought it from the landlords. It was paid back over a period of 90 years. We should buy out those bailouts over 90 years because when our grandsons are paying it, it will be chickenfeed for them, and default is next door to that.

It's strange to think that as a Protestant Republican I could be voting Sinn Féin next time around. It's possible, if there were men I could respect coming forward. There were a lot of them I wasn't able to respect in Sinn Féin. They were quite prepared to use the gun, they were quite prepared to hide the people who use the gun, and I couldn't respect them for that, but if I could see men going forward that I could respect, I could easily have voted for them. Because I think we have been led down the garden path: the country is awash with people who have made millions, are still making millions, and are still where they shouldn't be, earning 500,000 a year and they were the ones in charge back then when we got into trouble, bankers and businessmen you know? It frightens me. But the whole country frightens me. I can't see any way out. I can't see how it's going to change in the next 10 or 20 years.

What I value in particular from the Protestant tradition is honesty and openness. I feel that honesty and openness are an integral part of our bringing up. Admit something if you are wrong. My mother always used to say, 'a liar must have a great memory, because if you tell a lie today, you must remember you told it and tell it to the next person and tell it to the next person and eventually it hangs you'. So if we had more honesty and openness and admitting your wrongs in public life we wouldn't be in the state we're in maybe. That's not to say that a lot of Protestants might not be dishonest, you know, but in general it's the

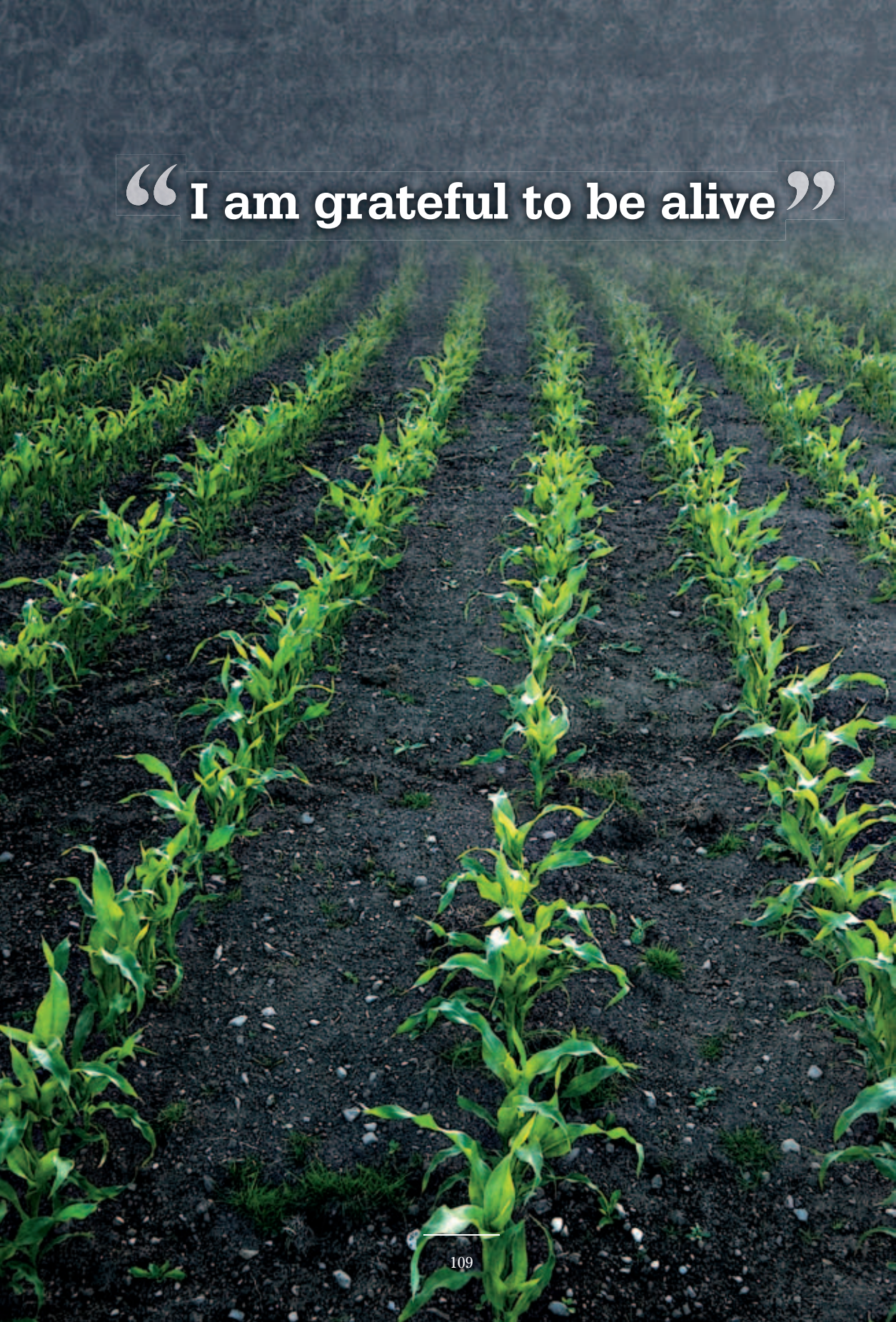
standard: 'I buy from you because I trust you, what you are telling me is the truth' you know?

I'll tell you what has changed, a lot of the Protestant generation has faded out, like, three quarters of the Protestant chaps are gone in Sligo now that were there when I was growing up. Their offspring have vanished, emigrated, went further afield. I probably would have emigrated too. I had a job, in fact I had four jobs when I left school, but I couldn't leave – I was the only boy to look after the shop that was 150 years old at the time. I couldn't leave the tradition. What was said was 'you can go but I don't know what your poor Dad is going to do without you'

So I made the commitment, I couldn't go, I did the best I could for it. People have said to me 'I'm sure you missed the shop when you left it' I said, 'I didn't, I was glad to get out, I was never a shopkeeper as such, I was never totally committed, and that's probably why I didn't make a million!

I would have done something different if I'd had the chance. My first ambition would have been to be an airline pilot, going back into the 40s, which was unusual at that time and the second was the police, and the third was a teacher. A shopkeeper was last on the list, but it was something that basically I had to do, that I couldn't depart and leave the family in the lurch.

Most of us lads in the family had a spirit of adventure, because I have no relations on my fathers side in Ireland except one, in spite of the family being here for five or six generations. Nobody in Connaught can say today that they are a relation of mine, they all had to emigrate. One stayed at home to look after the shop, the rest vanished. It's very difficult to know what to say to the next generation. I don't think there will be a place for my grandson in the business. I don't know what he's going to do, but it doesn't worry me, because you can't live in the past. You have to move with the times. If you don't move with the times you get lost.


“I am grateful to be alive”

I am grateful to be alive

I was a little kid but bad things stay in your mind forever. It was for a few months when the government changed, I saw bombs and shootings and everything, people running to save their lives. We all had to leave, my mother and my aunt and my cousin. My aunty and her daughter are in America now. I phone my Mum. She sent me to Europe and risked her life. She had to flee to another African country. She is still there, I am here by myself, and it's hard. I lost many people in my family. I lost my Dad, I was eight years old. We had to leave but we could call home. Then we had to move to another country and we weren't safe and I had to come to Europe. I lived for a few years in another EU country. I didn't know about Ireland, about conflict and everything, I just knew Ireland as a place on the map.

I thank God I'm alive. I am here three years now, waiting and waiting. Everybody you can ask, they will tell you the same. We are still waiting, for years. One day you get a letter in the post from the Department of Justice, yes or no. You just have to wait for that post. Your life is on pause.

I have lots of friends now, other refugees. We just eat and sleep, walk into town, watch TV, eat and sleep. The next day walk into town, go to the gym, come back, eat and sleep. At least you can get exercise, come back tired and sleep without stress. It's very hard living without my family. I hope we will meet up again. I live with that hope. Whether you are Christian or Muslim, we have only one God. So we pray and hope, that's the thing, just hope, hope, hope. My family is religious, we believe in God. But we don't have to be happy when God gives us something nice or to think when he's punishing us, that we did something wrong. Punishment can follow maybe with a good thing. I don't know if you understand? We have to even appreciate when

God gives us a hard life, not just a good life because we have to thank him for everything he does to us, you know, every second of our life is from God. I believe we have a life after this life; we go to heaven. No one will ask in heaven 'where are you from? What is your status'?

There are racist people in Sligo. You can see, they don't like black people. I don't want to change my skin colour, you know, because people don't like it. Even if we got permits to work I think we would still have racism. People think we come here to take their jobs, to take everything but we are not here for that. We can't work, we are not allowed. They just see us from outside, they judge us from outside, that's not good enough; they have to see what's inside of us. From outside they see we are black, they think we are some terrible troublemaker or whatever. They drive us to be bad because of how they treat us. If you treat me bad because I'm black, I'll be bad, but you have to treat me as human. I am human, a human being. If you treat me bad I have to defend myself. I'm human.

Living here I saw things on the news about the North. I heard the story. They were telling us what happened between Northern towns, between Catholic and Protestant. I know about the conflict from word of mouth, TV, news and things.

The conflict in my country is different. It is not about religion. It's about the government. It's like what is happening now in Libya, the government, it won't step down. In my country we had mafias, they came to control the town, they came by force. They fought to be where they are now and they don't want to leave. They will kill people or fight, force people out of their homes, like what happened with my family. That government is there twenty years. I can't go back. Once you leave my country, if you come back you will go to prison or they will kill you.

If the government changed in the future, if it was a good government I would like to go back. But African presidents are selfish, they just take for themselves, they are punishing people, you know? If they would treat people like they treat their children we would have no war, but they don't. In Africa we have everything, resources and everything but the people don't use it. People in America, people in Europe they use it, you see?

People are not treated equally in my country. The government is the problem. It is better for my family in America. My auntie is old, my cousin has three children now. My auntie minds the children, her

grandchildren and my cousin has work. She has a better life now, but I don't. I would like to work but I am not allowed. I would put myself in any job, even cleaner, I wouldn't mind, shop assistant, anything. I know computers, first aid, English. I would like to be a childcare worker or a nurse. My cousin in America, she is a nurse. I would like to have my own family and to see my Mum, in the future, if I get my status, if I can travel.

You have to forgive and forget, you know? If you keep forgiveness in your mind for the whole of your life, it will make a difference. You have to forget, move on. It's hard. I still have dreams. I try to forget. I read the Bible. I think about something else. You don't talk about problems every day, you don't even talk about asylum seekers because you have to clear you mind. I don't watch the news that much. I don't want to think about that part of my life. It is upsetting because we see people dying, killing each other. So I don't think it's worth it, to put yourself through that stress, to watch it, so I try to forget, to watch something else, because we have our own stress. It's better to watch something else, to relax. I watch movies a lot, to take my mind off things. I don't watch news about Libya, they have their own problems, and they have to sort it their way. I hope the rebels succeed but I don't know a lot about it. A good government is a democracy. You can say what you want, you know? Not if you say something you find yourself in prison. I was in Dublin when they had a protest about the hospital in Sligo. I saw the demonstration. It was peaceful, the guards were protecting them and everything.

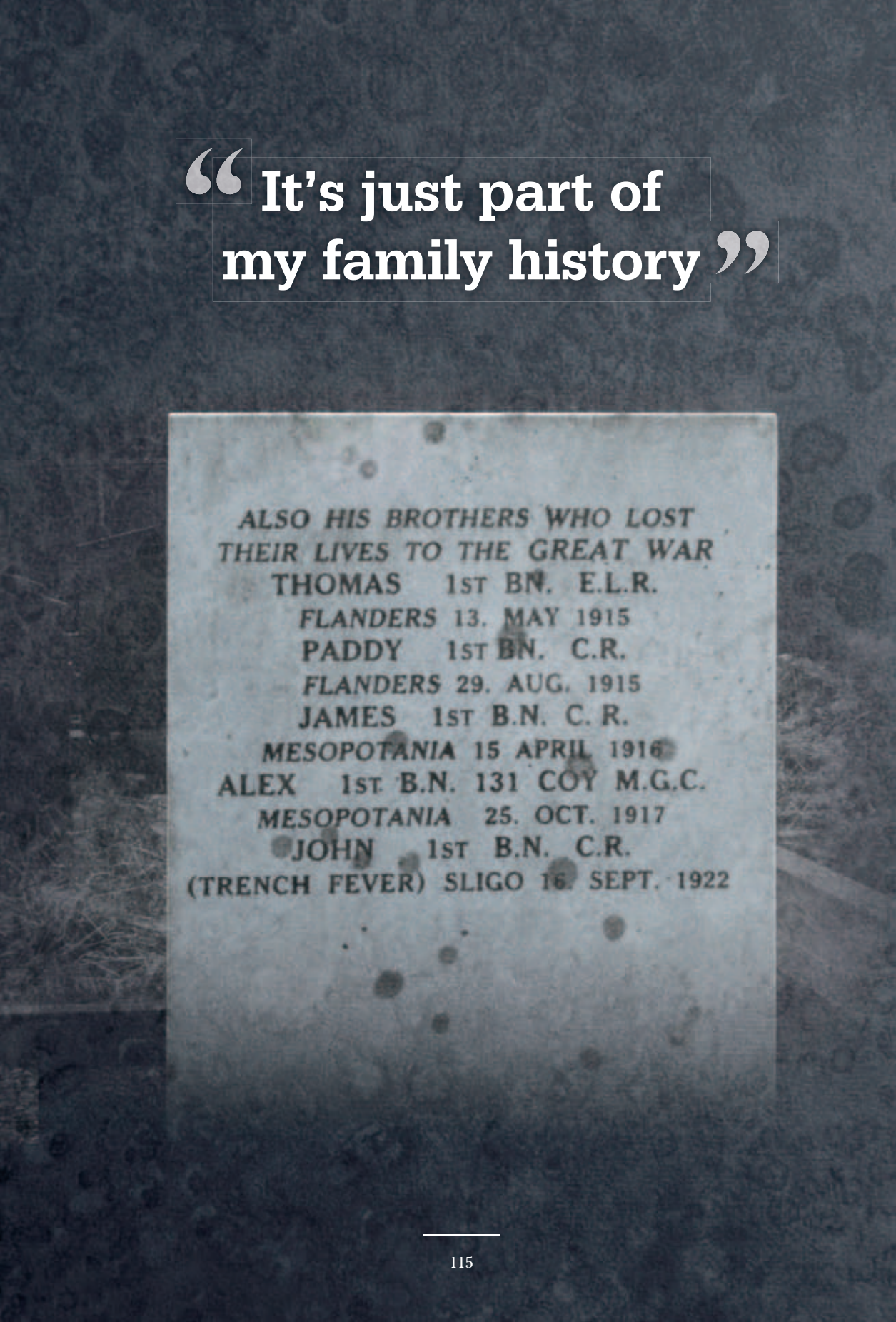
Back home you see the policemen with guns and if you do anything – bap, bap, bap – there is a shooting. There is no freedom to speak. You can only speak in your house. It's really difficult because you don't trust your neighbour, he might be working for the government. You might say something to your neighbour, then the next day you might find yourself killed or in a prison cell. A lot of things like that are going on.

When I am with my friends in Ireland, we sit around the table, we chat and we laugh. We have an acting class every Thursday, it's really fun. It's half Irish, half refugees. When we are there we forget all about the past and everything. We laugh a lot. Those Irish people they don't make a difference between us and between themselves. They treat us as human.

In Ireland everything is different, the culture, the music, the dance, the food, the taste of the food. In Ireland you just live in your house, you shut the door, you wake, go to your job, come back, shut the door. But back home, once a week or every night sometimes we go visit neighbours, we have much more community life. If something happened to you, all the community would have to help you, they would come and help you, that's their job, they would stay to encourage you. Now there is nothing. You stay by yourself, shut the door. I cry the whole time. Nobody wants to share. Where I grew up you shared everything. Not here, not now, no. The food is very different. We have all our own food, our own language, handwriting, everything is different. I used to read a lot, back home, a long time ago, now I prefer to watch movies, tv, read magazines. Sometimes I think if I was back home I would have my own family, my own career. At home, people marry in their twenties, have three or four children, sometimes eight children, sometimes only one child, it depends. I grew up in an Orthodox family, now I go to a Catholic church. If I want to go to the Orthodox Church I have to go to Dublin. In my country, if you are Catholic or if you are Muslim, you are welcome. If I was at home, maybe I would be in college, I don't know.

I'm grateful to be alive, I have a bed to sleep in, and I have meals. I hope in the future to have my status, to be with my mum, to have my own family. If it's possible to bring my mum here, you know, that's the hope. I call her sometimes. She calls me sometimes, because she is my mum, you know. She says, 'How are you, my baby?' What can I tell her? I am alive.

“It’s just part of my family history”



It's just part of my family history

This story begins in 1914 and ends in August 1979. My mother's family had a long history of men in the family serving in the British Army. In the First World War eight brothers went to the Front, in British Army uniforms. Four of them were killed in action, one in Belgium, one in France, and two in Iraq – which was then Mesopotamia. One returned home in 1919 with trench fever. He died in 1922, three years after he came back, he just wasted away and died of trench fever. The only time he left his bed from the day he came home, was maybe two days a year on a good summer's day. He was put in an armchair and the armchair was strapped to a horse and cart, and he was brought around the town like that.

So that was five brothers died, and my grandfather then served in the Second World War along with two of his brothers. Luckily they got back alive. So our family has a long history of association with the British Army, particularly the Connaught Rangers, and I grew up in a house with medals in drawers, and plaques and letters, even a picture of Winston Churchill on the wall. We got British Legion coal at Christmas and I remember we got shoes a couple of times. I know my grandfather was sent one time to Dublin – where the British Army had a hospital, to get cataracts off his eyes. I'd say in the Forthill area in Sligo at least one third or one quarter of the houses had British Army pensions when I was a young fella. And we grew up like that. And the funny thing about that, which I always found hilarious, was that the biggest IRA man that I ever knew was a coal man – and he had the contract every year for delivering the British Legion coal at Christmas!

So that was my family history. Now, my grandfather's sister married a man by the name of Bill Hudson, who was a Co Louth man – he was a vet, and they spent the last 30 years of their life living in one of the small cottages that is inside the grounds of Buckingham Palace. He was one of the men that looked after the horses – the Queen's horses, and he would ride on the back of one of these big carriages that the Royal family would come out in, with all the regalia on and the whole lot, any time there was parades on in London or anything.

They had one son and one daughter. In 1979, the son, Bill Jnr., decided he was coming home to Ireland to visit his father's people in County Louth, and his mother's people in Sligo Town. He tossed a coin to decide who he would visit first, and the family in County Louth won the toss, so he headed off to County Louth for the first week.

On the same day in August 1979 that Mountbatten was killed at Mullaghmore, Bill was fishing on a small lake at Omeath in County Louth. Eighteen soldiers were killed at Warrenpoint 400 yards across the lake from him and he was shot dead by the British Army. It was reported on British television for two days following the incident that he was an IRA bomber. His mother and father were living in the grounds of Buckingham Palace, in their home of 30 years, while this was going on.

It is very ironic to think that the grandson of a man, who served in the British Army and lost five brothers, should end up being shot by the British Army.

I was actually in London working at the time it happened. I was 18 years of age, and I worked very hard. I left the house at six in the morning and didn't get home till past seven most evenings. I was working in a factory making 45 gallon drums. You were on a conveyor belt; you had to keep going all day. I was making money, I was paying my aunt in the house, and still I had £70 or £80 every week for myself, but the only night you could go out was a Friday or Saturday night.

I remember my aunt sitting me down on the chair and telling me that her first cousin and my mother's first cousin were after being shot. That some guy called Mountbatten was after being blown away in Sligo, and I couldn't go out. All I remember saying is 'who the effin' hell is Mountbatten? I'm going out; I've been working all week. And I don't know that cousin – what's his name again? Never heard of

him'. All I wanted was out on a Friday night. She had four sons, and I remember two of the older boys pinning me down in the chair and not letting the out. This was in south-east London where there wouldn't have been a huge Irish population, and there was a lot of anger. I knew a family round the corner, from Galway, who had their windows smashed. But to me at 18 years of age, I didn't know what they were talking about.

I remember my aunt nearly crying in the corner, begging me not to go out of the door. She was afraid, that I would go down to the pub with my Irish accent, where I would be the only Irish one there among staunch English, National Front tattoos on their arm – this was the Isle of Dogs and Millwall, and she was afraid for me. I kept saying to her, 'I don't care, next weekend I'm going out, I don't care who was blown up'.

Sligo was on the news then and before that no one had ever heard of Sligo. All of a sudden everyone where I lived and worked knew where Sligo was and what had happened to Mountbatten but that didn't worry me, my only worry was getting out the door at the weekends.

It was only years later, when I came home and realised that the lad was shot dead and his mother and father were living at Buckingham Palace at the time, that all these soldiers were killed, and Mountbatten was blown away – it was only then that I realised that it was a historic event. Maybe it left a bad imprint in people's minds about Sligo, about Sligo as a bad place.

I just think it's like a wheel or a circle that has gone round. It's just part of my family history, but I think it's very apt that during the Troubles, members of a family who served the British Army in the First World War, Irish families, doing what they thought was the right thing to do, ended up with a family member being shot by the British Army. So it kind of brings a tragic end to a family story that was obviously caused by the conflict up the North.


“That was all down to the North”

That was all down to the North

Living in London during the Troubles I used to travel the whole way across London to Hammersmith tube station to get the Sligo Champion every Saturday morning. That was the only place I knew where I could get it. It used to come out in Sligo on a Thursday that time. I used to get it on a Saturday morning, and I used to torture myself – I used to open it out to where all the discos and the dances were, and nearly cried that I couldn't go to them! I used to visualise who was getting on the bus, and who was going out with who. I always longed for home. I think I went over when I was maybe too young, I was 17. I was on the verge every week of going home. I always wanted to go home.

One night I came out of a pub in New Cross and was waiting for a taxi when a police car pulled up with three fellas in it and asked me my name. I told them my name and they asked me was I from Southern or Northern Ireland. Me being drunk of course I says, 'the Northwest of Ireland'. The policeman says to me 'I'm going to ask you one more time, are you from Southern or Northern Ireland?' and I says again, thick as I was, and with drink on me 'Northwest Ireland'.

The next thing I knew I was in the car and across London – it must have been twenty minutes or half an hour, and there wasn't a word said. We drove up to this building, drove down into a kind of chute, down into the basement. Big steel doors closed behind me. Then through another door and so on and I ended up in a cell and the door was closed on me. It was Friday night. I was in Paddington Green Police Station.

I was fed ok, I wasn't harmed, and I wasn't asked anything until Sunday evening about eight o'clock when the policeman walked in. He was a sergeant in short sleeves, I remember, and had a clipboard with a bit of paper on it. He stood up in front of me and he told me my name, my mother and father's name, where I lived. He knew everything, everything about me. He named off my grandfather's army number, my mother's maiden name, everything. And when he was finished he said to me, 'do you know a police officer in Sligo called X?' I said 'I do'. 'Well', he said, 'you can go'. They never laid a finger on me, but they never asked me one question from 12 o'clock Friday night until eight o'clock Sunday evening. And that was two days out of my life! So out I went and home to the aunt and got absolutely murdered – would she believe where I was? She did not believe a word I said, and me missing for two days.

I remember a bomb went off in Catford too, when I was living there – it wouldn't be too far away from where we were. Catford bus station I think it went off in. So that was all down to the North. That was all down to Northern Ireland and what was going on I suppose, in London too.

“One event changed my life forever”

One event changed my life forever

My connections with Sligo go back over nine years. I have a lot of connections through my work with Sligo and Donegal but when I come to relax with family and friends my base is Mullaghmore. I love Mullaghmore. I go there for peace and quiet. Sometimes half of Omagh is there when you're out walking. I suppose that's why they call it 'little Omagh' because so many people come here on holidays and short breaks. Another favourite spot of mine is the Seaweed Baths in Strandhill.

For me it's a place of peace, to go for walks round the Head or on the beach. It's amazing how many Omagh people you will meet there. If I meet someone I know we'll have a wee witter and ask 'how are you? Are you down for the weekend or just for the day?' But when I'm there I don't like to spend a lot of time talking to people. For me it's a place to go for peace and tranquillity.

For people in the North to come South on residential weekends is such a relief – to get away from tension and stress. On the Sunday, going back, you can see their faces changing. You can see the stress coming back again because they know what they're going back into – so much strain. When people come for the first time, from Belfast say, to Mullaghmore, they can't believe it that maybe a hundred miles down the road is this lovely peaceful place, where it doesn't matter if you are Catholic or Protestant. Nobody passes any remarks. I still find the same thing happening myself. Once I go over the border into Sligo, my shoulders relax and slowly the tension drains away. Maybe it's the sea air that helps.

I was living in England so I was, when Mountbatten was killed. I remember I was out cleaning my windows and this wee woman came up to me and gave me hell.

'You Irish, look what you've done.' We were all tarred with one brush because we were Irish. I hadn't even heard the news. To be

honest I didn't even know who Lord Mountbatten was. It was only when I rang home that Mummy told me and she didn't even know he was related to the Queen. It was only later I found out he was the Queen's cousin. But my neighbour woman Lily wouldn't say hello after that. It would be alright for a week or two then it would start up again 'You Irish this, You Irish that.' It got to the stage where I didn't want to see her coming and if I turned on the news and another soldier had been killed I knew there'd be hell to pay. Lily wouldn't let it go. But back home my family weren't affected much. By that stage everyone took it as a way of life and no one passed any remarks. Mountbatten's death was seen as just another person killed in the Troubles. It didn't affect my family directly. It didn't stop us coming to Sligo.

I've always thought of Sligo as a peaceful place from when I was a child. The way we were brought up as Protestants, when it was the 12th of July we were taken over the border. There was a Catholic man used to lend Daddy his car so we could go south to Bundoran. That's where our days were spent during the 12th of July demonstrations. When I was small I didn't know the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant. I remember a boy called Sean who had a different school uniform. When I asked my mother why that was she said, 'because he's smarter than you.' That was her way of making sure I wouldn't treat Catholics any different. That attitude was quite common in my family. It's all mixed marriages. I never paid any attention to differences between Catholics and Protestants when I was growing up.

When my father got married he went to see a councillor about getting a house for us. The house was given to a Catholic family. After that the Orange sash was thrown off and never worn again. It wasn't because the family was Catholic, just because the politician was no help whatsoever. I believe politicians should help the people who voted for them, whether they are Catholic or Protestant.

The Troubles started to have an impact in my life about 1985 when my husband and his workmates were under threat. My husband was a builder but he wasn't involved in any organisations so he thought he was safe. Then when he started building work at an army barracks he was told his life was at risk. He had to look under his car every morning. We were all made aware of the need for more security. He would leave home at different times, go to work on Monday and maybe not get back until Friday afternoon. Security checks became

part of our everyday lives. Two of my friends were killed along the border in Castlederg. One was a UDR man. I knew those friends as very quiet and innocent, just doing a job. I couldn't understand why they were blown to bits. That was really hard for me to deal with. I think that was in the early 80s. The one event that changed my life forever happened on Friday 17th January 1992.

My husband wasn't supposed to be working that day. He was quite ill but he insisted on going to work. The contractor wasn't very high profile so he thought he was safe. He worked a lot at Christmas time and we used to go to my sister's place. Then Jimmy was able to take two weeks off and we thought we'd be able to have Christmas in our home every year after that. A fortnight later he was gone.

There had been a threat at the base all week. I normally went to my mother's then picked him up later. Apparently the bomb was supposed to go off in the morning but because it was foggy it was changed to the afternoon. If it had gone off when it was supposed to my Jimmy would be still alive.

I remember at 5.10pm I went out to get potatoes. I remember crossing the road and hearing the awful bang. My first thought was 'My God, they've got our men.' That was strange because it was fifteen miles down the road but I just knew because something gave me this cold feeling. My neighbour said, 'you're talking nonsense.' Nobody could understand what happened. Then at 6 o'clock it was on the news. My daughter was sick all over the kitchen floor. Nobody could give me any information. I even rang the hospitals. All the neighbours were out. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing. The authorities knew at 7oclock that my Jimmy was gone but I wasn't officially told until 10 o'clock.

It's nearly 20 years ago but that day is as vivid in my memory as yesterday. I remember exactly what I was doing. I was wallpapering. I remember thinking, 'he'll come home and see those bubbles and say it's not right.' It was a cloudy day, foggy and mild for January. That day doesn't seem to fade. Once I talk about it, I'm right back there.

The IRA has destroyed my life. I have had to learn to live with it. I'll never forget it. I'll never forgive them. I've come to the conclusion I don't know who to forgive. If they'd been brought to justice I know, with the Agreement, they wouldn't stay in prison, probably, for more than a few months. But it would be good to name and shame them. If they came to me face to face and said, 'we murdered your husband'

I would find it difficult but I think I could forgive them, if they were genuine. But still, to this day, I feel I can't forgive them.

I would say for about three years afterwards I would have been a bigot. I don't know why that was. My mother used to scold me for it. It probably wasn't until I got help from the WAVE Trauma Centre that it just turned right around. I learned that there were so many Catholics out there that had suffered as much as I did. I know a Catholic girl who was killed by the UVF just about 500 yards up the road from Teebane. Me and her mother, to this day would still have a big rapport.

Organisations that have come into being since the Troubles began have brought people together to tell their stories. I think it's good for all organisations to have a mix from both sides because you can sit and listen and realise they've gone through exactly the same kind of thing; they've suffered just as much. When my husband was murdered, that was the worst thing for me; that had the most impact, definitely. It was such a struggle afterwards. Just to get my girls to eighteen, I prayed to God to give me the strength to see them through. It was difficult, especially with the youngest girl. I couldn't cry in front of her. If I wanted to cry I would have to go to the toilet and then I'd only be sitting there for a few minutes and she'd bang on the door. I just couldn't leave her. She had this fear that I would go out and never come back, like her Dad.

I think all that fear has impacted on the next generation. I never told my granddaughter how her granddad was killed. She knows it was a bomb. I didn't want her to know if it was Catholic or Protestant bombers. I will wait till she asks in later life. I don't want her growing up hating Catholics. My daughter is grown up, she's going to college. People have said to me 'why are you sending her there? After all she lost her father.' I didn't send her, she chose to go there. I don't think people should go here or go there, to college or anywhere, just because it's Protestant, especially since the Ceasefire. We've moved on. I don't want my grandchildren growing up making distinctions. I hope that in the next thirty years, Northern Ireland will be a different place, a peaceful place where people can go where they want, say what they want. It feels so different now, you can go to work without being stopped, you can go to visit friends and there's no roadside check. That's all gone, which is brilliant.

I think when the army was here Catholic families suffered more than Protestant families. I've heard so many stories now, from my

work on peace projects. Stories about how the army treated people, taking them out of their cars, taking their groceries out, potatoes and the like, throwing them across the road, then maybe holding people for an hour or more. If they didn't cooperate it would be even worse. If that happened nowadays it would be harassment but I think because so much of it went on, it's hard for people to trust the police. I would like to think that the PSNI could gain the respect of everyone as a new police force but I would say it is only in certain areas. Around Belfast or Armagh or other parts of Northern Ireland I'd say there would still be a lot of distrust but around Omagh I'd say people would have no problem trusting the police.

I'd say it's part of the legacy of the conflict that Catholic families feel more distrust of the police probably because they were stopped and searched so much and made to wait on the side of the road. That never happened to me or anyone in my family. Once the police see your driving license they know what area you live in.

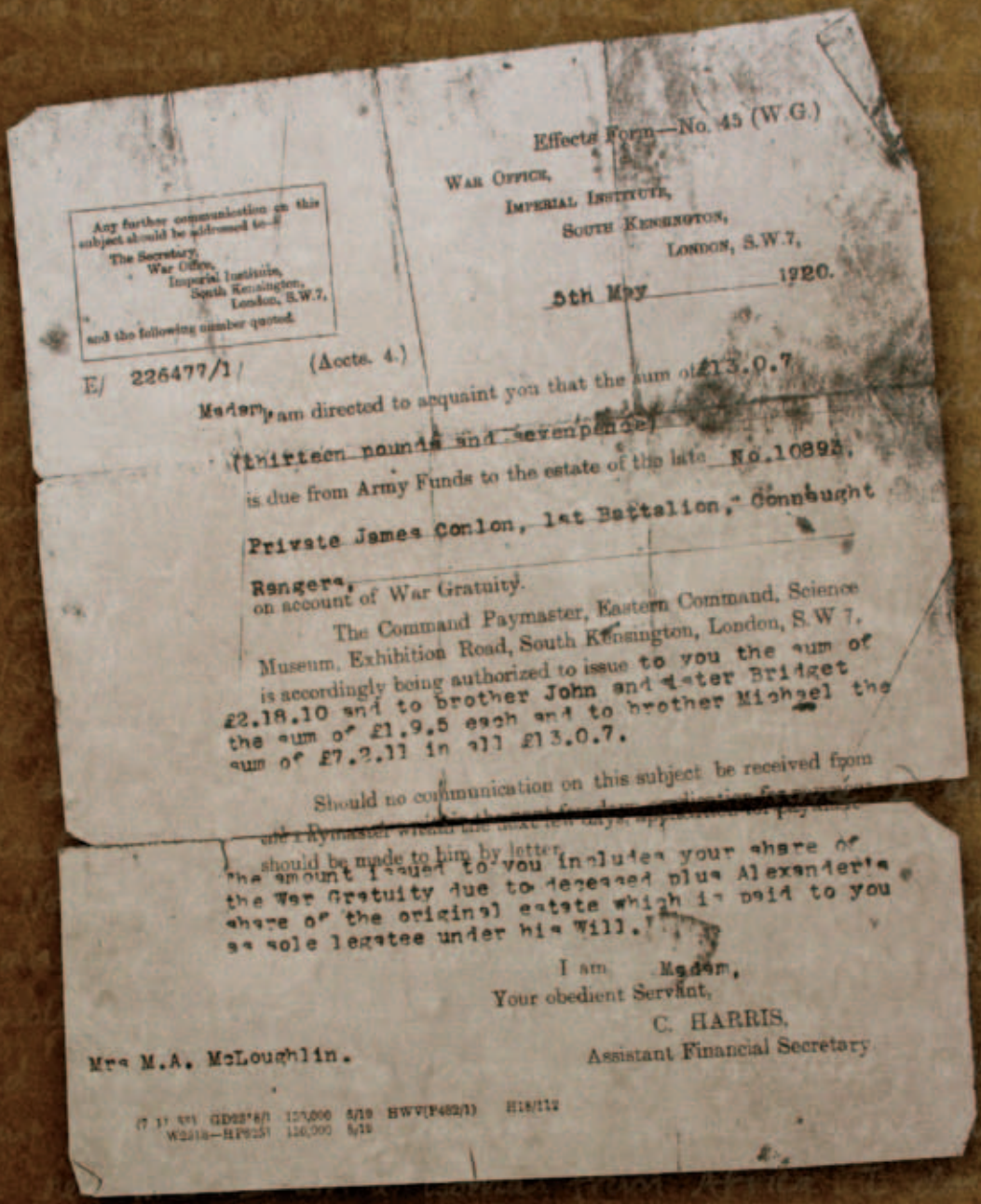
When the Omagh bomb went off in '98 it took me back to my own atrocity. I know so many people Catholic and Protestant that were killed or injured. I thought I should go to the funerals but I couldn't cope. People started asking me how I had coped but I couldn't tell them. I wanted to say, it's early days, it will be a long hard struggle but I couldn't find the words. It's been a hard struggle for all the families affected by it. I think a lot of families have moved on, a few can't or won't. The younger generation is different, they all mix together. I think that's brilliant. We have a lot of Polish people living here now and Lithuanians. We're more diverse. We're moving forward. I'm so glad that the Peace money allows organisations to exist that bring people together from both sides because it shows that both sides have been affected, both have moved on and there's light at the end of the tunnel. There's still a lot of people out there who maybe wouldn't have come to terms with the Troubles, with what happened to them personally. They haven't even started to talk about it. I'd say we'd need another ten years or so. Then you'll have the transgenerational effects, how it gets passed on to children and grandchildren.

If someone had said to me twenty years ago that I'd be working in Catholic areas or Loyalist areas I'd have said, 'no, never, not me.' But that has changed. I still feel a bit afraid going into new areas for the first time but once you meet the families the fear just goes. I have to say I have been accepted well by both sides of the community,

both extremes. I suppose Northern Ireland being such a small place, when I say my name, people make a connection. They connect me with Teebane; they know straight away that I'm Protestant. Now I feel it's a privilege to be allowed into people's homes. I can say 'Yes, I'm Protestant' or 'Yes, I'm connected to Teebane but I'm not here to talk about me, I'm here to listen to your story.' That's my Outreach work. I think there should be more of this kind of thing done on both sides of the border, people telling their stories and hearing each other. I think it can be a turning point for people and give them great satisfaction to tell their story. Years ago I would have sat and cried and sometimes I still get a wee bit emotional but there's no shame in that.

When that young Catholic PSNI officer was killed a few weeks ago, that was horrendous. It made my stomach churn when I heard it. My daughter rang me. It was just a horrible feeling all weekend. The fist announcement was that a Catholic policeman's car had been bombed. Then later they said he was dead. I thought of his mother, how awful it was for her. I could feel some of her pain. She lost a son, I lost a husband. It must be horrendous for a mother to lose a child. There's no words to describe it. I feel for that mother. I'd agree with everything she said, that his death should not be in vain. I hope people will say now, 'Enough is enough.' I think a lot more people should tell their stories because it's kind of like a release and it shows there's good and bad on both sides and we all have to work and live together now.

“Nothing is simple”



Effects Form—No. 45 (W.G.)

WAR OFFICE,
IMPERIAL INSTITUTE,
SOUTH KENSINGTON,
LONDON, S.W.7,

5th May 1920.

Any further communication on this subject should be addressed to—
The Secretary,
War Office,
Imperial Institute,
South Kensington,
London, S.W.7,
and the following number quoted.

E/ 226477/1 (Accts. 4.)

Madam, I am directed to acquaint you that the sum of £13.0.7
(thirteen pounds and sevenpence)
is due from Army Funds to the estate of the late No.10893,
Private James Conlon, 1st Battalion, Connaught
Rangers,
on account of War Gratuity.

The Command Paymaster, Eastern Command, Science Museum, Exhibition Road, South Kensington, London, S.W.7, is accordingly being authorized to issue to you the sum of £2.18.10 and to brother John and sister Bridget the sum of £1.9.5 each and to brother Michael the sum of £7.2.11 in all £13.0.7.

Should no communication on this subject be received from the Paymaster within the next few days, payment for the amount issued to you includes your share of the War Gratuity due to deceased plus Alexander's share of the original estate which is paid to you as sole legatee under his Will.

I am Madam,
Your obedient Servant,
C. HARRIS,
Assistant Financial Secretary.

Mrs M.A. McLoughlin.

(7 1) 971 GD62*6/1 125,000 5/19 HWV(P482/1) H18/112
W2218—H.P8251 125,000 5/19

Nothing is simple

I remember being home from England – it's funny, you come home from a country that's just given you a job and been feeding you and then you're down the town holding black flags in O'Connell Street against what that government is doing to men who are dying. I stood on O'Connell Street with black flags in '81, when the hunger strikers were dying. There was a lot of hatred in Sligo town, you know. I can see how there was a huge recruitment to the IRA around that time, it was nearly impossible, it was kind of do or die: were we going to let fellow Irishmen starve to death and stand by and do nothing?

I remember at the time the Irish Government just seemed to be helpless. Maybe if you look at the figures about the size of the British Army and the size of the Irish Army, well then maybe they were helpless, but I remember for a week two there seemed to be such a feeling of – 'well here's Bobby Sands has died now, so what's the Irish government going to do?' It seemed as if they were going to do something then, but of course they did nothing. And then there was helplessness, then people thinking, 'well, if they're going to do nothing, well, then it's down to us'.

Personally, luckily, I always looked upon men dying of hunger strike and people being blown up as human, as human beings, and that we were all human beings, it doesn't matter what flag we were standing behind. And you know, to me, I remember the hunger strike – I went and protested because a man died, a man starved to death, and that had to be a tragedy. Now that's only me personally. Of course there was other people saw it different…

I honour and remember the dead men and the decisions they made on what they thought was right – on both sides. So I go up to the Cenotaph on Pearse Road in November and I march up to the

Republican Plot at Easter. I lay a poppy wreath at the Cenotaph in November to honour those who were in the British Army in the First World War like my mother's family, and I march to the Republican Plot at Easter to honour those that were in the IRA because my father's side were all Republican. My grandfather's brother mutinied in India in 1920 when he was in the Connaught Rangers and he was sentenced to death. That was reprieved and he came back here and joined the IRA, so that's my father's side of the family.

How many men fought in the First World War and came back and joined the IRA? Loads of them. It was actually the men that fought in the British Army in the First World War, who were trained to use guns, they were put in charge – Quartermasters of most IRA brigades, they trained the young fellas how to use rifles.

Talking about joining the British Army I know the Catholic Bishop of Elphin preached from the pulpit telling young men to join, and I know his car was available on Tuesdays and Thursdays to bring men to King house in Boyle if they wanted to sign up to the Connaught Rangers. He put his car at their disposal to bring them up and join the British Army.

It was also a great adventure for young fellas. Imagine if I'm 18 years of age and I'm going around Sligo without a pair of shoes on my feet, and in 1914 or 1915 I am told if I join up I'll have money in my pocket, a lovely new uniform, that the war will be over by Christmas and I can go and see France? Today it'd be like going to see Mars or to see Jupiter, because if them men ever seen Dublin it would have been great, but to be told you're going to France! So for young people it was an adventure. It wasn't that they were anti-Irish that made them join the British Army and go to fight the First World War, and that's proven by how many of them come back and joined the Republicans, the IRA, and joined the fight for Independence, and took sides in the war of Independence and the Civil War.

There is a great thing in Sligo about the Noble Six who were shot on the mountain.

What happened was that Republican forces ambushed and killed three men from the Free State Army and wounded three more in July 22 at Rockwood. In the September, two months later, the Free State Army took a reprisal action. They were aware of an IRA unit on Benbulben Mountain, and they surrounded and attacked them and six of the IRA members were shot dead. Dubious circumstances

because the bodies were found in different places and some of them were shot in the head I believe, but they were the Noble Six, and they lie in Sligo cemetery in a large Republican plot.

But, you know, nothing is simple – one of the men that lies in that plot, one of the Noble Six, he was shot in 1922. His father is buried in France, he was killed in 1917 in a British Army uniform, and that lad, the Noble Six lad, his mother went through life with the British Army pension and an old IRA pension. And that wasn't uncommon in this town, you know.

I still call myself a nationalist, but maybe I'm not a Republican you know? I would like someday to see the 32 counties, but I don't want it done by pushing a million people into the sea. And I think Europe and European law will eventually do away with the border – we can call it what we want to – a united Ireland or whatever, but it will all be ruled by the one law and it'll be all one in the end anyway.

“Crossing the line”

Photograph: Derek Speirs

Crossing the line

I moved back to the North in the 1980's. There was a lot of shootings and bombings going on then in Northern Ireland. It affected the Travellers in the way that there was restrictions in place where they could or couldn't go. Knocking on people's doors, selling stuff, going to the markets and setting up a stall, well that wasn't really a healthy occupation, so it was best not do that type of work. Most of the lads up there were either on the scrap or the blocks of timber, you know, it was a better occupation, it was open, and people could see exactly what you are doing.

I moved into a site in Derry. I had no dealings in any way shape or form with the IRA. The experience I had was of the police and the army, driving in and out of the site at night, shining and flashing the lights, beeping the horns and putting on the sirens and stuff. The area we were in was full of Catholics, Nationalists, and they weren't really keen on the army or the police wandering around and driving around on a regular basis. It could be maybe every second night, you know? With all the stuff that was going on in the North, the police and the army weren't the type of people that you wanted around your place in the early hours of the morning in case somebody decided to take potshots at them.

We just couldn't afford to be seen to be getting involved in any side one way or the other. To be involved, or to be seen to be involved with the police coming and doing random checks in around the camps at night, or driving in during the day, wasn't healthy for the people who were staying there. So the best thing for it was to try and cause as much aggravation as possible to the police and then they would stop coming in. Which worked eventually.

We decided that the best way to sort it out was to get planks, put nails in them and leave them along the gate where we'd go in and out and when they would be driving in they would cut the tyres off their jeeps. Now the army and police were upset about it, obviously, they weren't happy, they were giving out, and they dragged a few of the lads out. They wanted to know exactly who had done it, and why, so we said we didn't know, that there was no planks when we were going to bed so it could have been anybody that came around and put them in there.

Otherwise you would be locked up for the whole day, I mean, you'd be straight into the back of those Land Rovers and trounced. We stuck to our story, I mean, they knew we'd done it, they probably even knew why we'd done it, but we stuck to the story that we didn't know who had done it and it could be anybody, so they sort of half accepted it after a couple of hours. Then they decided to raid and tear around and see what they could find and check the motors out and the usual hassle and aggravation, but then they went off and they didn't come back after that for a long time. It had started to become a habit with them to come in but that stopped them coming.

I remember another night when I was staying at a different site and we were in a pub in town. It was built into the walls of Derry. I got into a taxi to get to where I was staying, and when I told the guy in the taxi where I was living he wasn't really keen about bringing me home, but he said he would on condition that when we got to the roundabout he would slow down and we would all jump out, but that he couldn't stop there. And you know that was the reality: he said, 'if I do stop and we are caught I would be shot and you would be shot too'. They even had their own taxi service, the Protestants was on one side and the Catholics was on the other side.

We used to have a great laugh, because, when I moved across the border, I was in Clones, which is right on the border and of course at that time, Travellers being Travellers, you wouldn't be served – it's the same today, this is 2011 and you still won't be served in some pubs. At that time we used to go across the border into Newtownbutler to the pub, and we had to go through an army checkpoint. Every Saturday night we would go out, go across the border, and we would meet the army. They would stop us and they would say 'are you going to the pub lads' and we would say 'yeah', and on the way back the driver would have a few bottles on him, and he'd wind down the window

and hop a sixpack out the window to the soldier and they would let you go across the border with no hassle. I know it was illegal but we used to do it on a regular basis. Now you wouldn't do it if the police was there, because you'd be thrown in the back of a jeep and away with you. The police and the army were different. But the army guys didn't mind, or they didn't seem to mind anyway, if you gave them six bottles of beer.

I remember once we were stopped at the checkpoint and I was asked where I was coming from and I said, 'Derry' and the guy said he had never heard tell of it. The policeman and the soldiers, they were calling it Londonderry. And they kept me there for about an hour because I wouldn't say I was living in Londonderry. I kept saying I was in Derry and the more I said I was in Derry the more they held on to me. Until eventually they got fed up and let me go. I wasn't too bothered, it was a nice sunny day and I had nowhere much to go.

Aughnacloy. Now that was a dangerous border. I remember going across that border one evening and there was a couple of young cadets, you wouldn't describe them as more than cadets, these guys were only about 17 or 18 years of age if they were that.

Now when you come into those checkpoints obviously you had to dim your lights, they were sort of very pernickety about that – if you didn't they would be very upset with you. There would be fellas jumping up in the air with guns and they would be waving them at you – so you wouldn't be long turning off your lights completely, never mind to dim them.

But I seen them once, and I seen a young man, a young coloured fella, a black fella, and he was terrified. His face: he was absolutely terrified. He had the gun resting on one of those boulders, and he was lying across it and there was another young fella, and his knuckles were white, he was holding the gun so tight. So if you had a car that was backfiring and you going across that border, well God may mind you, because these young lads, when they stopped you at Aughnacloy they would tear your motor from bumper to bumper. There was no exception. Traveller or settled, they didn't care. I think it was the only border in the North where they took their job extremely seriously, and if the police were there you could multiply it by five. That was Aughnacloy! The young fellas that were there with their guns, they would break your nerves looking at them.

But the other borders – now some of them it was just a wave through or they would stop and ask you for ID, you would show them your ID and then you were gone.

The children were terrified at the beginning when they seen the guns but near the end they were sort of fine with it. After a while they didn't seem to mind the soldiers much. They got used to them because every time, on the streets, they would see them back-to-back walking up and down the streets with their guns. So they seen them on a regular basis and it became sort of semi-acceptable to see you being stopped at checkpoints and not getting that much of a hassle other than just show the ID and they would wave you through.

The families that were living up there, they got about their business I suppose the same as everybody else. The people that grew up in the North, whether settled or Traveller, I suppose they knew the boundaries. When, of course, the likes of me came in there was fresh meat that knew nothing about it and they would tell me all kinds of stories! They would tell me everything was acceptable but it wasn't of course. You had to have your ID on you at all times in the North, it wasn't acceptable not to have it otherwise you would end up in the Police station. That was something that I didn't realise because when I was in England you didn't have to have your ID and here in Ireland you didn't have to have your ID constantly in your pocket either at the time. In the North, if you hadn't it in your motor or in your pocket at all times you were begging for trouble. Every 500 yards in some places there was a different checkpoint, whether it was army or police, and then there was the random ones where there were fellas that were out walking and they were bored walking so they would stop somebody, just to give themselves a rest from walking. There was a lot of that sort of stuff.

There were a few fellas in Derry that used to get a lot of aggravation, but then, truthfully, they used to aggravate the army and police too. One fella went out to Buncrana and he got a load of timber – he had a brand-new van and he was taking it to Fort George, When they brought him in they stripped the van, took all the timber out, took off the car trailer that he had and emptied all that to the ground. They took all the timber off of the inside of the van, they took all the timber off the roof and the floor where the van was timbered out. They took everything out, held him for about six hours checking him out and then when they were finished they told him to get his van and move

out of the way. He wanted them to fix the timber back on again. And they said, 'if you want it, take it, and if you don't, leave it and we will burn it'.

There was things like that went on, and it happened with scrap as well. If you gave aggravation to them you were begging for bother. There was times when some fellas were just coming across the border and they would aggravate the soldiers, or they would say that there was a van behind them with explosives in it or something like that, just for a bit of fun, because you see, these guys were reared in the North and they were used to seeing soldiers and police with guns, so it didn't bother them in the slightest. They thought it was funny, for some strange reason. They had a weird sense of humour. But after a while when the soldiers and the police starts aggravating them, holding them for the whole day, taking their motors apart, they decided it wasn't really a good idea after all. But like I said, the guys up there were born and reared into it all, they were used to it. But for me, with seeing the guns, if the fella asked me for my ID, I said, 'there you are'. I mean, I am not a saint and I wasn't really happy, but I knew where to draw the line, I never mentioned explosives in anyway shape or form because I knew that was crossing the line.

I suppose my view on it would be that it had to be hard for the people that were living there, even though they were born and reared watching this all their lives. You can see why all the resentment towards the army and the police were there, you know, for some of the Catholic areas, because they used to get riddled just for being Catholic. In the North, and even today, your name got you a hard time, because they could tell by your name whether you were Catholic or Protestant and depending on who you were talking to at any given time it would mean that you would have a good time or a bad time. With Travellers, they had it fairly easy because when they heard the name they knew they were Travellers anyway so it didn't really bother them that much. We were different in that way. But I suppose, for settled people in the North, they had a hard time even getting their kids to school at times, because of what street you could walk down and that. So when they go to one of the other countries, England, America or anywhere else I would imagine that they would have a completely different outlook on life because of the experiences that they had growing up.

“I was so caught up in it all”

Julien Behal/Press Association Images

I was so caught up in it all

It started off when I was young. My father was a building worker and we had to go to England. When I was in England people attacked me because I was Irish and then when we came back to Ireland they attacked me because I was English.

My father was a moderate sort of Republican – my relations would have been in the IRA in the twenties but I was mad interested in Republican stuff. Before the hunger strikes I used to go on marches every Saturday for the blanket men.

Then when I was working on a building site I met two lads from Derry. One of them lads, his uncle was killed on Bloody Sunday. It affected me. I kinda got into Sinn Féin stuff. I used to read books about the rebels and it took up a big part in my life. I wouldn't go out anywhere unless there was rebel music playing. I used to go to all the H-block marches and stuff and I knew most of the well-known rebels, generally just hanging about with them. One time I was working on a job and there were eleven IRA men working alongside me on it, and some had been involved in the hunger strikes.

Later on then I met a couple of lads who were involved. My friend, my good friend, British soldiers shot his little nephew, he was only 10, they hit him with a plastic bullet and killed him stone dead.

I was going to join the IRA. My friends who were involved wouldn't let me join because I had young kids. I wanted to go up the North but they wouldn't let me. One of them lads did years in jail, they were my friends and I was working with them every day of the week. It turned out that the crowd I was going to join with, they did a bank job and they were all arrested and that put me off then.

When you go to join the IRA the first thing they say to you is 'Do you know your Irish history?' and you say you do. They tell you not

to dishonour the memory of men who went before you – like Emmet, Tone, Connolly and Pearse. Then they say 'if you inform you'll get a bullet in the head. You're not going to get much out of this except you'll be shot or killed or maybe end up in jail a long time'. They tell you the truth.

At the time when I wanted to support the IRA properly I wouldn't have minded shooting a soldier but I wouldn't have liked to plant a bomb. At times the sort of things the IRA did… when kids got blown up… I was disgusted. That lad in Derry that was tied to a seat and sent off to a checkpoint, that to me was… well, there was nothing noble about that, was there?

I would have put my life at risk and that, and I did, storing stuff and so on. I used to store a bit of stuff for the boys like, and the house got raided. One time I remember there was stuff stored in the shed and my wife must have looked in the shed and seen it. She was mad and she told me she'd tell the cops herself so I told the boys to move it and not to put stuff in the shed again. The boys didn't have much time for me after that.

Then the house was raided. It was early in the morning. I was eating a bowl of cornflakes and I saw two branchmen hopping over the wall – it was an eight-foot wall we had at the back of the house. When my wife opened the front door there was seventeen more on the doorstep. I wasn't sure if the stuff was gone out of the shed yet or not.

After that raid my wife wouldn't talk to me. Looking back on it I put Sinn Féin before my children. I was so caught up in it all. My wife used to take the kids on holidays and so on without me. Looking back now, I wish I'd put my family first. I was just so full of bitterness and hatred. My kids, the eldest one remembers the house getting raided but the next one down said, 'Mammy told me it was the house next door that got raided'. The younger ones were too small to remember. My eldest has no time for any of that stuff now and she has my respect for that. She's a good kid with a heart of gold, a great big heart of gold.

My attitude is that my involvement broke up my family. They should have been the most precious thing in the world to me.

Thank God I never did join the IRA. I'd like to think of myself as a nice kind person but when they shoot one of yours, then the hatred and bitterness builds and it becomes like a runaway monster. When I look back on it, when I was a young buck of 16, 17, 18, and if I heard

a soldier got shot I used to shout for joy. Looking back now I think 'Jesus what sort of a person was I at all?'

I just wanted the British Army out of Ireland. I wanted peace in Ireland. I thought that if the Brits went there would be peace. They had done so much damage to Irish people down through the years.

On YouTube the other week I saw a film of an army patrol under fire from heavy machine gun. Some were firing back but other boys were just sitting there behind the wall shitting themselves. To me the British Army were supermen, they were fuckin' impossible to kill way back then. Now I see pictures of them terrified under fire… they were human beings. I never looked at them as human beings. They were just targets and it was hard to best them. Years ago I would have rejoiced at seeing a human being die. It shows my mentality in them days. Now I think 'What the fuck was all that for?'

A united Ireland is not worth it when people are being killed. A united Ireland is not worth the life of anybody. Even people who join the Real IRA, they think that as long as the Brits rule part of Ireland there'll never be peace; but its just a waste of life. I am just glad that I didn't kill anyone.

When you seen McGuinness and the DUP, when they were talking to each other and smiling, you said to yourself 'well then, what was all the killing for in the first place?' But of course back then the Unionists were not always ready to do business either. And how do you negotiate with the British Army? When they were in full swing they weren't too happy to talk or negotiate. I remember at the time of the hunger strike, I had a feeling something could have been done that time, but Maggie Thatcher, she caused the whole thing to go completely crazy.

30 years ago I wouldn't have the views that I have now. I'd have thought that Gerry Adams was like Michael Collins – a traitor. My own brother thinks the world of Michael Collins but I used to hate the man because he had turned the guns on his own people.

But you look at both sides now. I don't know… I'm wondering… I think about it a lot. If I had my life back I would have done it different. Now I don't even like to hear rebel songs anymore. I see it differently now. I try to figure out why I didn't see it then. Other people were out enjoying themselves, going to dances and having fun, and I was engrossed in all this stuff – I couldn't figure myself out – I wouldn't even go out for a drink with someone if they weren't rebel-minded.

I am still a member of Sinn Féin because I am disgusted at what I see happening to the poor, but I would never like to see Sinn Féin involved in violence again.

Part of why I wanted to tell my story is in the hope that I can stop someone else going down the road of violence – there's nothing to be gained from it… to me the violence was completely futile and only made the problem ten times worse.

It's not much of a story is it?

Another reason why I wanted to tell my story is that I would like to apologise to people for my bigoted views. I was a stupid ignorant donkey: I hated Protestants even though I never met one.

A mate of mine, he'd been in jail for a very long time, he was a nice lad, he was only a few months out of jail and he went home up North to see his family. He was walking out of a pub when three fellas shot him and when they took off they crashed the car. When they crashed the car the army came out of the woods, it was a situation backed up by the British Army. The three fellas who shot my mate turned out to be in the UDR and I suppose it was that that made me hate Protestants. Even though I never met a Protestant before, to me UDR just meant Protestant.

I met a fella here in Sligo in a pub. Someone came on the TV wearing a Poppy and I said, 'look at them dirty bastards'. Well, he just looked at me and he said, 'I think you're wrong'. 'Dirty bastards' I said, 'I hate them'. He said, 'I wear a poppy'. I didn't talk to him for months after that, every time I saw him I just growled at him. Funny thing was eventually my wife left me and his wife left him and he and I ended up in the same boat and were neighbours. Bit by bit we became friends and now I think the world of him. That man would do anything for you. He has changed my attitude towards people. I've met a lot of Protestants in Sligo and they are the nicest people. I just want to apologise for my bigotry.

I was glad of the Peace Process. I didn't think it would last. I thought Gerry Adams would have got shot to be honest. I seen him on telly last night asking people to come forward about that PSNI Officer being shot in Omagh. I'm happy with the way Sinn Féin are going now and I'm just glad there's peace. Even now, I'm getting less interested in politics, maybe it's the older you get… I don't know.

I don't really care about a United Ireland if I can see an Agreed Ireland where people can have their rights and traditions, and not

be killing each other – and that includes loyalists too. Now we're a multicultural country, Chinese, Africans, Poles, they all have their rights. We have to accept other people's cultures.


“It is important for me to keep my culture”
RUSSIA
Black Sea
GEORGIA
ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
TURKEY
Caspian Sea
KURDISTAN
IRAN
SYRIA
IRAQ
Mediterranean Sea

It is important for me to keep my culture

I was not literate,
but my teacher educated me
I did not know how to sing anthems
but poor people taught me
I did not know anger
but the oppressor taught me
I did not know liberty
but my homeland taught me

I was born in a camp in Iraq. We lived in tents for years. Then we moved to Jordan. We lived in tents there for another four years. Life was really hard. The weather was really bad, hot. It was really scary as well, a lot of danger. We got help from the UNHCR. We got litres and litres of water. There are eleven in my family. We had one tent for cooking and one for sleeping and sitting down with friends. The camp was between Jordan and Iraq. It was really dangerous, a lot of animals, snakes and things. We had to clean the ground all the time.

Before that we lived in a house. My dad was trying to build a house for us. He worked really hard to get money to buy stuff for us. Saddam was really bad in Iraq. He wasn't helping people, except for some friends. When the bombs were dropping all the shops were closed. We had no food. My dad was trying really hard to move us to Jordan by lorry. We got up at night, at five in the morning to get into a lorry with a lot of Kurdish people. We were afraid we would die. My dad just prayed. Then there were aeroplanes. It was really dangerous. My mum was sitting in the lorry crying and crying. We were all holding

each other until we got to a safe place. It was a long journey for hours and hours in the truck.

Then there were Americans giving us food, giving us tents, helping my dad and my brothers putting up a tent. I was happy. I said, 'oh my God, we are safe, we are in Europe.' I was crying. Then my dad said No, we were in a safe place but it was not Europe. It was really hard after that. First we were in one place then after a year we moved to a different camp. But some terrorists they were putting bombs into our camp. They were trying to kill us. All the people were moving from buildings and from tents, moving outside to be safe. One night it was really bad. We were all moved outside. We were sitting on the ground. The bomb was in a car and we had to run away.

In 1988 Saddam killed thousands of Kurds in Halabja and many other places. He wanted to kill all the Kurds. He used chemicals. It was genocide. Kurdistan is part of Iraq. You can find it on YouTube, all this stuff.

There were a lot of Kurdish people in the camp in Jordan. The UNCHR, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, came to the camp. They were speaking to families saying which countries they were going to. My aunty was trying to get us into Finland. But they didn't accept us because we are a big family, I think. After four years, in the next camp a Kurdish family were sent to Ireland. They sent a picture to my brother. When we saw the picture we were so happy. My dad was praying we would go to Ireland. I was saying, 'Dad, only in our dreams. We are in a camp, how can we go to Europe?' He said to pray. Then our name came up for Ireland. We were looking at the names and we saw our name on the list. Oh my brother was so happy, oh my God, yes. Then we were waiting. I think it was one month. The Department of Justice was interviewing our family. I was small at the time only thirteen, now I am eighteen. Then after that we were waiting six months. We went to Mayo first, then we came to Sligo. There were three groups, one went to Mullingar, one to Carrick-on-Shannon and one to Sligo. Nine families I think. We lived in a big house in Sligo for four years. We had a lot of upset and moving around. We are happy now. New life, not scary, no snakes. Ireland is my dream come true.

My first year here I had a problem with the language. They were saying, 'how are you'? I didn't speak any English. I didn't know what they were saying or what to answer. I would go home crying from

school. But my teacher was really nice, helping me to speak English. The students are nice, some of them are friendly.

My first language is Kurdish, my second is Persian then Arabic. I can speak a little Arabic but understand it and read well. I learn English now for four years. And French for my Junior Cert. I had three teachers helping me to learn English in Ireland. I love them. I can't forget them. They were nice. Now I have to do my Leaving Cert and they are helping me as well and I am trying my best. Ireland is a really good place for people to live. My whole family is together now.

My dad used to work as a lorry driver. He can't speak English that much. They are not giving work to him. My mum finds it hard. She was in Iran, then Iraq, then Jordan, now Ireland. She is trying to get English and finds it very hard to learn. My dad loved working hard. He says, 'oh if I was in my country, I could work. Why do you need language? I can do everything.' My mum and dad are paying for us, to help us with school books. My sister is looking for work. She is not getting any money. She says, 'It's really hard looking for work. I am copying a CV, copying and giving it out but no work.'

Sligo is a nice place, nice people, we have strong health. We love Rosses Point, a nice place, I love it. We have Yeats. I am learning about Ireland. I went to Northern Ireland, to Belfast with my school. I am going with my dad to different cities in Ireland. I love Sligo. It's like New York for us.

In Ireland I heard it was war between Ireland and England, in history, people were dying. In Iraq it was the same, between Iran and Iraq. In history, or now, war means fighting and soldiers, killing people and dying, being terrified.

It is a good thing to fight for freedom but in the past Saddam was doing things for himself and his relations. He didn't care about other people. Iraq is rich enough in oil. He was keeping the riches for himself.

When we were small we were not allowed to go outside. My father doesn't like fighting. He worked hard for us. When there was fighting our house was moving, shaking, falling over. My father wanted people to talk, face to face, no fighting. Talking for freedom is better than fighting. Everyone needs freedom but not by throwing stones, breaking nice hotels, breaking shops. I saw a Kurdish boy at the back of a crowd, just walking. They killed him. He was shot in the head. My mind is full of these things. People coming into houses, shooting,

killing. Our life was really bad there. We had a sitting room and a big garden. We were scared going to the bathroom, across the garden. Maybe someone will be in the garden, coming to kill us or kidnap, look for money from my family. I couldn't go to the bathroom until the morning. It was very bad. My dad's shoulder is bad now, like a boil coming up, because he was doing a lot of hard work to get money for us, to buy clothes, to buy food.

We are Muslim. At Ramadan, for one month, we get up at three o'clock in the morning, to eat, wash our hands, and wait for time to pray. We do housework. Pray again at lunchtime. Then we read the Koran. About six we make food to eat. My mum makes Kurdish food, like rice, chicken soup, salads. We put all the stuff on the table. When we were in Iraq we were just sitting on the ground. We had no table.

In Ireland we get up at three o'clock for Ramadan, fasting and praying, then sleep. Then get up at eight o'clock for school. It's really hard for one month, going to school tired, sleepy, no eating at all, no drink. But God is helping us.

We have Kurdish friends in Ireland from when we lived in the camp. We have friends in Carrick. We have no friends left in Iran or Iraq. I had an accident in Iraq, no traffic lights. It was really bad. I will never forget it. I can never go back. I like our house now in Ireland. I like the garden, I like animals, rabbits and dogs, puppies. I like living in Ireland now. I still speak Kurdish. I write Kurdish poems. I can't forget Kurdish. I live in Ireland but I can't be like Irish people. Everything is different here. The religion is different. But not that different because we believe in God and we pray. There is a Kurdish church in Dublin. In Sligo there is a hotel where Muslim people meet. It is important for me to keep my culture. First the culture and second the religion. There are a lot of different people in Europe now, Kurdish, Pakistani, Arabic people, who are Muslim. I would like to have a good life in Ireland, to get a job, get money to buy clothes.

I want to go to the IT, do business studies, then get a job, have a good life. I don't understand politics in Ireland. I don't follow it. I love Ireland because people accept us. I am praying God to help the government.

There are a lot of people in Ireland from the camp. They never talk to people. They have never been able to talk about it. I would like to have no differences between the colours, to respect each other, respect different religions. Don't be like Egypt, fighting, breaking

windows. Fighting is not good. I am afraid people in Ireland will think we are like that and won't give us work. I want to finish my course and get work. People might not give me a job because they think I am from Asia or something like that. I'm scared of that. People are not giving work to my father because of the language. I am afraid we will face discrimination. I want to work and to have a good life here; that is my hope for the future.


“Looking for directions”

Looking for directions

I was born here in the South. I was in England for years but there were family members back in the North, so I went back there. It was a nice place. I found them all to be easy-going and friendly people, doing their own thing. I was in a few places there: Belfast, Derry, Armagh, Strabane.

For the Traveller families that were born and reared in the North, they had a completely different view on things from what I did. Because they had grown up seeing everything that was going on they knew where to go, who to talk to, what was acceptable and what wasn't, you know, how their behaviours should be. So for me it was all new. It was all sort of a novelty in the beginning.

Back in England in the 80's all you had was reports on the television and the radio of the shootings, the bombings, the killings and all the rest of it. And it sort of painted a complete and utter different picture from what was actually going on. When I arrived in Belfast, I was sort of a bit anxious on my first couple of days, because I didn't know what to expect, but after a while it was no different than anywhere else. Okay, there was a bit of added extra hassle in that there was bombings and shootings going on, but they weren't a Dáily occurrence. They weren't on every street corner which was the impression they gave you on the news. And it wasn't everybody that was running around on the street with guns in their hands or wearing balaclavas with bombs in their back pockets.

But that was the impression that people got, you know, even people that was South of the border, they were terrified to go across the border in case they would be shot. Personally speaking, I found it to be a beautiful place and very nice people. The families that were in it, they were comfortable. They had grown up there and they

knew where you could and couldn't go. Looking back now, I had the innocence, if you want, of driving from one street to another not realising what was what.

I remember going from Derry to Belfast one day to get a part for a generator. I had to go to Donegall Square and so I went up along the motorway and into Belfast and heading for Donegall Square I took a wrong turning. I didn't realise it to be honest, I was chatting away, myself and my father-in-law was in the front of the car, and we were just driving along and then we decided that we were not going in the right direction. So there's two fellas coming up the street and my father-in-law said, 'pull in and we'll have a chat with them two fellas and we'll ask them where Donegall Square is'. And thankfully I was going fast, too fast to stop easily.

Now, I say thankfully because I had passed those two guys out and just about 50 yards further on there was a woman coming out of a shop, so I slowly pulled up beside her and I rolled down the window and we asked her how to get to where we wanted to go. She went into a panic as soon as I spoke and said, 'oh my God do you realise where you are?' And I said, 'yes', and I thought 'well, I'm in Belfast', and then I said, 'well, we're looking for Donegall Square and we got to take a wrong turn'. She said, 'look, don't stop, go to the lights, turn right and keep going until you see your own colours, but do not stop for anybody, do not ask questions of anybody. Please don't stop, and please get going right now, go'.

That was when the reality sunk in that we were in dangerous waters and for a few moments it was a bit scary. We went to the lights, hung a right, drove down there, seen green white and gold on the kerbs and all them things, and then we sort of laughed about it. That poor woman heard a southern accent in the middle of Belfast, and I can't remember the area that I was in, but there was an awful lot of red white and blue around me. I laughed with my father-in-law at the time, and I said, 'if we had have stopped and chatted to those two fellas, they would have dragged you off and I would have had to drive off and leave you there!' But there was a serious element to it. Thankfully I was going too fast to stop and chat to those two fellas, and thank God that I met the woman that I met.

Now even today I have often thought about that reality, and what would've happened if I'd asked those two guys instead of the woman. Would they have been as accommodating? Now, to be truthful, I don't

know – well maybe they would say, go to the lights and turn right, or maybe they would have said go to the lights and turn left and I'll show you a shortcut, do you know? I don't know, but it was a sort of eye-opener, to realise that all wasn't well in the world, that even through my tinted rose coloured glasses view of Northern Ireland, there was actual danger in it and there was other things going on that we knew nothing about. That it wasn't as safe as I thought it was.

But that didn't change my view and I still stayed in the North. But I often thought about it afterwards, how things could have turned out, or would have turned out had I stopped and had a chat with those two fellas.

“Republicans have feelings – We are flesh and blood”

Republicans have feelings – We are flesh and blood

I probably would have known from the time he joined the IRA that he was involved, it mightn't have been said but I would have known. Because we were close as a family we knew what each of us was doing… I suppose the first word I would think of would be 'scared'. We were a Republican family with strong Republican ideals and we wouldn't be afraid to let our Republicanism be known. We were proud of it. But when it comes to your children, you are protective, you are scared for them if you think they are going to be in a situation where they will be in danger.

I accepted it as, 'Joe is growing into a young man' and he would make his own decisions. On the one hand I would be very proud of his ideals and how he felt, on the other hand, I would be very protective towards him as his mother.

You had the hunger strikes, the different people being killed, the volunteers dying, he would have been at the funerals of volunteers who had been killed, who had been shot; all that made a big impression on him and, no, I wouldn't have been surprised that he had joined. I would have tried to get across the dangers of the situation that he might find himself in. I suppose, working as a Republican in Sinn Féin or as a political activist is one thing, the other road was something that scared me for him. I did talk to him about it but he was old enough to make up his own mind.

Before Joe was killed I knew where he was living and that he had moved there because of his Republican activities, but I suppose you don't let yourself think of what might happen. It's something that happens to somebody else. I think maybe that's the protective thing we put up for ourselves. You get on with your everyday life. I went

to work. I did the washing and cooking, and whatever else, same as I normally would. I suppose in the back of your mind it's there; but you just hope that everything is going to be fine and nobody is going to get hurt. Even the day he died I heard news headlines about the incident before I left for work and for some reason I didn't even connect the two things. That was the area where Joe was… I remember that day I had bought knitting wool, I thought I will knit him a sweater for his birthday, I was going to do him a grey one and Chris a red one. I came home and later on I heard he was dead.

The difference between my son being shot and dying as a Volunteer and maybe if my son got killed in a car crash was that I didn't know how people were going to react. There was a lot of animosity and dislike of Republicans and all sorts of anti-Republican feeling out there. When my son died I knew that there would probably be some negative reaction and there was.

I was finishing work at three o'clock and I did hear headlines on the radio at work before I left. It never entered my head that Joe could be involved. I did some shopping and I came home, did the usual things. I was doing some ironing; I can remember the ironing board sitting with a white jumper on it and I can still remember the lamb chops on the grill that were there 24 hours later. Two of our own people came to the door and when I saw them, I knew, but I just couldn't believe it and everything got all confused then.

I know Chris informed other people that needed to be told. People were coming and going and I wanted to know where Joe was and where his comrades were. We were told he was taken to Enniskillen and we would have to go and identify him. My brother, who has since died, said that he would identify him, he didn't want me going down there, or Sean going down there. He went down with another man and when the two of them got there the police wouldn't let the other man in. They only let my brother in which was probably just to make it hard for him I imagine, but he was a strong man. He went in and Joe was in a body bag. One of the reasons they didn't want me or Sean to go down was in case he had been shot in the face, but he wasn't.

On Thursday, there were so many people in the house; even the Free State police came to see us, the Garda Siochana. They wanted to know what kind of funeral it was going to be. A Republican funeral was obviously going to be a problem for them. But we were having a Republican funeral and that was whether they liked it or not.

I remember seeing this man, I don't know what he was, he had a lot of braid and a fancy hat on him on the bottom step of my stairs and I just lost it and told him to get out. We were lucky that we had good friends. A very good friend of mine came from Dublin and she said to me – 'don't answer the phone, don't speak to the press' – because I would be vulnerable.

On Thursday evening we went down to Enniskillen to bring Joe home. There were so many people and people were so good – a huge number of Republicans came. Up until then – something in your head doesn't let you believe it, really believe it. On the Thursday when we went down to bring him home it was, I don't know what word to use, but I was looking forward to bringing him home. It sounds ridiculous but it was nearly a kind of excitement. Several of us went down in cars, in the hearse, and whatever. I remember when we walked in, there is this great big room and there is this coffin in the middle of the room with Joe in it, and policemen in every corner with guns. The feeling of hostility in the room was palpable. I guess that's what would make a Republican death different to others.

Somebody said some prayers. Several cars had come with us but when we brought Joe outside, the soldiers and police managed to break up all the cars coming up and they got in between everybody. When we came up as far as the border at Belcoo and Blacklion, Republicans wanted to carry Joe across the border and they stopped there. I could see the young British soldiers out there and they were laughing. I said to one young soldier 'if you were shot and you were lying in that coffin how would you like it if somebody was laughing at your mother or making smart remarks to your mother?' I said, 'it's really no different'.

Anyway, we brought Joe home. He was at home for Thursday night. Volunteers and Republicans did a guard of honour all through the day and night. I did find a great comfort when Republicans came and you knew you were among friends, people who understood and people that cared. There was no hostility and it was a comforting feeling. Some people in particular, and I won't mention names, looked after us and cared for us. It was such a long few days in a lot of ways. On Saturday it was the funeral and it took ages, it was hours. Police everywhere, but that didn't bother me really, we were used to them over the years anyway.

Joe died on the Wednesday and the odd thing about it is that even though you are in the middle of it you are kind of unaware of a lot of it. I remember going out the back, we had a big long garden down the back and I thought I needed some fresh air, and there were men above in trees…I couldn't tell whether they were photographers or plainclothes detectives. I don't know. At this stage I came back in, I couldn't be bothered. The evening that we brought Joe to the church there were about three or four women who stayed back in the house, family and friends who were just tidying up and doing bits in the house, they were scared because there were so many policemen outside. There was a big cordon, so somebody had to go and get them to move back from the house because they were frightening the women. You are in the middle of this big public thing but at the same time you are somewhere inside in your own head as well.

I remember the evening we were bringing Joe to the church, I was right behind the coffin and there were so many people. The guards came in at some sort of angle that I got pushed back and I got this feeling of being separated from Joe. It didn't make sense. But I remember some man picking me up and putting me back right behind Joe – you were always sure you were going to be looked after no matter what happened.

A lot of Republicans from different parts of Ireland came but there was a lot of people from Sligo town and around, outside Sligo town and Leitrim. Even though many people might not have agreed with our politics; they would respect us for the strength of our belief.

We got a lot of letters and cards. There were hundreds and hundreds of them… I remember a letter coming from somebody who explained that he wasn't a Republican and couldn't support Republican politics but he just wanted to sympathise with the loss of a child and something to that effect. It was a very nice letter. There were many others as well and then there were a few nasty ones which were hurtful. We got a lot of letters from Republican prisoners, they were extremely kind, extremely good. They made some pieces for us including a mirror with Joe's photo on it and a celtic cross.

There wasn't much time for privacy if you want to put it that way, that was something you had to do later, do your own little thing, go to the grave, whatever. Having said that, I think the comradeship of family and friends…the Republican comradeship was so important. I find it hard to explain sometimes, but there is that closeness even

with people that you wouldn't know very well, but you know that they are on the same level, that they feel for you, they would do absolutely anything. It was that sharing, that feeling of caring – it was a great comfort that they were there.

My son was buried on Saturday and I went to my place of work on Sunday to arrange some time off for obvious reasons… and I didn't have a job anymore. Sean and Chris were outside in the car and I came back out and I was psychologically a mess. I was scared, such a jumble of emotions. It scared me, not just for myself, but for Chris and Sean. I felt we were going to get an awful lot of negative reaction and at that stage I felt very vulnerable. We came home, I had no job and I remember thinking, Chris was 18 years old – I thought what is he going to face when he goes back to school? He was doing leaving cert that year. What's he going to get from teachers, pupils and so on? I was really scared for him and he had lost his only brother. I hadn't thought about it before then, I hadn't analysed what the reactions might be for him. He did get a lot of bad reaction from some of the students and from some of the teachers but thankfully he is a very strong young man and he weathered the storm. There was one particular teacher that had made comments behind his back to students in school. I wouldn't have learned about it until a good while afterwards. I think that Chris was sort of protecting me from things like that... some of the things that happened he mightn't have said anything to me about.

I got the impression my employer was scared of what just happened. Having said that, he knew my politics, he knew exactly where we were coming from. He more or less said something to the effect, 'I have children, I have two sons to rear'. I said, 'I had two sons last week and have only got one now' or something to that effect. I can't tell you his exact words but it was clear to me that I wasn't welcome to work there anymore.

Previously we got on very well and I enjoyed working there. They were good people to work with and for. They treated me well. We got on well and we often had discussions on politics and various things. We discussed books we had read and shared a drink. He would give me a lift home if I didn't have any mode of transport. At Christmas I was brought into their kitchen for a drink and it was generally a very friendly relaxed place to work. When that all took a complete 360° turn I just couldn't believe that a person I would have had that much

respect for, and had known for so long, could actually treat me like that. So, it didn't do my ability to trust people much good.

I think one of the things that upset me as time went on – I heard from people – and this is only hearsay – that he more or less said that I had left of my own accord, that I wasn't able to work. Anybody who said that to me I told them the story, the truth. I told them I didn't walk out of my job because I wouldn't be able to work just after my son died.

Maybe when he sat down and thought about it, the whole thing might have scared him. I mean the funeral was huge, with huge amounts of guards and forces and thousands of Republicans and all the rest of it. I think maybe that scared him, but for me, it absolutely floored me, coming from him of all people, I really hadn't bargained on it. It really doesn't do your confidence any good.

A lot of people were really kind and supportive of us but there was an element of the other as well, I did meet people I knew on the street who actually walked past me and didn't speak to me. At the end of the day they weren't close friends or anything, they were just acquaintances but it was hurtful. It was just something else you had to deal with which was inclined to make me distrustful of speaking about Joe. Without realising it, I put barriers up, and that can be isolating to a degree.

There wouldn't have been an awful lot of people that would do that, there would only be a few, but it only takes one to make you feel bad. I remember in particular one day I was just walking down the street in Sligo town and I met this man who I would have known very well and I said hello to him and his name. I know that he heard me and he just walked straight past me like I didn't exist. He didn't look at me or anything. I was upset and I thought; is that how we are going to be treated? On the one hand I thought well, I'm a Republican, I'm proud of it and if folks don't want to talk to me, then fair enough. And then when you'd be feeling a little bit more vulnerable, it was upsetting. Sometimes we are not as strong as we like to pretend we are. And then I worried that Chris was probably getting the same. And Sean… but I think he would have been stronger in that respect than I would have been… though I shouldn't say that because I don't know. A lot of the time he was suffering and maybe I wasn't aware of it, it's not always easy to talk and people have different levels of grief.

A few years later when I looked back I realise I wasn't really there for Chris. He had lost his only brother. I don't know if this is relevant to other people who lose children but you end up with everybody doing their own grieving at different times and different places and at different speeds. When I look back, in the early years I think that Sean was suffering and Chris was suffering and I don't know where I was, I certainly wasn't there for Chris. For a while after Joe died, even if Chris went out into town, I watched for him to come back, it was a totally unreasonable sort of feeling but I was scared until he walked back in the door.

Joe died in February and I think the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis was soon afterwards and I remember thinking I'm not going to go up there, I just can't go up there, I'm just not able. I was persuaded to go anyway and the three of us went and there was such a welcome for us when we went into the hall. Up on the walls they had pictures of the Volunteers that had died during the year and Joe's picture was there. We were made to feel very special. There is a very good friend of mine in Dublin and sometimes a lot of the women from the Ard Fheis get together in the evening at her house and the men might go off and do their own thing. I remember that evening I was there and there were maybe six or eight other women, cooking and having a drink and this one evening I will never forget because I felt so at home and so comfortable there and I knew that no matter how I was, good or bad, it was fine and it wasn't everywhere I could feel like that. We had a few drinks and we had a laugh and the next thing of course I descended into tears, but that was fine, and they held me and looked after me. Those are the things that actually help you survive, and I won't mention any names, but that woman, if she reads this will know who she is.

I wasn't in an area like West Belfast where there is a large Republican community, where other families would have lived through the same experience as us so I was always wary of who might have been supportive and who wouldn't – and on my guard in a way. Anyway, I sometimes felt that to keep going on and on about Joe's death was a self-indulgent thing to do. I used think I haven't a monopoly on this, there's a lot of families, we have to get on with it. That's a bit ridiculous too because it's not that simple, it doesn't work like that.

People in town, especially mothers, or people that would have lost children of their own through totally different circumstances

would come and talk to me. I remember one woman coming to me and she asked me how I was and how I was keeping and was I coping and all that. She had lost a son or daughter, I can't remember which, 30 years earlier, which was quite a long time and when she saw me that was all fresh for her again.

Probably one feeling stands out – an awful fear. Sometimes you just wake up and you have that feeling of desolation like someone is turning a knife in your gut. You go out and the world is happening as it normally does and that just doesn't seem right somehow. I remember one day when the sun was shining and I thought I wish it wasn't. The happy things become the sad things, like the birthdays and the Christmases and that type of thing.

I remember feeling I was afraid but I didn't know why. I tried to analyse it. Maybe partly I was afraid that something might happen to Chris, there was that fear in me for a while and I tried very hard not to let him see it because I didn't think it was fair to him. He had enough to deal with without me fussing around. I suppose fear that something would happen to him – you feel vulnerable. There used to be four plates on the table and now only three. Fear that something would happen, that someone else is going to die.

I did voice my fears that Chris might follow a similar path to someone in the Republican movement and they told me that 'no, that wouldn't happen.' If a family loses a member they would be careful or watchful that the same thing mightn't happen to another family member.

I don't know if any of the media coverage was really sympathetic apart from the Phoblacht. When I look back on it, I was kept away from the television, I wasn't aware of it at the time but I didn't see any reports until long afterwards. I was also kept away from the papers and I said to somebody 'don't do this to me, I need to see it all, I need to see the good bits and the bad bits – you mean well but I don't want to be protected, I want to see it'.

It was of course hurtful when you read in the paper that your son is described as a 'murderer' or something to that effect, when you know that he was growing up to be a fine young man with values, a sense of decency and respect for people. Nobody likes war, nobody wants war and if there is another option to solve a problem then that's fine. But the way things were at that stage there wasn't another option to try

and lift the oppression. To me, 'murderer' is a horrible thing to call somebody who sets out to do what they see as 100% right.

I have no strong feelings about the man who shot my son. As far as I'm concerned, Joe was a soldier and the man who killed him was a soldier. He was part of the reason that Joe was a Volunteer in the first place. It was the uniform. It would be like any war where one soldier kills another soldier on the other side. It's not the person.

He was part of the oppression. He is an individual and a human being of course – but I don't think of him in those terms. I think of him as just being the oppressor and he was part of the British regime. You can only have feelings about someone if you personalise him, but he was part of the oppressing army. I never gave him an awful lot of thought to be honest, that's not meant to sound callous or anything, it's just I feel that I have enough to deal with.

When Joe was killed I wouldn't have known the other three men who were there with him. Subsequently they were arrested and they were in custody and awaiting trial. One of the things I felt I needed to do was let them know that they should not feel somehow responsible for Joe's death. They would have been in jail at the time. The last thing I wanted was them to feel guilty or to be afraid that I would, or we would, feel that they were in any way responsible for his death. We managed to get that message across to them even though they were in custody. I wrote letters to them and they wrote back and we kept in contact so that they knew we were okay with them and that we cared about them as comrades. I just had the feeling that maybe somehow they might feel bad that Joe was killed when he was with them and I didn't want them to feel like that.

When they came out of jail we had contact with them and they came to see us. It was very difficult for them as well, I mean, extremely difficult, to come and talk to me, Sean and Chris about Joe's death. It gave me a clearer picture of what happened. I needed to know all the details. I needed to know everything. I needed to know where he was shot, how many times he was shot, where the bullets went in, what happened – I needed to know all those things. Sean didn't particularly need to know all those things and that's fine, but I did. I made the journey that I wanted to. I went to where Joe died. Otherwise you have a strange picture in your head of the way things happened and the picture is usually wrong and I just wanted to go and clarify it. It's hurtful and it's painful but you just go through it.

You change without realising you're changing. You find that you don't talk easily unless you know somebody really well. I would certainly be aware if I'm talking to somebody that I don't know well of everything I say. And that can be tiresome. You get into conversation with somebody socially, knowing that they might not know anything about you and they say, 'have you got children?' And I would say I had two sons but one of them was killed. I would leave the conversation at that unless they pursue it and if they pursue it then I would tell them exactly what happened. Sometimes that's okay and sometimes that makes people feel very uncomfortable. Not so much now, but back when the war was still on and before the Peace Process when it wasn't very popular to be a Republican at times. But I would never not explain if somebody asked me how Joe died. I explain that he was a Volunteer in the IRA and that he got shot in an ambush in County Fermanagh. Sometimes people would be sympathetic. Depending on the feedback I get, I would talk about it if I thought that the feedback was genuine and they asked me questions but sometimes I found that that was the end of the conversation, they would just move on, they wouldn't know what to do with me then.

If they had a problem with it, then they had to deal with it you know, I had enough to deal with. I would never initiate a conversation or bring it up or intentionally want to make anybody feel uncomfortable, I would never ever do that. I respect people's beliefs. I always felt that one of the things that help people to get along if they have a difference of opinion, is to actually try and understand where the other person is coming from, maybe then the void will get smaller.

I think maybe one of the reasons that I wouldn't have talked that much about Joe's death to a lot of people, or that I would be distrusting, would be that there would be a feeling amongst certain people that because of our Republican beliefs and our Republican work that Republicans to some degree bring these tragedies upon themselves and I suppose I can understand that thinking too.

For a long number of years, maybe not so much recently, but in the past, Republicans were perceived by some people as unfeeling, as some kind of monsters or people who were war hungry. Republicans have feelings; we are flesh and blood the same as everybody else. I don't think any Republican would have chosen war if they felt that there was another option, another way, to get the oppression lifted off our people. We paid a very high price, we have our losses and

our grief… I can only talk as a mother who had a son killed in the Troubles. I do think of all the other mothers, especially the mothers of the hunger strikers who died and how they had courage and bravery. I don't know how they did it; but to respect what their sons were doing and were able to carry it through. That must have been horrific. My son died quickly and I hope without too much pain, but to watch him dying for months on end, I wouldn't even be able to comprehend it. I think of all the mothers and how strong they've been and how brave they've been.

It was nice, if nice is the right word, if someone asked you how Joe died and you told them and they reacted well. There is a void where Joe should be that can never be filled. My belief in my sons and my love for my sons came first and how people felt about it, that's up to them. That's who we are, that's who they are, that's who Joe was, and that's our life. To that extent I would never make any apology – I wish Joe hadn't died but I would never make any apologies for our Republican beliefs.

Joe was an uncomplicated person, he was fun-loving, he had a big smile and the most perfect set of teeth you have ever seen and he had kind of ginger blond hair. He loved football, he liked a drink, he loved the girls, he loved to read, he read incessantly, all sorts of books. Yes, that was Joe, he had loads of friends, enjoyed the craic, got told off by me occasionally when I didn't agree with what I thought he might be doing. Some of his friends, after he died, couldn't believe that that was part of the Joe that they knew.

People say that if things don't kill you they make you stronger. In some ways I was vulnerable but in other ways I would have been quite strong and the fact that Joe had actually died for what we all believed in – certainly in some ways – there was a strength from it.

I think people understand my experience as a mother who has lost a son. Sometimes grieving parents will talk to me knowing I understand their suffering. Perhaps the only positive thing that comes out of losing a child or going through that kind of pain is that you understand another person's pain and they know that.

Initially there was a little bit of 'how can you possibly go on being a Republican and working within that community and working with Sinn Féin, seeing that you've lost your son because he was a Republican?'. And it was very, very hard to get the message across that the fact that he's died for what we all believe in makes an

even stronger reason for carrying on the work. Many people don't understand what makes us who we are. There is no personal gain to be had in being a Republican. Quite the reverse. Up until the Peace Process, there was fear, jail, isolation and maybe death. And in the case of death, the suffering is ongoing. I think it's hard for people to grasp that sense of a strong belief in something that's right. You have to be inside the Republican movement or have a good grasp of Republican feelings to understand. It's a thing that comes from your heart. But when you're faced with a tragedy, like we were, you have the warmth and comradeship of the Republican community. That is something we would have that other people mightn't have.

I would again like to mention Sean and Chris – I'm getting the opportunity to speak as a mother but Sean is Joe's father and Chris is his brother and they have suffered too and I'd like to say 'thank you' to both of them for the support that I got over the years. Sometimes people are at different stages in their grief and maybe it's not that easy to talk about. Sometimes it's just too painful for people that are close in these situations… but we're still here.

When you lose a child it's an ongoing process, your life changes. Something inside you dies a little bit and I'm sure that goes for Sean and Chris as well, but we're strong, we will survive and I hope we will go on surviving and I really appreciate this opportunity to talk. One of the reasons I am doing this is that I'd like people to understand that Republicans are flesh and blood, that we bleed and that we suffer and I'd like to dispel this idea that we are cold or un-feeling.

I'm not sure if it's at all useful but I'd like to mention the other mothers (not leaving out the fathers, sons or daughters) that have lived their lives in a lot harder situations than I have – in places in the North of Ireland where their whole lives have been taken up with struggle – trying to survive and keep their families together, with members dying, or in jails and all the rest of it. It's not been easy but hopefully one day soon Ireland will be united, then all the suffering will not have been in vain.

> “It was absolutely crazy stuff”

It was absolutely crazy stuff

The one thing I always thought when I was a young fellow was that every Protestant in Sligo was rich, until I met a gentleman who used to work in Denny's factory – I didn't know him at the time but he was a Protestant, and he was a poor Protestant.

I looked in the gates of the Protestant Cathedral one day and I saw this elderly gentleman on his hands and knees with a knife going through every crack in the concrete, trying to take out bits of weeds. At the time I was working with Sligo Corporation and they sent me out with a knapsack on my back and weedkiller in it round the town. That would have been maybe 1987 or '88.

I went in the gate of the church, and it was the first time I ever stood in a Protestant churchyard. I went up to him and I said, 'Tommy, get up off the ground and I will spray the path for you'. He used to cut the grass around the graves, but there were areas he couldn't get at along the wall, where there would be bits of nettles and everything, so I sprayed all along the wall, and anywhere I could spray I would, to kill any weeds for him.

When I went round the church everything was great, but when I came round the front where I could be seen from the road it was different. He thanked me, but he wanted me out of it as quickly as possible, and I was also conscious that I was on risen ground in John Street where people could look in from the road and see me. I was conscious that people were looking in at me and saying was I a Protestant now or what? and I think he was conscious in case any of his Protestant brethren come along, or the people that hired him to look after the church, and saw a Catholic in there spraying the path,

so I did it as quick as possible and got out on the road and he wanted me out as quick as possible too.

He was the first poor Protestant I ever met in my life, and a real gentleman, and I think that first time he thought I was joking, that I would never actually come in and do it. He thought I was joking and I wasn't going to do it.

We became great friends afterwards, and I used to go down and do it regularly for him. He gave me a key – there is a side gate of the church, you go in a laneway there at the Lungy, at the retreat house, and I had the key of that gate and I used to go in there when I had the knapsack with the weedkiller.

And I always think back to that and say, 'what was wrong with us, why was I so conscious of who might see me spraying a footpath, helping an old gentleman out, and why was he so conscious, afraid that someone might come in the gate and see me in there?' It was absolutely crazy stuff.


“Do you go across the Border much?”

Do you go across the Border much?

I was in the pub in the North and I was asked 'do you go across the border much?' I said I went across a lot, because I used to go down to families living in the South, and I was asked if I would deliver something and I said, 'no'. And then strangely enough, I was at home in the South on one of my visits not long after that and I met a guy in the pub that I had known for years. We were chatting and drinking, and he asked me the exact same question. He asked me where I was staying and I told him I was in Derry at the time. And he said, 'how do you go across the border?'. And I said I go across by Swanlinbar, and he said, 'is there much checkpoints?', and I said there was absolutely none in Swanlinbar, or very rarely, because I was used to going across the border at Swanlinbar on a regular basis. At that time there was very little customs, we would very rarely see them, and even if you did they wouldn't stop you.

So then he asked me if I would deliver something to a friend of his and he gave me his address, and he said, 'you would be doing me a great favour, you will save me the bother of going up myself, because you're going that way and you can do it'. He said, 'it's only a small box', and of course, me being in the pub, I said, 'yeah, no bother, why wouldn't I? I'll talk to you in the morning about it'.

But the following morning when I was sober I said to myself 'ah ah, I'm not having it'. So I hopped into my motor and went home. You see, I didn't know what was in it – it could have been a box of chocolates for all I know, I don't know, but it doesn't really matter. The thing is, I wasn't going to be caught transporting anything that wasn't… well it was nothing to do with me. He was a friend of mine and I know I was supposed to be doing him a favour, and I know he was going to give me a few bob and all the rest of it, but if he wanted to send a box of chocolates he could use the post, or else drive it himself, but I wasn't getting involved in it. That was the only one – well, two times I was asked, and I found it strange that I was asked twice in such a short period of time.

“It was all over in five minutes”

It was all over in five minutes

When I was about 10 years of age, I went to stay with my cousins in Omagh for the weekend.

The first time I seen soldiers was when I got to the border. Like, you wouldn't see them in Sligo – you would only see them on Saint Patrick's Day marching in the Sligo parade. In the early 70s there was no barracks in Sligo town apart from the FCA who were trained on a Sunday, so to actually see soldiers with guns was a new thing to me. I was looking out for the border because I knew I was going to come across these soldiers with the big guns, you know, it was like a film. The bus driver said, 'we're coming up to the border now, sit down and keep your seat. Don't say anything and don't be shouting out anything'. I remember peering out the window at the soldiers. It was all new. It was my first time ever to stay overnight in Omagh, and it was all excitement. I was thrilled that I was going to be there Friday night and Saturday night, and all these soldiers going around with their face blackened and big armoured cars and guns hanging out of them.

The woman of the house was a first cousin of my mother. Her husband worked in, I think it was a brewery, or just a place where they used to bottle drink or minerals or something like that, I can't remember now. He was just an ordinary man that came home, had a wash, went out for his pint, and minded his own business. An ordinary family.

On my first night, Friday night, I was put into a single bed with my cousin John at about 10 o'clock, and we were soon fast asleep. I woke up at about a quarter past eleven, I heard a lot of banging and noise in the street and the noises seemed to be getting nearer and nearer.

It was one of those old terraced streets like you see in Coronation Street with no front gardens, just a long street with all small houses.

I sat up in the bed and the next thing I heard an unmerciful bang, and the front door flew into the hall and I heard all these big heavy feet coming up the stairs and the first bedroom door was kicked in, and then our bedroom door was kicked in, and there was soldiers standing in the room. They ran towards our bed, tossed the bed up in the air leaving us on the floor and the bed on top of us, did the same in the other rooms, and threw the furniture around the place. They never said a word and were back down the stairs in 30 seconds and out the door. The whole street of about 20 houses was done in five minutes, just like that. All the doors broken in, all the beds tossed, and all the furniture thrown around. We were left with a street of screaming roaring kids, adults roaring obscenities and the noise of the trucks pulling away off around the corner. It was all over in five minutes and the people that did it were gone into the darkness as if they weren't there.

That would have been the summer of 1971. It was a one off and it is a story for me to tell but it's a vivid memory I have of being up the North at ten years of age.

This was the first time I encountered anything like that. I was a bit shaken, giddy – I couldn't sleep a wink that night. I wasn't hurt, I was all excited! I thought it was great! But there was a lot of kids younger than me crying their eyes out, toddlers, very angry people, old women all crying.

It was just Bam Bam Bam Bam. The truck pulled down the street nice and slow to keep up with all that was going on. There could have been I suppose 12 or 14 soldiers – there would be three or four in each house, and there would be two or three houses being done at the one time. They would be two or three of them out in the road standing with guns looking up and down the street, the rest were kicking in doors and throwing furniture around the place, and then they just all jumped in the back of the truck, down the street, round the corner and gone. And there was absolutely no sense to it. There was no logic – why was it done? Why that street?

It didn't affect me there and then, but looking back on it, seeing all the crying children and all the upset people, it sure affected the people that had had it done to them on numerous occasions before. The amazing thing was that at twelve o'clock at night or half twelve,

a fleet of carpenters arrived and the doors were fixed before we went back to bed. So how regularly did it happen? I know my cousin of the same age as me was very annoyed and the whole family was very annoyed, and the whole street was very annoyed.

Then they got up the next morning and they said they didn't want to talk about it. I was kind of hopping around like the little pup – 'do you remember he came in, do you remember he came in, the way he threw the bed up, the big fella came in', and they're saying, 'yeah yeah yeah, don't be annoying us about it, it's all right for you, you can go back home but we're left with this you know. Could be again, could be tonight, could be a months time'. They were on tenterhooks all the time. It was a terror to them. The novelty of it was well gone I suppose, and then I suppose they developed hatred, complete hatred for them, because they were faceless – there wasn't even a voice, there was nothing, there was just blackened face, helmet, big gun, big boots, big uniform – two kids, bed up in the air with kids in it, jumped in a lorry and drove away. That was it.

It affected my thinking afterwards because if I heard people try to justify that the British Army were there to protect all communities I would think 'well they didn't protect this community, they just went in there and intimidated and scared kids and upset everybody'.

That was my one and only encounter of violence or intimidation by the British Army in the North. I told my mother the next day on the phone about what had happened and she promptly got me on a bus back to Sligo. I was sent home on the 12 o'clock bus on Saturday morning. I was rushed back to safety. So that was my one night as a kid in Northern Ireland. Needless to say I wasn't allowed to stay in Omagh again.

“There was no other path for me...”

There was no other path for me...

I got involved when I was eleven years of age. How I got involved – there was one event which really sticks out in my mind – I think I was about nine or ten years of age and when we were kids we used to go robbing apples. We had to go into the Protestant part of town at the time, because Catholics didn't have orchards where we lived. The town was divided in half. I always remember coming back down the town and there was this crowd standing shouting 'one man, one vote; one man, one vote 'and the next thing we seen the police charge them. We were only kids so we started throwing the apples at the police because we thought 'why are they doing that, them people are not doing anything'. We didn't even know what 'one man one vote' was at that particular time.

Afterwards, the major event which really influenced me would have been Bloody Sunday. I was only about twelve or thirteen. I was in the local Fianna at that time. Where I lived in Lurgan, County Armagh, the town would have been 50-50 and anywhere we went we had to pass Protestant areas so therefore we were attacked nearly every day going to school from when I was eleven 'til fifteen years of age. I noticed that the police always took the Loyalist side. Even in the schools, the staff would have thought – you're from that area, you're a troublemaker – because there was always rioting there.

The thing I could never understand was, at eleven, twelve or thirteen, the way Protestant minds changed for the Twelfth. My own mother, she minded kids while we were at school, she minded Protestant families' children and we grew up with them. But the 11th and 12th July they were out throwing stones and bottles – but come the 14th or 15th they talked to us as if nothing had ever happened.

I couldn't understand it and they wouldn't speak about it afterwards. I was young then, I understand it now, but not then.

The Troubles were starting then. I could never understand why at every chance, they tried to come up into the Catholic areas. We were out throwing stones – we were only kids with no comprehension whatsoever. So that's the way it was more or less up until I was about fourteen. At fourteen or fifteen I left school. Rioting became more severe and the whole Bloody Sunday event happened. And I became more bitter, by that stage I was out throwing stones and bottles; we were out every night rioting, nearly every day and night. At that particular time the area, believe it or not, was still mixed. There were still Protestants living in it, there were still RUC living in it. On the street that I lived in, there was an RUC man called George. I think he's RIP now, and the reason I say his name is because of an event in my life. My sister was burned to death at nine years of age, her nightdress caught fire, and he was the policeman that came up. He was fantastic to the family; we couldn't have had a nicer man at that particular time. Two years later, there he was, kicking in the door. The change in him and the bitterness within him was totally mind-boggling you know.

The Troubles became more and more severe and involved more and more people. Then you had internment coming in and you had the whole thing out on the streets – watching for the Army coming in, banging the bin lids, and the rioting from internment, and then it ended up in 1976 – I was caught with explosives in the house.

I had been involved with Fianna Éireann since I was eleven years of age. It was more or less like Scouts. You were not allowed as a member of the Fianna to be out on the streets rioting or to become involved in sectarianism or to be up the town fighting with the 'tartan gang' as you called them, but very few people heeded that. They were very disciplined, you dressed up in the Republican uniform and you paraded at Easter and different events. It was the Official IRA because there was no such thing as the Provisionals at that time. But then the whole split came and there was no way that I was going to sit in the house, so I was back out on the streets, and then I joined the Provisional Fianna.

So for the next number of years I was rioting, burning, hijacking. Everybody was. That's just the way we grew up you know – protecting our areas. Every new foot patrol that came into the area, a house was

raided; our house was raided more than twice a week. Every event that happened, if a soldier was shot or a bomb went off, the house was raided. Then we had the whole events of the Loyalists burning the Catholics out of their homes. I'll always remember seeing a young Ian Paisley giving a sermon in the middle of Lurgan when we were coming down in O'Hagan's lorry. We were helping a family to move after being burned out. Joe O'Hagan would have been a well-known Republican who had escaped out of Mountjoy jail. Paisley started shouting 'here's the IRA there'. I can always remember thousands of Loyalists coming towards us. So the next thing, the boys in the back put up the back of the lorry and pointed at them with hurley sticks and let on that they were guns. I would say within three minutes there was about three hundred RUC men around the lorry, so we were all arrested. I think I was about thirteen. I was just held for a couple of hours, the whole lot of us were, and then they just threw us back out again. While they arrested us the Loyalists burned the lorry and all the furniture.

The Fianna were what you'd probably call the junior wing of the IRA. We were only kids. I was only seventeen when I was arrested. The way the judge put it, he said I worked in 'close co-operation' with the IRA. I wasn't actually a member of the IRA; I was just minding guns and explosives in the house.

I got married at seventeen to a girl who was twenty-eight. Her family were staunch Catholic people. Her father was actually a Protestant, her mother a Catholic and they went to Mass every day of their lives. I was well-known for always being out rioting and in their eyes I would have been a hoodlum and always causing trouble. Her family wouldn't have been allowed outside the door or anything like that and once we started going out together, of course they didn't like it. The next thing she was pregnant. She was living with me in my sister's house at this stage and then we squatted in a house, where we claimed squatter's rights and that was it.

She wouldn't actually have been Republican but she wouldn't have been anti-Republican, she would just have been a normal person who wanted a normal life. I suppose at that time I was young and I didn't understand. I thought that was the norm, it was normal for me. When I was in jail, there was explosives found in the shed. She ended up in jail too, because she was living in the house like, but she didn't know anything.

I was eighteen when I was sentenced, so I got life imprisonment. It was February the fourteenth, Valentine's Day. Then I was part of the dirty blanket protest. I refused to wear prison uniform. My wife's reaction to my arrest was more 'shock'. I don't think either of us really thought of the consequences, we didn't even consider it.

There was a whole reddin' out there, because you had the whole Ulster-isation, normalisation, and criminalisation policy kicking in from an early stage. Their whole motive was to get you into jail, hit you very hard sentence-wise, demoralise you and try to get you to put on the prison uniform. Criminalise the whole struggle.

Two of my sisters were married to Protestants. My sister came down to visit me and there were prison officers that lived only doors away from her. There was about six or seven of them in the same street. When we escaped out of jail, she was coming home that day and one of the neighbours who was a prison officer turned around and said, 'Jean, your brothers away'. One Christmas he handed her a book, and the book was 'The Officials and the Provisionals', you know, that whole feuding was going on. I had another brother – he was an informer – and that was hard. I found that out sitting watching the TV.

My involvement would have caused resentment at the time because they would have seen their lives badly affected. It did affect my family at the time; it affected their lives massively like. One sister who actually lived in Craigavon, and that's a Protestant area, and the person who lived across the road from her was Billy Wright, you know. She used to shout at Billy Wright all the time. He would just put her down as a headcase.

I got on very well with my sister's husbands; and still do when I'm down home. I call in and see them and go and have a pint with them and there's no problem. I'd go and visit them now but I wouldn't have gone and visited them at that particular time. I couldn't because I was on the run.

The first nine months in jail was kind of busy, you know with your trial and everything.

You don't really care because you actually lived two lives. There's two people within you, not one, two. There is this person who was a Republican and this person who was a family person and the trick is to be able to switch off, because when you walk out through your front door, you don't know if you're coming back in again. So when

you left the house, I know it's hard to say it, but your wife and kids didn't exist. The minute you walked out the door they didn't exist. Home – that side is gone – it doesn't exist in your mind at all. You have to do that to survive, because if you go out and you're worried about the kids – 'What happens if I get caught, what happens if I do this, what happens if I do that', it doesn't help at all. The other side, the Republican side, dominates you the whole way.

I was married with one child when I went to prison. The child was six or eight months when I was arrested. I seen her a few times when I was on the run and next time I seen her after that was when she was about fifteen. I got photographs of her when I was in jail. Then I never seen her again until she was eighteen. It was pretty tough. Tough on her like, you know. She has a lot, but she's been through an awful lot. Her mother moved out of the area. I didn't see my daughter again until it was all over with and done and dusted. We didn't have it out until she was about twenty-eight. That wasn't nice you know. We would sit and talk and she would say 'I can never forgive you for leaving me'. I said, 'I didn't leave you, I was sent to jail'. But it worked out in the end anyway. She understands now what my life was about. Looking back on what happened – the only regret was getting married. I regret getting married but having a child – I don't regret that one bit. The other kids too – I was there but I wasn't there. They didn't know who their father was. It's only now in this last number of years they have really got to know that Dermot is a normal person. I didn't know what it was like to be normal person. I didn't know what it was like to have a normal relationship. I didn't know what it was like to go out and spend time in normal company. It was always with the guard up. You walk out the door you forget the family piece. You are in prison, you forget about outside, outside doesn't exist. You are in jail and that's it, do your time. I never took visits for two and a half years. When you did take a visit, that's your contact with outside, and once you walk back inside the door, that's it – gone.

I'd say that once I got the life sentence that was it – my marriage was over. I remember her coming down to me when I was in Musgrave Park Hospital. I was taken out of the H-blocks when my ulcer perforated in my stomach. I remember her coming down and telling me you know – that that was it, that it was over and all, but I wasn't mad. I understood it, because I was in jail. 'I will stand by

you' she said, when she was by my bed, 'if you can tell me now that when you come out of jail you will not be involved'. I said to her 'I can't say I won't be involved, I am who I am and I can't change that. That's me and that's what I believe in'. That was it. I didn't see her again until I was back home visiting my daughter. I see her all the time now; every time I go down to visit my daughter. We still talk away as friends. When we met initially we avoided any subject of me and her, we avoided any of that type of talk. You see I wasn't bitter because she broke up; that didn't even come into it because I knew and I understood.

After the whole thing with the H-blocks, the hunger strikes, there was this psychiatrist came in from America, one of these top psychiatrists and he turned round and said after so many years you become institutionalised. He interviewed quite a number of people who were on the blanket and he said that he never met more sane people in his life. At the end of the day, it's all to do with yourself and what you believe in. There is this thing inside you, that you can't explain to people, but it's there, and it looks after you, it's your driving force for the whole time, that thing inside you. And it's because of that, you can turn on and off.

It's a battle with yourself. Your first year in jail is taken up with your trial, your second year is accepting your sentence and accepting your trial, and the third you start thinking, and start questioning, why am I here? Why am I in? I've found over so many years that so many Loyalist prisoners became born-again Christians. I believe that one of the main reasons why that happened was because they themselves had no identity. They were in there allegedly fighting a war. But the same people who I was fighting in that war were locking them up. Keeping them in jail.

In '77, we got moved up to the cages in Long Kesh for four or five months then we got sentenced and brought to Crumlin Road. They cut our hair, brought us into Long Kesh and gave us the prison uniform and said, 'put that on'. I was in the H-blocks during the hunger strike of '81 – from start to finish. I knew all of them personally.

I think that the first year on the H-block was pretty severe, because you're in a cell for 24-7 and we were sent to the young prisoner's wing because we were under twenty-one years of age. There was a particular screw there and he gave us a very, very hard

time and we had to sit on the chair from seven in the morning 'til seven at night. We weren't allowed to move. If the table or anything was dirty they'd be in beating us. Any time they opened the door you were supposed to give your number, which we refused to do, and they were in beating us. I wouldn't stand for the anthem; they would be in beating us. And when we went to Mass on Sunday, we all had to march in a single line and we weren't allowed to talk or look right or look left. They were severely hard on us in that line. Any time we left the cell, they had Loyalist prisoners and ordinary prisoners on the far side and then – 'the dirty Fenians' – it was never Republicans, it was never Provos, it was always 'Fenian'. The amount of sectarianism was unbelievable.

In H3 we had it very hard and then we were all moved to H5, and we were the mad ones, we were the ones that wrecked the wing, broke the windows, smashed the beds, fought with the screws. Anything we were supposed to do, we done the opposite, which is wild you know, and continued on like that right up until the very start of the dirty protest.

I think the worst time was when Bobby died. I'd say that is the most soul searching I've ever done. My whole world just collapsed – it was total and utter dismay. Very hard, you know, to put it into the right words, but that world, that protective world you have round yourself, just a shell – collapsed. It was because the Republican Movement is as close as your family. We still are, all ex-prisoners an' all, like, still very close. Living in such an environment we needed each other and we lived off each other's strengths.

Bobby was well got, was very well liked, and see the night when he died, in one sense your whole world was empty – this is it. It was that it had actually happened. Even though you knew at the back of your heart, the back of your mind that probably this was going to happen because it was strategically planned that way. But there's a part of you that believes it will never happen, and it's that wee bit there that just – the only way I can describe it is – it was the only thing that could get through every bit of defence in me. It just hit you straight in the heart. There were no defences, absolutely none, just bang. But you soon close up again.

There was total silence; you could have heard a pin drop. We sat there for an hour. We had heard the news on the radio, we had smuggled in radios. Bik came in first thing the next morning but we

already knew at that stage. It was devastating like. But then we soon picked up. Nobody really wanted to talk, nobody really wanted to hold conversations, everybody was sort of down in themselves, and then that night we just got up and started talking at the doors, just started picking up and talking about what was happening to the rest of the hunger strikers because we got a Dáily update on their health. At that stage we were able to hold it together, be very dignified, not react to any abuse by the screws. The screws were coming round then once it was lock up, coming round saying, 'ha ha the bastard is dead'. We just wouldn't react to it at all, we didn't. I had been very close with Francie[1], and Raymie[2] was cribbed across the hall from me and I'd been living with him for years. Martin Hurson used to be in the next cell to me.

When Francie died it didn't have the same effect as what Bobby did and that's because Bobby Sands was the first. So that hardens inside, the defences were back up again and we wouldn't let it go back in again. That's the only way I can describe it like, we wouldn't be open again. Francie, before he left to go to the hospital wing, the last memory we have of Francie is he sung Tom Williams, that was his favourite song. He sung that the night before because he knew he was getting moved to the hospital the next morning. We had intended, for the hunger strikers, to get up to give them a big concert in the wing before they moved up.

I put my name down at the start for the first hunger strike but unfortunately anybody who had any illness wasn't allowed on hunger strike. I had the old perforated ulcer so I was excluded on medical grounds. When it first happened, when they said there is going to be a hunger strike, a lot of people put their names forward but then anybody with any medical condition, eye, ulcers, diabetes was ruled out because it meant it would have been a shorter term on hunger strike, so it wouldn't have had the effect that it was supposed to have – that cut a great lot of people out. But we all did actually go on three-day hunger strikes which, when I think back, was stupid, because the only thing we were doing was inflicting pain on ourselves.

I would have gone on strike, no problem. I know it's an awful hard thing to say but you don't care how your parents or family would

[1] Reference to Francis Hughes, the second IRA prisoner to die on the 1981 hunger strike

[2] Reference to Raymond Mc Creesh, the third IRA prisoner to die on the 1981 hunger strike.

react. Because if you worry about your parents and your family then you are defeated before you start. But my mother actually did say to me afterwards, she said, 'son, I wouldn't have let you die, I would have taken you off it'. I said, 'Ma I would have made sure you didn't come down'. I would have signed it over to my sister. I was one step ahead of her, but that's just a mother's love for her child and I can't condemn my own mother for that, or any parent, that's understandable.

Men were still coming forward and putting their names forward. It would have kept going on and on, we wouldn't have given in. It kept going like, and the more that died, you'd be questioning in your head thinking, 'we are going to lose this battle.' And then with the names all going forward you'd think there is bound to be something happening, something will come out of it. Obviously it did in the end.

People have said that there was an agreement between the Brits and the Republican Movement about the hunger strike. (It was in O'Rawe's book[3]); there wasn't an agreement. I know O'Rawe and I know Bik McFarlane, very, very well. I escaped with Bik and I know him from remand and I regard him as one of the most honest and genuine people I have ever come across within the Republican Movement. Bik printed actual comms[4] – in the Irish News I think it was – the actual comms that was referred to and proved that there wasn't an agreement.

When we were moved up to H7, one day one of the lads said to me 'look you're doing life imprisonment, did you ever think about escape' and I says, 'not really like' and he said, 'if you had the chance to escape would you escape', and I said, 'no problem'. And he said, 'what would happen if you have to kill a screw?' And I said that would be no trouble either. And he said, 'don't say anything to anybody and I'll come back to you on it'. He had the same conversation with my cellmate but he never said anything to me and I never said anything to him, until three days before the escape.

It was seven months between that conversation and the due date for the escape. It wasn't mentioned. You never do that – you just wait and they will come back to you. And so when he came back

3 Blanketmen: An Untold Story of the H-block Hunger Strike, Richard O'Rawe, February 2005

4 Comms was the name given to the small notes of communication which were smuggled into and out of the jail

he just said, 'look we're having an escape, it's on Sunday. It was supposed to be last Sunday only the screws went out on strike and the RUC were brought in so it was moved to the following Sunday'. He said, 'I talked to you before, you know the position, you know what to do'. That was it. I still never said anything to my cellmate who had a part to play and he never said anything to me.

It was at the back of your mind for the seven months. But you just bided your time. But that particular morning, holy God I'll never forget it because we got up that morning and how the guards never copped on something was wrong I'll never know to this day because everybody, not now the whole wing, but all the ones that were involved, they were all going to the toilet! The screws with any intelligence would have said, 'there's something wrong here' but of course we were thankful because they'd given us curry the night before – the first time ever in there!

We were playing pool. That particular day none of us knew what was going to happen like. The next thing your man was on the pool table and he's looking at me. I said to him; 'do me a favour go over and sit at the TV and look at the TV and don't turn round, I'll be here about ten minutes', and he said, 'what? what?' and I said, 'just do it', and then two minutes later the whole thing kicked up.

I had to be on the pool table because a screw was sitting right beside the pool table talking to your man and he didn't know. So he copped me and he kept looking, he knew something was happening but none of them ever dreamed what it was.

We just read out a statement saying that we had overtaken the whole block and we returned the other lads back to their cells for their own safe keeping. That's it. I had overpowered a screw. That particular aspect of it was all over in thirty seconds. In every wing – five seconds. In five seconds every screw was taken, all at once, and you're still thinking, 'is this actually real', even though you're doing it, and you're part of it.

Never in my life will I ever forget that journey on the back of a lorry from the Blocks to the Tally Lodge. It was a knife edge, you could actually hear the grass grow, you could hear your veins tingling, you could hear the wheel bearings in the wheels and you could feel the tension, just unbelievable like.

The lorry stopped at those high security gates to go through and you say 'right that's the first one' and then the second one, then we

came up to the Tally Lodge and actually the screw who was driving the lorry was under the impression there was a bomb; so we were pulling in this side of the tower and he said, 'pull in this side so the cameras can't see you from this side'. It wasn't out of love for any of us; it was sheer fear I would say. He was that much under control.

You see a prison officer had been shot and he thought 'this is going to happen to me now if I don't do what I am told.' Pure fear like.

When we got out there, the boys went in to take the Tally Lodge. We were late. I'll never forget the look on their faces when a whole lot of us jumped out of the tail; they only thought it was four or five people at that stage. They never thought. It was obvious at that stage, but they never dreamed, they were standing there and the next thing thirty eight of us jumped out of the back of a lorry and they were totally stunned, they were stood there with their mouths open. At that stage it was every man for himself while the fighting was going on.

We found out afterwards that the Brit in the tower actually looked and scratched himself on the head – saying, 'the Paddies are mad, they're down there fighting with each other'. He didn't know it was us. He thought it was screws fighting screws because we were wearing prison officer's uniforms. I ran towards cars in the car park and we were pulling at handles, 'cos at that stage we were in a bit of a panic, all sense goes out the window and then you think 'what in the name of God were you doing that for – you can't even drive and you have no car keys'! So at that stage we were piling up on top of each other to get over the fence, then there were screws standing with guns and spanners and swinging them at everything. I heard shots going off to me left, I ran over and I think it was Gerry Kelly's shoulders I got up on to get over the fence. And I'll never forget running up that field, and I was fairly fit, I was playing soccer five days a week, but half way up that field I was out of breath. I said, 'we'll never make this'. My whole chest was caving in… but I jumped over a hedge and out into the middle of a road. Here's me – you're away!

There was eight or nine of them away ahead of me, then there was another man jumped over, it was Bik McFarlane, then another man jumped over. We were running down the road and we seen the other boys hi-jacking this car, getting in the car, there were legs and arms hanging out the window. And I thought there's no way we'll get

into this car… and I looked up and there was a bungalow to the left. I said to Bik, 'look – there's two cars up at the house', so we ran up to the house and the man opened the door. He wouldn't give us the keys of the car, neither would the woman, but the son came out and he handed them over.

There was a gun stuck to his head and we said, 'here, give us them keys.' I wasn't armed but a couple of us were armed. Anyway the son gave us the keys and we got into the car. There were eight of us. We headed off, we were going towards Belfast and then we said, 'no, probably too much of it will be cordoned off', so we turned around, towards Dromore. We took over a country house, the people were Presbyterians. It was one of those country houses where you can lift up the garage door and you can drive right into the house, so we did that so the choppers wouldn't see us from the air. We stayed there until dark.

There was the woman of the house, her husband and two kids. They were pretty scared. We used psychology with them. First we told them the SAS was outside and if they got us, they would shoot us on sight. Then we told them we were taking their son with us. We done that to stop them from going to the security forces. But then we found out they were born-again Christians, so we said to them 'there is an alternative here, if you give us your word, swear on the bible that you won't go to the security forces for three days, we'll leave your son'. They agreed to that and they didn't go to the security forces for three days. But they did go to a Presbyterian Minister and they told the Presbyterian Minister and he says, 'you gave your word on the bible and you have to honour your word on the bible'.

We stayed in that woman's house until a heavy fog came down that night and the chap was going to work and we moved out. You see we went through all the Protestant areas. We were cute because all the Nationalist areas would have been sealed off. So we lived for five days in the fields. Walking the fields for five days, drinking the water out of the cow's troughs and eating crab-apples.

I was thinking – we done it! We're out! Even if they catch us, we're out now. We done it. We broke the jail. We broke the system. It was supposed to be the most fool-proof, escape-proof prison in Western Europe. They were supposed to have supergrasses, to know every piece of information on the IRA. Here the IRA were. In actual fact,

had it worked to the detailed plan, we would have been across the border quite safely and there would have been a statement released saying the IRA went in and took IRA prisoners out of Long Kesh. The roads were mined; there were units in from South Armagh in certain strategic positions. If it had worked according to plan, and we had been on time, we would have taken control of the Tally Lodge, we would have held onto the two screws outside. It went wrong because we were late and they were coming on and off duty.

You're focused on getting as far away as is possible. We knew that they would kill us if they caught us… it would have been handing them cake off a plate. You don't really go there but on the other hand it's in the back of your mind. You tell yourself that you're not going to give them any opportunity to take you out. It's the SAS and MI5 you're most concerned about but if it was the RUC or the UDR in the right place, they would do the same thing. There's this big place in Guildford beside the river but we couldn't cross the river so we decided we'd send someone out and suss out a place where we could cross. We crossed that night and we ended up staying at this big manor house. When we were there, the dog was going mad, barking and barking and this big country squire came out. We were in the hedge and we seen him looking and the next thing a cop car pulls up and two RUC men got out of the car. I'll never forget it, never, never. I knew from that minute onwards I was never going to be caught. They walked right up to where we were in the hedges and Bik said to everyone – 'not a word'. It was very heavy shrubbery, greenery; I could see the pupils of his eyes. He was smoking a cigarette… and he just twisted and turned and walked over and said, 'come on get into the car' and drove on. Every single one of us said, 'here – there is no way he could have not seen us'. Whether he did is a question I could never answer. It was amazing but this feeling came over me, you know when some thing like that happened, the hairs on the back of your neck would rise. It was like a calmness came over me, I said to myself… we're not going to be caught, we're going to get away. So we bolted down and ran.

We crossed the river and I'll never forget that one. There were eight of us like and there was this guy fly-fishing and he was so concentrated on the fly-fishing that the whole eight of us walked right past him! He never even seen us! We did this in broad daylight. It was the first time we ever moved in daylight. We managed to get

into a bit of a forest and we moved through for about half a mile and we said, 'right, we'll wait here'. We were waiting on the choppers going up because we were all convinced that he had seen us and he was going to get back up, but there was nothing.

So, we walked from there down to Crossgar and Crossgar onto South Armagh way. It was funny, most of us were from cities and towns, we had no real country experience. The only one who really had the experience was Seamus Mc Elwaine from the countryside and he told us what way to walk around the fields, how to walk, don't climb over a gate, every way to do it.

Normally you go into a field, you throw the foot on the gate and over, but you couldn't 'cos you left muck on the gate. A farmer will always be able to tell, these were signs, or a foot patrol would know people had passed over the gate. You don't walk across the field, you walk around the field – you're leaving too many open for a target. If you are leaving the field, just pick a place that's central through the hedge. Or if someone is in the field and you're there and a pigeon or anything is flying over your head… a pigeon will always fly with its wings outstretched, but if there's a person below, the wing will come up, so they would know there's someone down below. These are all the things that you learn.

At the fourth or fifth day we were starving, we hadn't ate a whole lot, so we said, 'how are we going to get food', so I says, 'we'll chase the cows around and we'll milk the cow, drink the milk.' We were chasing around in no shape, no energy at all so I says, 'fuck it, we'll shoot it and then we'll milk it'. It was a bullock! I got slagged about that one… !

We were going to hi-jack a train which is easily done because if you put the signal down, the train has to stop. We said we'd do that – get us into south Armagh and then see what happens – but there was a bomb on the lines. There were so many bombs on the line the Brits were on the lines the whole time, so we decided against it.

We arrived into South Armagh. We were in this particular area and there were three houses and we were looking to see which house we'd go to. Seamie McElwaine, God rest him, Seamie said, 'that house there, that's a Catholic house'. We watched that house and in the morning we saw this fella leaving the house and we all went down. Some went to the back door, some went to the front door and we knocked on the door and this woman answered and

we said, 'excuse me missus, we're escaped prisoners, can you help us? 'Oh come on in' she said, 'the whole lot of you'. She made us all breakfast.

That evening we told her son where to go and who to see. He knew the person so we were able to give him a note. Then night came and we went across the border, four of us slept a couple of hours until before dawn and we came back up to South Armagh again and we were in this ditch.

There they were in the full military gear, armed and all, the IRA protecting us and the Brits landing in the fields…and they said to us don't worry they'll not come in this direction. Such a sensation like. We could see them all getting out and heading off in the opposite direction. They said we were safer here during the day than we were at night. They were ecstatic to see us. I was the only Armagh man who had escaped, not only that, it was the whole thing of the supergrasses and the effect that was having on the 'RA: the escape busted all of that wide open…it busted the H-blocks wide open and that was a severe blow to Maggie Thatcher. We were at elite level like.

I think one the greatest sensations I had was when the cars came at night five days later to take us away. We were sitting in the cars and these cars were going 70 / 80 miles an hour, it was pitch black, you could see nothing, no lights, no nothing and the Brits were lying around the corners. It was amazing… and we were safe.

We didn't know where we were going. The cars came and took us across the border and we kept crossing back and over until we headed away then to Leitrim. We stayed there until such time as we started moving about and doing different things, then people were split up all over the place.

We just more or less laid low, I couldn't say this for definite but I believe that it's part of the Republican movement's psyche… let them see how hard it is to go on the run, mentally. So you were messing about a couple of places for month, more or less moving from safe house to safe house. This was life on the run and you'd come across other people on the run for years as well, who had done different things, they were wanted, and they'd say, 'look this is it'.

The most difficult thing about being on the run is not seeing your family. For months and months, you didn't see a colour TV.

Different things, you'd think about your family and what they're going through and you think about your comrades, you'd be lying there at times, you'd have to get moved, down here there would be raids and you'd be moved to a lot of houses and sometimes the safest place to be was lying out in the fields and you could be sitting there night after night and you'd be thinking, 'am I have to going to live the rest of my life lying here'… things like that. At times like that, I always thought of the hunger strikers, I always thought about what the boys would think.

There'd be nights walking down a field and something trips you… you know real pissing rain and you'd be walking across a field, walking across a ditch and fall, and that time you'd say to yourself; 'I was better off in Long Kesh than this'… but not in a serious sense if you know what I mean.

There are people out there and you know they were like mothers and fathers to us, absolutely fantastic to us. It's a whole different life in the sense that you have a whole new family – they are your family – your secret family. For them people, some of them were business people, some of them would have held very, very good jobs, some of them would have government jobs, that was life for them with young families growing up, to have us 'on the run' in the house. If we were caught in the house, they were destroyed. And some of them were very involved in their own communities, in the GAA, or handball, different things within their community and they would be totally destroyed and ostracised by the community if it was ever found out. These were the people who sacrificed all that.

I did not expect that from people. I didn't expect the calibre, right across the whole board, of people. It was mind boggling, the amount of support. Some of them didn't even support the IRA, but they'd let you stay in the house no problem. 'I don't support you but there's always a bed there for you if you need it.' I think it boils down to the old Fenian inside the Irish person… that's what I put it down to. Some of these would have been hardline Fianna Fáil – some of them would have been high up in Fianna Fáil – not at government level – but high in their cumanns – Fine Gael, the whole lot. It was mind boggling, the amount of people and that is the hardest part of it, they can never be acknowledged for what they have done and I wonder how it is for them. In some sense, they are the forgotten people, not by us, but because of their particular circumstances.

We were never worried because these particular houses would have been tried and tested for other people who were on the run, not necessarily just from the state. A safe house is a safe house. If it's a sound house, it's a sound house. And you do everything in your power to protect that house.

I think the hardest part after you got out of jail was that you're still thinking like you're 17 or 18 years of age – but I was 28. But that was my mindset, you know. And it's very hard to adapt to life outside, very very hard. It was eight months before we even got out for a drink, before we got the confidence to go out for a drink. And I'll never forget, we went into a disco up in Galway, we were sitting talking to these ones, and one said to me 'wait until the slow set comes..' and I said to meself 'what's a slow set..? There was all these coloured lights. I had never seen anything like this in my life. Never. So, we were out dancing and I looked up and I seen all these wee wheels going round, and I says, 'God you'd think you were flying on a plane'. We were supposed to be out and not be conspicuous!

It was like shooting forward in time, if you know what I mean! All of this was alien to us… and we learned how to handle money… but the way we were behaving, it was obvious we were either two rednecks from the asshole of nowhere or two stupid Provos!

We were in different houses and there would have been different people looking after a certain amount. The eight of us moved for a while, we stayed with one family for a considerable amount of time, maybe three or four months. The kids knew… they loved us… they used to come out walking in the fields with us at night, you know for exercise an' all. We wouldn't go out during the day. It was funny, people used to call to the house. I remember on Christmas Day we were all sitting around having our Christmas dinner and this boy called to the house and we all had to go down to the room and wait in the room and he stayed for 5 hours! We'd have grabbed the plates had the food been out but it wasn't out!

We stayed with that family for a considerable amount of time. You become very close to the families. And they become very protective of you. And I wonder, I often asked this question and I still do – their own children, what was going through their heads? Like, 'do my ma and da love him more than they love me? Why are they getting the attention?' What did them children think at that time? They were absolutely fantastic people.

A good few of them I have gone back to see. We can go to these people because years later their cover was blown. They were more afraid that we'd get caught and go back to jail than they were afraid for themselves. But again it was like that two sided coin, the minute you walk out that door and you're away from that house it doesn't exist until you come back again.

If anything happened while we were there you would always do everything you could to make sure that the family wasn't in any danger. At all times, they came first.

We weren't armed. They wouldn't give them to us because they said if we were stopped at a checkpoint or we met guards, we'd be less inclined to persuade our way out of it, rather you'd be bull-headed and say… 'here….'

You're always depending on people for houses, safe houses in different areas. We were moving around in different areas but we'd come back to the likes of Sligo, Mayo, Galway and that would have been classed as coming back for a break. You might be out doing work and you'd be away three, maybe four months and you'd be coming back to let the hair down every few months.

I met this girl here, I was living openly and signing on the dole in Sligo and she had a flat so I said to myself…'I'll not depend on anybody anymore'. Her circle of friends, some of them were in the Irish army and all that there and when you're moving in that sort of circle of friends you don't tend to come under the microscope. Then we had a child together. We lost our first child, three days old and we couldn't do anything big. It was very hard for her at that time. My name at that time was Dermot Hanigan and she had to tell her family I worked for Digital. That was the storyline because I was always away. I was away and coming back all the time. It was hard for her.

Then came the time that two of my friends (escapees) were arrested and they were sent to Portlaoise. They were caught fully armed. They got twelve years or something in Portlaoise. They finished their sentences. Meanwhile the judgement had come out about extradition and then the next thing the two of them got released from Portlaoise and they weren't arrested for extradition.

At this particular time, I noticed too that the Special Branch were passing the house on a regular basis and I was thinking they never done this before. So the next thing anyway, I was brought

to court for fishing, poaching salmon, and it was under the name Dermot Hanigan. The inspector stood up in the court and he said to the judge, 'I don't believe this person to be who he says he is'. I just turned around and looked at the judge and I says, 'I am'. He fined me a thousand pounds for one fish. So I wouldn't pay the fine, pure badness, like. So, I was arrested then under the name of Dermot Hanigan.

I was going up to Mountjoy in the back of the taxi with the two cops and half way there the cop said to me, 'you see Dermot when we go in here', he says, 'don't use your right name', he says, 'still use the name Dermot Hanigan because it won't make any difference but it means you'd be brought back to court and you'd be tried, it'd cause too many problems, just go along with it.' So, obviously they knew at that stage who I was.

I went into Mountjoy and I remember going into the governor and he says, 'how long did you get?' and I says, 'I haven't a clue'. I knew rightly I was doing five days. He said, 'what are you here for?' and I said, 'I took a fish out of the river'. He says, 'you wha'?' I say, 'I took a salmon out of the river'. He says, 'where are you from?', I says, 'Sligo'. He says, 'head home'.

I was going out the Mountjoy gate and a man who used to work in Sligo happened to drive past in the car and he stopped and he said, 'what the fuck are you doing here?' and I said, 'I got arrested for not paying the fine'. He says, 'are you going home?' 'Aye'. 'Jump in'. And he left me off… I was just coming up from Magheraboy and I turned the corner and the guards were coming down, the same two who had dropped me at Mountjoy… they nearly crashed the car. I was back in Sligo before them!

So, I says to my wife – it's time now – you've got to go and tell your family who I am. At that time, they'd know me well. I had two kids an' all at this stage and I was married. And I was married under my own name and I was living with her.

I think it was the 10th anniversary of the escape when they did a thing in an Irish magazine… a 'where are they now?' story. They were all telling their different stories and a reporter for the Sunday Times landed to the house. And of course, me being me, I had no comprehension whatsoever of the media, of reporters…I was like a lamb to the slaughter. He was interviewing me about the escape an'

all and I said, 'there is nothing they can do because of the Finucane judgement about extradition'.

I said, 'I'm married and living in Sligo'. He questioned me you know, what did I think of Gerry Adams securing this Peace Process, which was at initial stages it must have been the early nineties. I said, 'I fully support it'. He was going out and he said, 'off the record' he says, 'why did you not go to America?' I says, 'there's no war in America'. So that was alright. The next Sunday – headlines in the paper – 'escaped bomber tracked down to hideout in Sligo'. Big massive article that I had trained IRA volunteers to bomb England and all this crap that he put in the paper. I said to myself…'Jesus, you know'. Ken McGuinness and the Unionists were up in arms; the Brits were going mental about it. It was brought up in the House of Commons and everything. It was all over the papers. The media was down outside the house and everything.

There was not much my wife could do. It was all over the papers and I was under pressure like… but I was like a lamb to the slaughter. I'd say if you ever asked me, I'd say it was the biggest mistake I ever made in my life. I should have been a lot cuter.

I had been a long time in and around Sligo; I knew a lot of people and the amount of phone calls that I got. Dermot – 'are you alright – do you need help?' 'Do you need a bed?'…from people I would never have dreamed of. Most people said, 'sure I've known him all my life, he's not that type of person'. Basically then pressure came on and I'll never forget the day I was arrested for extradition up in the house. Even the guy that was arresting me, says to me, he said, 'Dermot, this is a political exercise. This is going nowhere.' So, that was it – Portlaoise. I was there for 3 months. I got bail that time and I had to sign on for two and half years. I had to go every day to the barracks and sign on… this was before the whole thing of prisoner release.

They didn't know who I was, even me neighbours. After that incident, me neighbour sold the house and left. She was afraid of her life. My son was well clued in. I don't know what was going through his head, when the reality hit him that his father was this person. Him and my daughter had a hard time, like. They didn't talk to me about it. I would have been headstrong. I would have confronted it straight away… I would think they told their mother and their mother said, 'whatever you do, don't tell your father'. I would be

99.9% sure that's what's happened. But I often talk to my son about it now… he says, 'I just wanted to be my own person. I didn't want to be known as the son of Dermot McNally who escaped out of jail. I wanted to make my way in life as me', which he did do. And all the time the guards raided my house and all that, they were always in bed sleeping. They never actually seen the guards raidin' the house or anything. Never seen me getting arrested or anything like that. It was hard for them… when the holy communion or confirmation was on, I was in Portlaoise.

It was all over the news… I'd say all their friends knew. It was all over the news and papers when I was arrested. There was no doubt. Everybody knew.

The escapees stay in contact. When you talk about emotions, that was something similar to the hunger strikes and when the hunger strikers died… the same emotions happened with the Peace Process, like. That transformation of coming from conflict to no-conflict… that was one of the hardest battles I ever had in my life. You're in turmoil… you feel you're betraying. These are all things that are going through your head. It took two or three years to come to terms with it. Longer even.

The hardest thing was coming to terms with the transition. It's your whole life… everything from, you may as well say conflict from 11 years of age right up until you're 40 and all of a sudden that part of your life is over. No, I was not equipped to deal with the new life. The biggest challenge was being responsible. Learning how to pay bills, learning how to lead an ordinary life, not look over your shoulder. There's death threats on my name from the UVF and the UDA so just being down home (in Lurgan) having no worries, being a normal person, it's all different. People often say to me…it's the first time in my life that I've made a decision as Dermot McNally – no politics, from the other side, just as me. I'm rearing kids now where I'm there as a father the whole time.

The life that I was used to was a closed life. If I was in the house and I was there with the wife and kids, I would say, 'I'm sorry, I have to go.' I was gone out the door. She didn't know if I was coming back in a week, a day, the next morning. If anyone came looking for me… she had to say I was just gone. He never said to me when he was coming back. It wasn't an easy life for her under any circumstances.

I miss the life. I do actually miss that part of life. People say, 'sure you have a family'. But the Republican family, I missed it. When I was eleven years of age and throwing stones and bottles and petrol bombs, there came a time in my life when I reached a stage when I said, 'I want to throw more petrol bombs and I want to become involved in the cuttin' edge'. When you're at that cuttin' edge for a long period of time, then that's the only thing you know in your life. Then all of a sudden that's gone. That's over.

Nobody wants to see anybody dyin'. If I was looking at the TV and there was a soldier being buried, and you see his family, I wouldn't be heartless but it's not the person, it's the uniform. That's the hardest part of it you know. What can you say to people? If somebody came up and started accusing' you in the middle of the road and started shouting, 'you killed my son', 'you shot my son' or anything like that there… or their son was in the RUC or in the British Army – it was the uniform. You didn't know, you wouldn't have known who that person was or anything.

Your first reaction when you go in as a child, and I was a child, I had no experience, no nothing, I was more of a reactionary you know. The first thing you think is that the IRA will take over and run the whole country. That's what's in your head. That's what you think. Until you start to become politically aware in yourself. In my lifetime I actually thought, and hopefully still do think, that we would have a thirty two county Republic… now with the nature of change in politics throughout the whole world and especially in Europe an' all. We are all European citizens now anyway up or down. I believe the whole dynamic between now and the early 70s, it's all changed. But I would most love to see a whole new radical change in Ireland. And I think it will come about. I think you're seeing the start of it where I never thought I would see it; down here in the South.

People's attitudes towards me have and haven't changed. 'Yes' in the sense that they accept who I am – the Maze escapee – the Peace Process and that enhances it. But there are still people out there who would say 'terrorist'. They would not say it to my face but if you scratch the surface it's still there. There was certain ones that would be very hostile towards you, more hostile than they would to anybody else. For a lot of people there's a fear factor there as well. They'd be afraid of you. You'd know that by just talking to them and looking at them, you know. Just afraid of that whole thing… you

know, he's a terrorist, he escaped out of jail, he was one of the ones in the H-blocks and all this here and there's that fear he must be – you know – a psychopath.

When you notice it, you kind of just go along with the person and you try to ease their feelings. If they broached the subject, it would be no problem talking to them about it but if they didn't I wouldn't talk about it. But most people now would slag you or there's ones would sit and have a serious conversation with you. There's other ones and it would still be 'them and us'. It's still there you know. It hasn't gone away. There has been a gradual change over the years. Even now with the guards, I happened to be at a couple of weddings and guards were there and maybe Special Branch and they would come up, they'd wait 'til they'd have a few drinks in them, half jarred and they'd some up and say 'Dermot, I hope you've no hard feelings, you know we were just doing our job.' I would say 'I hope you have no hard feelings, cos I was only doing my job'. 'The only difference is, I says, is that you got paid'. A lot of them – the guards – in one sense they mightn't have liked you but they respected you. I didn't go around slagging them. I didn't go around abusing them or anything like that. That is me and that was me. What you see is what you get.

They (the Gardaí and Special Branch) would still pay attention but not as much. They pass by the house. They would be outside the house nearly every day. They still check certain events, like the Easter commemorations, parades… it's not to see if you're still involved, it's to see that you're still with the Republican Movement because if you weren't they'd think you'd be away with another faction. They would still keep an eye on known Republicans.

The happiest moments were when we all got together. There were times and events when we'd meet up together and we'd have great craic… and then we'd all go our different ways again. There were lots of times when you'd meet people that you'd stayed with for years and years. You'd happen to bump into them, at some occasion, like a fleadh or something like that… and you'd have to find an opportunity to go up and talk to them so nobody would think 'why is he talking to them?'. You would talk then as if you just met them at the bar, then you'd sit down and have a good conversation. And they'd be happy to see you; the unfortunate thing is, when you walk out the door, that's the end of it again.

I do have friends who I suspect are involved with dissident groups. I still treat them as friends. I've had conversations with them in terms of the present situation. My attitude is very simple, at some stage, no matter when it is, they'll still have to come back to this point in the existing Peace Process.

I feel sorry for the young fellas, 19 or 20 years of age who are joining an organisation when I don't see any reason why they should progress right from the beginning to where it is now. We have achieved what they are saying they want to achieve. You have to have a strong political party. You have to be strong. They have no political party. What I say to them is 'why do you not all come together as one and see what happens, end the lot, come in as one, they might not agree with all parts of the Peace Process but come in and see what happens. If you're not happy in four years time, fall away again'. The biggest killer of the Irish cause all the time has been divide and conquer.

I believe that quite a large proportion of the population would understand my perspective. There's probably a section out there who have never heard it. And more who have only heard the propaganda coming out from watching the TV.

I do think it's important to get the story out there. I think they should know. I hadn't a choice. There was no other path for me but only that path. That was the unfortunate circumstances of the time I lived in and the area I lived in. People say, 'you could have been this, you could have been that'. You couldn't, you didn't have them opportunities.

If people see the story and they read it, that fear element should go because they should know exactly where we were coming from. We were labelled as terrorists, psychopaths, this and that. All of a sudden, they're reading the exact reasons why you became involved in the conflict.

To go down that path and live that life was quite an experience, an adventure in finding yourself, in finding a true meaning, in finding the true you. I have no regrets whatsoever. I found life fulfilling. I have recovered my relationship with my kids. They come down here and I go and stay with them and the grandchildren and I would still be on very good terms with both my first and second wife and they with my partner.

No, none of my kids got involved in politics. They would be nationalistic minded. It didn't disappoint me. I can honestly say that I brought them up to make their own decisions. That's what I wanted. I made my decisions and if they for instance, join a political party, say Sinn Féin, I want them to do that because it's what they believe in.

If any of them had chosen the route I had chosen, I would have talked to them, and I would have made sure they were doing it because of their own politics. I'd have had a very, very serious talk with them, told them the realities. This is no glorified life. It's a very, very tough life. It's a hard life. I was so young, I was sentenced to life imprisonment and I thought I was going to be there for the rest of my life.

“The struggle in Africa”

The struggle in Africa

Most people I think, have heard about genocide in West Africa because of the news and the film Hotel Rwanda. I have been affected by conflict in that part of the world. I cannot say what country. I would like people to know why people are fighting. What is the backbone of this conflict? What causes conflict, especially in Africa? I would like people where I live in Sligo to understand.

In my opinion, these countries that are suffering from conflict are the ones that have natural resources like gold, diamonds, copper, aluminum, stuff like that. Like in Liberia for example, the rebels want to get control of the territory where the natural resources are. Sierra Leone is another example. It is a very rich country, in resources, but it is also one of the poorest countries in Africa because of civil wars and corruption. It is important to check the motive behind it. In Sierra Leone there was a very nasty war between the rebels and the government troops because they wanted to control the territory of the diamonds. They wanted to exchange diamonds for weapons and ammunition. The rebels got the support of the people.

The news in the West does not always give the full story. Take Liberia for example, Charles Taylor got control of the country. Then he exchanged diamonds for arms and sold the arms to Sierra Leone. Now he is being charged in the Netherlands, in The Hague, for crimes against humanity. Anyone who steals the wealth of another country, or their own country and causes thousands of people to be killed is guilty of crimes against humanity. Many people from Sierra Leone fled to The Gambia, many people.

I was taught not to fight. I tried to get an education in my country. But you know, if you are not financially strong, it is hard. To go to higher education you need finance. I know Ireland was colonised by the English. Many African countries were also colonised, so now I speak English.

When people have to leave their own country they should get asylum and support to make a new life. I cannot talk about what happened to me. I want to forget, to move on with my life. If I talk about it I have to remember what it was like when they came for my family, to kill my family. I don't want to think about that or to keep talking about it. I want to live now, to integrate into this country, into the community in Sligo.

I have learned about Travellers. They are very kind people. They have suffered discrimination and bad treatment. Every Saturday they come with their vans to take us to football matches. There is a team in the hostel, called Globe House Dragons. I like sport. I would like to see the team getting into a league. That would be great for morale. It would give everyone a lift.

I think a lot of people don't understand that we are not allowed to work. I want to work. I used to be a chef. I have qualifications. I know all about food hygiene, health and safety. I could teach people. But when you are an Asylum Seeker, you can't work. Even if I get to stay here it will be years before I can become a citizen.

You just have to wait. The process is very slow. They are in command. You have to wait. You have to keep positive. My life is very different now, completely different. I knew nothing about Ireland before I came here, just that it was English speaking. I thought it was part of the UK. I saw a film about the North, about Enniskillen. The only difference I could see was the number plates on the cars. Everything else looked the same to me. In Africa every country has a border with flags and soldiers. I did not know that Europe has no borders like that. I could never go back to my country. It would be too dangerous. I did not want to leave but I do not want to live a corrupt life. I want to make my future in Ireland now, to get a job, to further my education. That is a dream for me.

I don't think I will ever see my family again. International calls are very expensive but I have some contact on the net. There is light at the end of the tunnel. I will never give up hope. One fine day, you never know, only God knows.

You need to be positive. I try to push myself in different ways, like going to the library. It's free. I can get different books, get more knowledge. I like detective novels; they take your mind off things. It's a good experience in Ireland but it's also a challenge. You get good days and bad days. If you think too much you can get down. I try to

eradicate the bad times from my mind. I don't want to destroy my mind. But I see some people around me can't cope. It affects them a lot, thinking about their family and waiting and waiting. They think they will get some news, and then they don't know what's happening. They have to wait again. They get down, they get depressed.

It's very hard to survive on nineteen euros a week, not knowing what will happen in the future. You have to have strong willpower. If I keep thinking about my situation, if I get down, no one will lose, except me. When I think about it too much I get heartbroken. If I get sick, if I have a heart attack, I will lose. At the end of the day, I am the only one who feels this pain, my own pain.

Life is about strong willpower and good faith. You can jump up and down, protest, but at the end of the day, you realise life is about money, finances. If you are not financed in this town, you can't move. But you have to keep going. If you think about something bad, make yourself think about something good. If you think about death, think about life. You have to have determination and willpower. You have to accept you will get down for a while but you have to try to integrate. How you do that depends on each individual person. Some people don't like to socialise. You have to push yourself. If you stay in one place, people get to know you. They might need your help for something some day. I try to mobilise people, to bring people together, organise things. Like last month we travelled to Galway. Before that we went to another town. Sometimes we go to Donegal for a football match. It brings people together, even people who don't like football; they come for the bus trip.

There are some talented lads on the team. They want to be good footballers. People like watching good footballers. They don't see the colour of your skin, they see you as a good player, that's the first thing. Football teaches people to overcome difficulties, to face challenges. Life is a challenge actually. You finish up with this one and another one comes in front of you. Challenge after challenge. You have to be mentally fit to meet life's challenges. If you overcome difficulties, it's a good experience. You learn from it.

One of the hardest challenges living in Ireland is the system for asylum seekers. Having to stay in one place, three to a room. Waiting to hear from the solicitor, waiting to hear about your case, for months or years. You can walk around outside, go where you want, but all this waiting and not knowing is like mental torture. It's like prison.

Everyone wakes up at the same time, eats at the same time. There is no choice. It is good to have a bed, to have meals. It's not good not to be allowed to work. A short term, part time permit would be good, while we are waiting. It's a procedure. You can do nothing. You just have to wait.

You have to keep busy. We play football, snooker, go to the library, read newspapers. I read novels and books about health and safety and food hygiene. I think everyone should know how to avoid food poisoning or food contamination. It's good to have inspections in the hostel. We should have them more often. It's good that they change the menu every month. It would be good if we could cook for ourselves. If everything is provided you do nothing. I don't like doing nothing. I like to be active. I like to help people as much as I can.

I don't know much about politics here. I read the Irish Times. Someone wrote that the contracts to the hostels are renewed every year. Nobody benefits from this system except the hostel owners. The government here treats asylum seekers like cattle, moving them from here to there. I don't want to keep moving. I want to settle here, to work. I would like the right to work. I would like to pay tax, to contribute to the Irish economy. Every little helps. I don't want to just take. I want to give.

The government and the hostels give us a helping hand, a bed and three meals a day. We could run our own hostels, cook our own food. This would give us some satisfaction, some independence. We'll see what happens with the new government, if there is a little change or a big change or no change.

When Irish people here the words Asylum Seekers some see the negative side of it. They think we are just here for money. This is quite wrong. They have no knowledge of how the asylum system works. If I was able to work I would have more respect and more dignity. If you don't have dignity and self respect it's not good for your faith. The moment you put me down I feel down, I start to lose faith. If you disrespect me just because I come from Africa I feel really down and low because I don't have the power, I don't have the tools to challenge you.

We are free to practice our faith here. We have religious freedom. In the hostel there is a mosque. We pray every day, five times on Friday. To have that freedom is important. Faith doesn't only mean religion. Faith means strength, a good mentality, good will, that's

all part of faith. It's a feeling I have in my heart. Since I was seven my parents taught me 'respect your elders.' This is the number one priority where I come from, show respect. Elders doesn't just mean your family but people in authority and to treat everyone else with equal respect. When people take that away from you, you have to stand up against injustice. I come from Africa. If I violate the law in Africa they will prosecute me. If I violate the law in Ireland they will prosecute me. This is right. We should all have equality before the law. When you go to a foreign country, you should respect the constitution of that country. In every democratic country citizens have the right to voice their opinions, to come out with their point of view. If you don't cast your vote your voice isn't being heard. You have the power to vote, to demonstrate on the streets, the power of the people. When you have freedom of movement and freedom of speech you don't need to be violent, you can challenge on any level.

We learned a little about Ireland in school, that Ireland was a British colony a long time ago and we learned that the IRA were labelled as terrorists. It's good to have the Peace Process. Suicide bombers are not good, you could take innocent life. That's not the solution. Some people, when they think of Muslims, they think 'terrorists'. But killing innocent people, that's not what Islam is about, it's a religion. The Prophet does not commend those types of actions. Terrorism is unlawful. To take somebody else's life is unlawful. Terrorism is not in the Koran. They can hold the Koran and call Allah's name and kill, but it is not documented there. If you are a good Muslim and believe strongly in your faith you would never go that path. It is wrong. The fanatics say they do this for the cause of Allah. It is wrong.

There is good and bad in every society. Muslims have good people and bad people. Christians have good people and bad people. The IRA were labelled as terrorists and they are Christian. They planted bombs in the UK in the 80's. They were fighting for a cause. They believed that was the only thing they could do to change things.

You hear people talk about democracy. But in 90% of the countries, in my opinion, they are not exercising democracy. America is a superpower. They say they are champions of democracy. But when did black people get the right to vote in America? How did they get it? Through peaceful protest. They came out in numbers and in the end of the day, they succeeded.

In Egypt now people are coming out in numbers because what was happening was wrong. You cannot rule a nation for 20, 30, 40 years and have your son take over, then a family member, in a kingdom. Nobody voted. This whole thing started with a fruit vendor in Tunis. He was there for 20 years. That's what I heard. They destroyed his fruit stall. He poured petrol on himself and burnt himself. That's where the protest started in Tunisia. People started an uprising. In Egypt, the army fired on people but later they stopped.

If one person takes a stand it can make a difference. The population is more than the military, more than the police. If the population is five million, they can't kill five million, which would be genocide. Peaceful protest is the best way. Just go and sit down. Come out in numbers. Stay on the streets. If thousands of people come, it will change things. One voice cannot be heard but thousands can. The majority carry the vote.

“I went from strength to strength but it wasn’t easy”

I went from strength to strength but it wasn't easy

The first thing I've ever really known about Northern Ireland was when I lived over in England donkeys years ago, and my first husband who was in the Army, went over to work there.

At the time he went away I was working back in England and there were two Irish ladies worked in the office, one from Northern Ireland and one from Southern Ireland. I had more problems with the lady from Southern Ireland than the one from Northern Ireland, even though I was more afraid of the Northern one because we were led to believe, through the news media then, that anybody from the North was bad eggs. We were only really told one side of the story in England, we were never really told the full impact of what really happened in the North. The Republicans were the bad ones. We heard of all the atrocities but we were never educated about why all these things happened.

So consequently I was a little bit nervous with the woman from the North, but she was my ally at the finish. Her brother had been railroaded into joining the IRA, according to her and if he didn't do it the family would be at risk – they were living in fear. I think that was one of the reasons why she came over to England. And I kept fairly quiet about where my husband was too. But it came up in conversation one day and the woman from Southern Ireland, she really turned on me. 'Your husband shouldn't be there, they should send all the English back. There is a war going on there'. I was getting all of this really thrown at me, and at that stage I was quite innocent, not knowing the full issues of Northern Ireland. And I would say, 'right, okay, we are in the workplace, I don't want to argue with you, you know, let's just – you have your politics, I have my politics, we've got to work

together'. So there was quite a long time when she wouldn't speak to me, which was fine, but the one from Northern Ireland, she was a lovely girl, she came in and she made more of an effort to talk to me, to make me feel a little bit easier. That would have been in the 70's, the early 70's.

My husband went to the North several times with the Army. He found it difficult. It had a psychological effect on him and I noticed a change in him, big-time. For instance if you were walking down the street and a car would backfire, then he would be down on the floor immediately, he would be thinking it was guns or whatever going off.

He would like to have a drink before he joined the Army, but after it, he became an alcoholic. He would wake up at night in a state too but you see, with drinking as well you wouldn't know where it was coming from – I certainly didn't at that stage, by God I must have been really, really innocent. But post traumatic stress was never really talked about in those days.

They would just up and go to Northern Ireland for a few months and then they would come back for a week or two before they'd be off again. And you never really knew when they were going to go, you know, the second time, the third time, whatever time. There was no support, no support at all for any family. You were just left there and the idea was that you should think yourself lucky that he was going and you were getting money from him and all the rest.

There was no mobile phone or internet in those days either so if something came off the news about a soldier being killed or injured you didn't know if it was him.

We had an arrangement to talk on the phone once a week. He used to phone me to a public box. I remember when it was the coal miner's strike, going off in the dark with my torch to the phone box and if he didn't phone through I knew he was out somewhere and I just had to come back home wondering if he was okay. So that wasn't easy either, you know, it would be another week before you got to talk to him and knew if he was ok.

I would try to ask him about being in Ireland. I would say, 'well what was it like up there, I have never been to Northern Ireland', and he would say, 'well you know, there are some good ones too, they are not all bad', but generally he didn't really speak about it. I would ask him what the countryside was like, and he'd say 'sure it's the same as here'. He never wanted to talk about it. He was trying to fob me off

and shut me up; he didn't really want to go down that avenue. Instead he started drinking more, he would be gambling, going off with other women, you know? The whole of life was turned upside down.

He became more aggressive. Now, you can look at it and ask 'well was it there before all this?' I don't know. Up until that point he had never hit me, but after he started going to Ireland I was hit and bashed around. It affected the children. There was fighting and arguing in front of them and that wasn't good. In the end we bought my husband out of the Army. 'I have to get out' he said 'I can't stand it'. He wanted to get out, he couldn't cope. And I had seen him as I say; cars backfiring, any kind of loud noise and he would be down on the ground. It was all to do with what happened in Northern Ireland.

He was just a regular squaddie. £250 it was at that time to buy him out. It was a King's ransom. I had to borrow it from my father.

I left him. Then like a silly fool I went back to him again, to see if it would work for the sake of the children or what have you, but as we all know that doesn't happen, it's very rare that it ever really works out. I just couldn't take any more beatings, being raped or anything like that any more, so I just made the big sacrifice in that I had to leave one of my children behind. I couldn't afford to pay somebody to look after him while I worked, so I just had to think about leaving, plan what I could take and do it all very surreptitiously. I would move stuff out of the house without my husband knowing.

I let the people at my workplace know what day I was going to move and why, so I could ask them not to say anything to him because I knew he would be on the phone demanding to see me. I made them promise not to tell him anything until I had a day or two to get myself sorted and that was hard.

I would put some of what we went through in those years down to the effect serving in Northern Ireland had on him. From what I knew about him before he went, and what I saw when he came back, superficially things looked to be okay, but underneath the surface there was a lot of differences. There was real violence, you know? I would go to work with black eyes and do the usual story, 'oh I bumped into the door'. But thankfully I had understanding there at work and they gave me the support I really needed at that time, and thank God, I went from strength to strength but it wasn't easy.

I then got divorced and I met my second husband who is absolutely fantastic. He's the only best friend I have in this world, the only one

who knows everything about me. He's taken my children as his, same as I've taken his children as mine, warts and all, nobody's perfect.

So now I have a new life, but not a lot of people know of some of the things that happened back then. But like I said, life is life and you just have to play it the best way you can.

As time went on after my first husband came out of the army, it seemed to go quiet about the North in my life. Then all of a sudden Gerry Adams was allowed to speak and I was actually then beginning to realise what had led to a lot of the Troubles, because it was bloody well unjust. You know, I have been up to Derry a few times – the first time I went up to Derry, I actually saw with my own eyes the wall and how people would have lived in the Bogside. You wouldn't have put an animal there, never mind human beings and I said that to the chap who was showing us round. He said, 'I thought you were English, I thought you were a Protestant', and I said, 'what the hell has that got to do with it? We are talking human beings here not religion, and by God I can tell you that if I had to live there, I would be bloody well creating – you wouldn't put a dog there'.

Then he went on about Queen Victoria and how a statue of her had been bombed during the Troubles. Well, as far as I'm concerned she should have been bombed years ago, because having read up since then on Irish history, she didn't do any favours for Ireland. In the famine stuff was coming out from here, foodstuff, but what were the people getting? Nothing, again. It boils down to not treating human beings like human beings should be treated. The Irish poor were treated like animals, again, and I can't follow the logic of that.

You know, there are a lot of people who can answer for the knock on effects of what the Ireland issue has really done to hundreds and thousands of lives….

When I was growing up, I grew up with a lot of Irish people who came to work where we lived because all the mills were there. Lots of Irish and Scottish people, they were fantastic people. I used to go in their houses and that, and by God, I would get better fed than what I would at home. It was lovely! If you couldn't tell your mother something you could always tell one of your adopted Mammies!

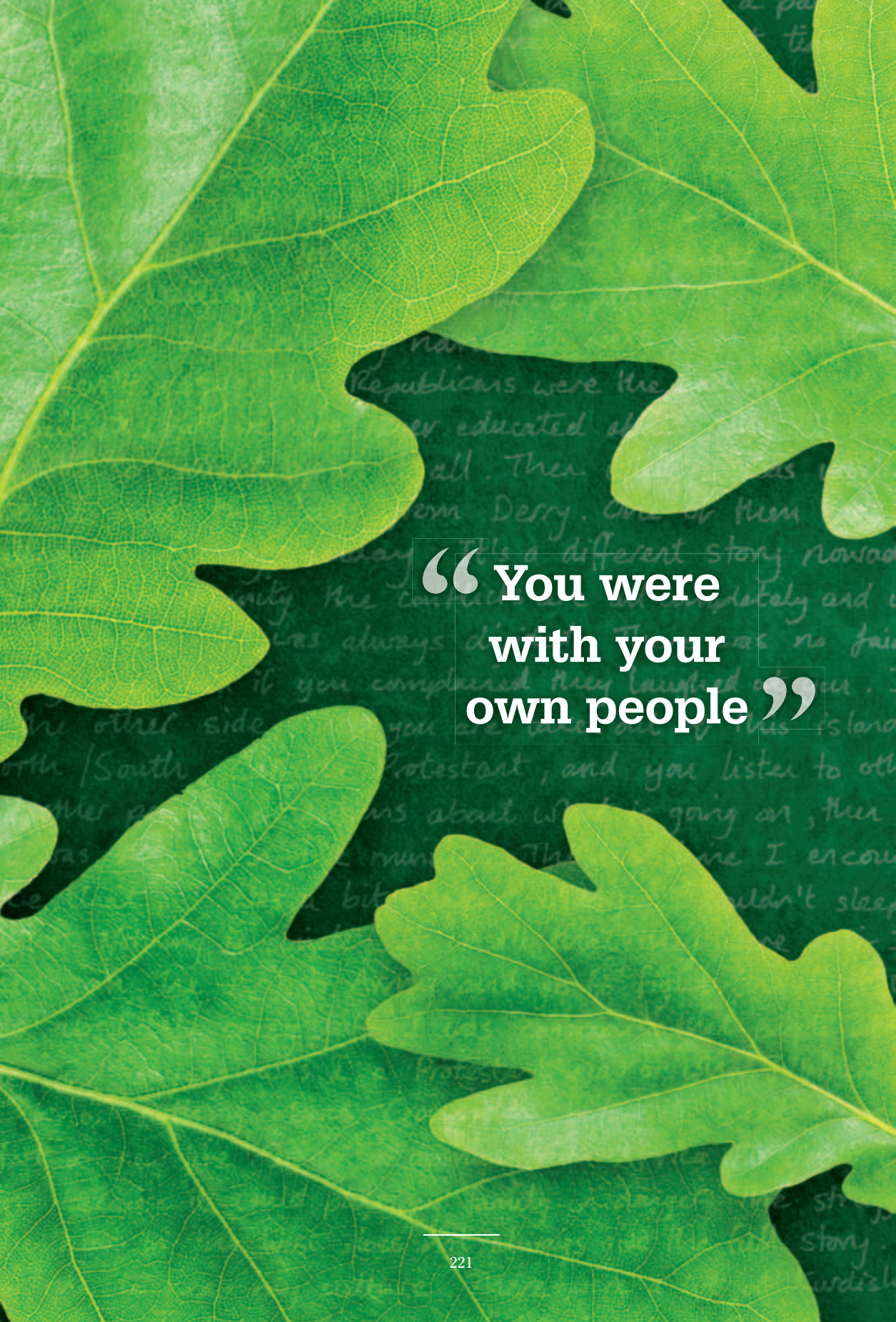
Then I came over here to live in Ireland. At first I found people treated me as an outsider, which is to be expected when you are new. But I found that in the family I had married into, every opportunity was taken to say things like 'Ah sure, you're only a Proddy anyway' or

'she's English' emphasising the 'English' bit… well, I don't go around saying, 'she's Irish' but in my experience there is always a dig at the 'Proddies', even now, after 20 years here.

Sometimes people ask me how my husband and I manage, being from different Churches. When I tell them I go to both they might say 'well, why would you go to two churches? You are a Protestant, you should go to the Church of Ireland'.

We would get remarks too, typical being 'I pray for you two', and I would ask 'why?' 'Ah well sure, you are not married, I pray for your souls'. I suppose there have been lots of little comments that have come out, but I've got that used to them now, they just seem to go over the top of my head.

It depends on the people I am with really, for some I am just me and that's that but for others I will always be an English Protestant. I suppose because of my husband being Catholic, I've been into more Catholic churches than I have Church of Ireland churches. But I don't see any difference – all right there is a difference in what they say, and what they do, but to me you are praying to the same God, so where are the hang-ups? A Christian is a Christian, the same as a person is a person.


“You were with your own people”

You were with your own people

As a youngster, I don't think that my Protestantism reckoned that much with me. My father had two men working here and I suppose our farm was a little bit bigger than the other locals. All the farms were generally around 20 acres and we had a little bit more, just through enterprise; my grandfather came here to a 29 acre farm and he expanded it and then my father expanded it also. He had two men working here and it was the fact that we were children of the employer that made us that bit different. My father did some cattle dealing, mostly cows, and he would have grazing land taken in different areas and so forth which made it appear that he had a larger farm.

And then he had a misfortune, he lost the sight in one eye in about 1944. It handicapped him considerably and he wasn't nearly as enterprising or as adventurous as he had been previously. He was one of eight and they all went to America. In fact he also went to Australia first while the rest of the family were on the East Coast of the United States. He considered that Australia was quite undeveloped at the time, even in Melbourne where he was, there weren't many permanent or secured buildings. He said that every place was just a façade and behind it was a temporary structure. And of course letter writing was the only way of communicating and the family in the United States were doing much better than he was and they encouraged him to go there. I think there might have been a little bit of romance involved also! He had a romance with a girl from down the road before going away, I'm not sure if she left Ireland before he did, but he went to Australia and she ended up in the United States. He may have gone there to make contact again – it's a mystery – we won't ever know!

All the family with the exception of one girl emigrated. She waited to mind her mother and later married about 1923.

My grandfather died in 1922 and my father and his sister returned here in 1923. When they came back, there was a slump in the cattle business and his brother who had the farm here got wiped out with the poor prices, and my father had, for that time, a considerable amount of money. He had a farm of his own before he left and he had sold it in 1919 or 1920 for approximately stg£1900, which was a fortune at that time. I daresay if he hadn't had that money he would probably have stayed in Australia. He came home and his brother was in dire straits, not able to pay the rent, all the cattle sold and not enough money to pay the grazing rent so he bought the home farm from his brother. His brother left for America and never came back again because he was so discouraged or maybe soured about his achievements here in Ireland. That family had started dispersing in 1912. There were three girls and five boys and they were enterprising. They had a sheep export business going, shipping, they even got to the stage of killing pork pigs and shipping them and rabbits to Liverpool. They were an enterprising family at that time, very forward-looking, and pulling themselves up by the shoelaces you might say.

It didn't register with us that we were going to a different church when we were young but in school when catechism was taught and when there was an intense programme for the visitation of the priest, we would be moved out to the porch. There was my sister, myself, three cousins and three from another family at that school. We were ever so quiet, not getting rowdy or anything like that, and maybe listening a little bit, eavesdropping – curiosity! I don't think that my parents would have asked that we be taken out of class for catechism but I think the teacher was afraid of indoctrinating us. That was the first evidence that we understood we were a little bit different. There was another time that a gentleman, a Christian Brother, used to come recruiting and he would start off at the end of the row and then the master would tap him on the shoulder to skip one – that would be skipping me!

It didn't make you feel different because you were the same as they were in every other way. You would be doing things on the farm in the evening or morning time. The farm was the focal point and all the others were involved in doing farming chores as well. Neighbouring children would come working for my father at times, so you didn't

feel any different from them. It was only that little bit of teaching that made you feel different. The context for this is that the primary schools were geared towards getting pupils for the seminaries. If you got picked to go to college – it meant that you were going for the priesthood. I remember the schoolmaster was pressurising his eldest son to go to the college but he wouldn't go. On the road from school, he would ask me, 'will you be a Protestant priest?' And I effectively didn't really know what a priest was at that time!

It was a feather in the cap for the teacher that there were a few Protestant families going to his school. It was partly for convenience as the Church of Ireland school at the time was further away from us (about three miles) and also, the local school had a better reputation. Our cousins would have commented on us attending the Catholic school, I think they would have felt we should have attended the Church of Ireland one. In my father's time, the family went to the Church of Ireland school, where there was a very good teacher, rather than to the Roman Catholic school.

Our Minister used to come to the house a few times during the school year to check up on the progress of our religious education, to see if we were learning our Scripture tracts and prayers, learning the 10 Commandments and whatever else was required. We had a Sunday school in our church. It was hit and miss, depending on the teachers who remembered to get there in time! Our service was at 12.30 which was rather late in the day, but still the Sunday school teacher would only arrive at maybe twenty past or a quarter past twelve. We were all ushered into a seat to be ever so quiet. The (Church of Ireland) school teacher was also the Sunday school teacher at one time and it was only the few that weren't going to her school that were effectively caught out.

We didn't go to football matches. I think my mother was probably fairly strict in that line; there was a puritanical thing about Sunday behaviour. We didn't go to the cinema or we didn't go dancing on Sundays and definitely didn't play football. Other cousins who went to the local Church of Ireland school, when some of that family ended up going to dances on a Sunday evening, it was a catastrophe. She thought it was utter damnation for them, as it were, that they were going to Sunday dances. My mother had a girl working here from the house across the road – housekeeper or assistant or pot-walloper or child smacker or whatever you might be. She was looking after us

to a fair extent, and she would go off to the local town on a Sunday afternoon to the dance hall and would come home and tell us who was there, but we dare not go to dances on a Sunday. We could go to the local beach alright and you could hear the music playing from the ballroom but that was all you got. There were also amusements there and you didn't go near those on Sunday either. That was the degree of strictness. However, my mother and her assistant used to go to the amusement arcade on week evenings.

It was acceptable to go to the seaside, go for a walk over the fields or possibly go visiting other families and other families would come visiting us. We didn't have a car but some of the relations from town had cars and would visit us. My mother was from that town originally. Her father was a businessman and I think they had a bit of airs as it were. She mightn't have been so much that way herself but she had an older sister who was a matriarch, who lived in the North and who would be very strict on how the family behaved.

I didn't really feel left out at all. Maybe we felt a little bit superior to some of the others! Because we had relations coming here with motorcars and we could be brought for a drive somewhere and that left us a little bit above their level. Until our schoolmaster got a car, there wasn't anyone else getting spins in cars around the place either.

My sister had ambitions of teaching and there were scholarship exams at that time. The Incorporated Society was a Church of Ireland foundation which had an exam each year resulting in the award of half a dozen scholarships for the whole country. She was awarded the scholarship and was allocated a place in Celbridge school in Kildare, which entailed a long train journey. My turn came to sit the exam the next year and I got a scholarship, but I remember clearly one of the times my sister was going on the bus from the crossroads, and my father hinting, 'sure, you won't need to go away like that, you'll stay and help me' and my mother protested and said, 'he's going to school if at all possible'. My father was crestfallen. But it mightn't have happened only that I got a full scholarship. I think there isn't any way they could have afforded the secondary school if I didn't get the scholarship and that sealed the thing. My father always gave credit to the local schoolmaster for our achievements in being awarded scholarships.

There was a lot of evolution in that period. But you hear about the hungry dismal '50s and '60s. It depends on how bright a picture

you're looking for or what you had endured before that time, but we got through the war times which did cause some problems, but in the countryside you always had enough food at home and there were always enough provisions on the farm. The most thing that was wanted from outside was sugar, etc., Tea was scarce, flour was readily available although the quality wasn't great, and there wasn't an awful lot more the people needed. If you wanted clothing, you bought a bolt of cloth and the local dressmaker made up your suit or costume for the woman of the house. The mother and the father got their clothes made with the local tailor and the youngsters got second-hand clothes or hand-me-downs, or maybe cut-downs of their parents' clothes or whatever it might be. There were dressmakers every few miles. Everyone was wearing the same sort of garb at the time and you didn't feel any bit different.

I went to boarding school. It wasn't unusual for the time. The chaps that went to the local secondary school, they boarded there as well. Some of them, in later years, cycled to college each day. You got a mid-term break and you got home at Christmas. At this time there would be parties in relation's houses and that sort of thing and I suppose when we were well into our teens there were dances in town that we went to or there was a Church of Ireland school fairly local to us and you would go there to dances. The church socials and the church dances wouldn't be held on Sunday, it was always a weekday.

After being married, there was a chap from nearby working with me and his son was getting married, and that was the first time that my wife and myself danced on a Sunday. That had all gone by the time I raised my family and dancing became something different in present-day times as to what it was then.

Various cousins or cousins of my parents and lots of people had migrated from this part of the world to the North in the '30s and '40s. A good many families from around here had gone North, even into the '50s, and they would come back and visit here and they would look on us in a kindly sort of a way. We consider that they felt a bit superior because they were from the North and the North was better off financially than here at that point. Even during the war years, because of food, they got paid handsomely for everything they produced. And going back to the time of the economic war, the tariff war, in the 30's people here were at a huge disadvantage, in that the cattle that were being exported from here, as soon as they got across

the border they were worth double the price. Some people along the border and even inland from the border made lots and lots of money. I'm not begrudging them in any way, as it were, but that survival on the land was really, really difficult in the mid-'30s right up until the outbreak of war.

When I was a youngster I wouldn't have known why those families had left. It was only in later years that we came to realise why they had left. We understood later on that they left generally for economic reasons, that farming was better in the North and also for fear of the family being married to Catholics. They thought that they had a better chance of meeting one of their own in the North than here. Also that the Ne Temere decree was being implemented here caused a lot of discomfort in people's attitudes to their neighbours. I suppose it was because of that we were prohibited from going to Sunday dances. The Roman Catholic people would be going to their dancing on a Sunday and they would be meeting their own people. Then the Church of Ireland socials would be on a Thursday or Friday night or whenever it might be and that kept you apart, you were with your own people. It wasn't good in its own way really, you were too segregated.

I would think my parents shared that fear. If a mixed marriage took place there would be regrets and there was a discomfort I suppose in some ways about it. The regret is that it was taking people away from our church and our congregation, they were usually gone out of the congregation and that was it. But, three of our boys are married to Roman Catholics and it doesn't cause any problems.

There are different attitudes now within the churches to the inter-church marriages as they are calling it now. Inter-church marriages in our family's case have been allowed to live in a liberal way. But in years gone by, the priests gave some of the people in mixed marriages a difficult time. I don't have any concern about how my own grandchildren should be raised. I have five grandchildren in mixed marriages. My daughter is in a mixed marriage and she goes to her own church and he goes to his church. I'm not sure about the others; I think they might go to both. You don't interfere in the matter.

We very much had a sense of loss regarding those families who moved to the North. A lot of regret that they were gone from us. Then going back to visit them in the North and the affinity that they seemed to have with us all the time since, they nearly had their own

little bit of regret of having moved from us; that we were more of an easy-going type of people than the people they met up there.

We never thought they would come back. They were gone. We have papers in our house from the 1800s, 1900s. One of them was a letter written by a man who had left from around here, he had farmed nearby, and my grandfather sent his men with a truck to transport their furniture to Northern Ireland. They might have gone by car or bus or whatever it was. He wrote to my grandfather thanking him and saying how it was great being able to sleep at night without the gun at the end of the bed. That would have been in the '20s, he felt that relief of having gone there. I think on the other hand, the particular type of people who did go, would be less tolerant of the Roman Catholic neighbours I would think. And I know of three particular cases where the husbands were never that content in the North. It was the women that brought them there. I don't really know why they moved. I would think maybe the women were a little bit more, not exactly militant, but something like that, as regards the religion, than the men would have been. And it's a general aspect as well, men would be a little more casual as it were regards observance than the women.

My parents would probably have seen themselves as maybe pro-England rather than pro-British. They still wouldn't class themselves as being English but they would have been sad to have been deprived of their British citizenship I would think. They probably would have been Unionist in outlook whatever that Unionism might have been, that would have been pre-Parnell type of thing. They resented all the trauma their families went through in relation to the troubled times – 1916 to '22 or '23. All of the families that had left were gone by 1920. Uncles and their families used to come home from the States in the '50s and they couldn't see much progress being made here in Ireland, they thought that it was a sort of backwater, maybe backward looking. In fact one of them wanted my father to move to the States. I think that his handicap prevented him and I think he claimed his age as well at the time, that he thought he was too old to make the move at that time. He made the excuse that there was a risk that I would be drafted into the American army as the Korean War was being fought at that time. Before my uncles went, they were fully integrated into the local community and when they came home they had a great time with all the friends they used pal around with. They were welcomed back with open arms and people loved to hear their stories and they

loved to retell the stories of the devilment they used to get up to before they went away.

I think my mother's family would have been nearly royalists, whereas my father's family wouldn't have been. A very important event in our household was Princess Elizabeth's wedding in 1947. It must have been at a weekend because we were at home from school listening to it on the radio and, not through any deliberate indoctrination or anything like that, the girl that my mother had working here was keenly interested in the royalism at the time and ended up going to England in her own time also. On return visits, she jokingly talked about Queenie! She lived in Berkshire, the Royal County and they would have been quite near Windsor Castle and so forth and she kept up her knowledge of the royalty.

The sense of connection with England was waning all the time and it would have been an economic thing at any time more than political. We have inherited the politics of the parents down the line and I suppose it influences your social connections – the other families that you associate with. Yes, there was a political element all through the years. I would think it went back to Civil War politics, that you had one side of the locality would have been pro-Collins and the other would have been pro-deValera. That has remained there all the time and whether it's a prejudice or bias I don't know but you always found that Fine Gael people were better off people in the community and you felt a bit of distrust for the Fianna Fáil type of people. I think because of the families that you associate with, it sort of keeps you voting that way all the time. By continually trying to work on a united Ireland, it causes friction and distrust.

I would think that people in the community wondered about whether we supported unification with Britain as opposed to a united Ireland. Very, very little comment would ever be made about it, but you would partly be classed as pro-English or pro-British I think.

Our family were not very much in favour of the allegiance with Britain but the relations who visited were I suppose, royalist. I'd say they saw the English parliament as more complete than the Irish parliament. That it was running the country in a better manner than the Irish parliament was running its country. And that the Irish one was so influenced by the hierarchy as well was an influencing factor. In fact, one uncle, he was a bit eccentric in some ways, he thought that it was a mistake having set up the Republic and it should go back to the

United Kingdom again. He wasn't thinking the whole thing through I would say. And likewise the ones who had moved to America thought that the Irish state wasn't a very satisfactory administration either.

I think it would have been part of my father's outlook that you can get on in any society, it's up to yourself, if you want to turn in on yourself there's no problem, but it's yourself you're turning in on rather than on everybody else or turning away from everybody else. They would have been an outgoing type of people.

In secondary school, it was the Monaghan people that had the Orange songs, it was the first and maybe the last place I ever heard them being sung. We effectively didn't know what Orange-ism meant even after coming out of school. The pupils from Monaghan weren't any different from the rest of us and there would be an odd night in the dormitories that we would have a little bit of a singsong and these fellows would sing an Orange song – in a good-humoured way. The songs may have had bitterness in them but they were sung in jest.

I couldn't connect with that. The songs were highlighting a difference or they were maintaining a difference. They were living and believing in that, or living it, and we see it since with the Orange-ism which is an influence for evil and bigotry and division. Even with day to day co-operation within communities they had a separateness in spite of all that. They might have been 40-60 percent of the population in Monaghan, they had quite a strong enclave of their own, they associated generally with themselves. They did business with their Roman Catholic neighbours, etc., etc., but it was just doing business with them and maybe they joined together for making the hay and so forth. But I would feel that there was a separateness there all the time.

I don't see any role for the Orange Order. I think they're misguided. I think that it would be quite alright to have their association with one another, but this parading on the streets on the 12th of July, I find it abhorrent. They show themselves up as being almost brainless. And it's also illustrated by the fact that they don't have anyone from higher level who is – what do they call them 'grandmaster' or something like that – he is only a normal person in society. They have lost status within their own community I would think, within the Protestant community, but they are a danger as well.

Going back to the 1960s, from '68 on you had Orange riots and I know a particular man that discussed it with me and he was able

to name people from around here who were supposed to be going up to the North to join in these riots – which was totally untrue. As I see it, the Church of Ireland people didn't involve themselves that much in the Orange Order, it was mainly Presbyterians that involved themselves in it and it creates that bit of a division within their own society. There would be some Church of Ireland people I know in the Order but the majority of those involved would be Presbyterians. I often think about those people who were incorrectly labelled as people who were going up and supporting rioting in the North. The man that talked to me about it was a Fianna Fáil man locally (not active) but he was a broadminded guy and had been away in England for years and years and whatever he had seen away, he related to it, but he still continued the divisions that the Civil War caused here. How many generations will it take to get rid of these attitudes? I think this last election probably was one which was less about that type of nationalism.

You have more of a sense of connection with people from other Protestant churches than you do with people from the Roman Catholic Church. I think that a proportion of our Sunday worship is about going to church and singing hymns, singing the chants and singing the canticles. The sermon is also a focal point of our worship. When we go to a mass and we do go to funerals and to weddings, it's nearly all words. There isn't very much singing and what singing there is, is not the type that we are used to and it tends not to involve the whole congregation. The connection with people from the other Protestant churches is more about the 'practice or the 'ritual' than it is about faith.

A common attitude is the work ethic of the Protestant people. And even today the Methodists would hold onto a strictness of 'no Sunday' activities. I know a family of our own age and the present generation has abandoned the Sunday restrictions. I often wonder, does the mother in particular, cringe about what they would be up to on a Sunday. Playing rugby, I think, did away with a lot of it. I think there is still a fear for the future of our local church that is still drawing a good deal of people to their Church of Ireland church or their Protestant church. There is also, a little bit of distance between the Presbyterians, the Methodists and the Church of Ireland. They seem to want separateness of their own all along the way, which I think is

partly fostered by the clergy themselves, a fear of they themselves being eliminated.

It's extremely interesting in relation to the First World War that you had three or four eligible men here, and none of them joined up. The recruiting officer for the army lived near here. He had two sons who were also of military age and they didn't join up. The fellows here were probably discouraged – they may have said – well if the Major's family aren't joining, why should we join? And the Major as he was known, was a respected man within the community.

There would be some extended family members in the police, more of my wife's cousins than mine. It was very rarely discussed. We would have been very conscious of it, yes. One chap of my age in the '50s joined the RUC, he had an uncle who was a member of the Gardaí here, that policeman type of thing must have been in the genes. He wouldn't join the Gardaí here and went to the North and joined the RUC. Then the family sold the farm, upped sticks, and they all moved to the North in 1959. The father of the family was a very reserved type of individual and it was talked about a lot, about him going to the North, about how brave he was to do this. Was it bravery or just pure determination to get away from here you would wonder? He had five sons and he didn't want them to be married to Roman Catholics.

The son who was in the RUC wouldn't come back to visit in the Republic, he was afraid, fearful for his life. There were examples of some who had come across the border at that time and had ended up getting shot. But since he has retired from the force he has come down and visited us here. It was extraordinary at his father's funeral, how different he had become, in comparison to what he had been. I used to go to dances with him, we were the same age, but he could barely associate with us then. He couldn't connect. They couldn't quite understand how we would stick it down here, you know, and they would say 'down here' as well. I think they would nearly look at it that we had sold out because we stayed and that we were compromised by doing so and not making a stand. I'm only assuming that now.

Then there was a cousin of mine in the North who had married an RUC man, and they used to come here visiting. He had to stop coming. I think they were prohibited by the force itself from coming to the South and he loved coming here. I don't think we would have talked about the family members in the RUC in the Roman Catholic community at all, I think it would only have been amongst the

Protestant people that we would have talked about them. The subject generally wouldn't have been brought up.

We wouldn't see ourselves as having any great similarity with the Protestants in the North. We can go up to them and visit them and get on perfectly well with them and everything like that, they are very welcoming and all the rest, but there is a strictness there, not exactly an intolerance, but something bordering on it. They would have a sympathy for us I suppose. We have had more trips to the North in the last while with a new contact we have made. It was a terrific experience and we get on famously together, but we were still happy to part. We have more of a sense of connection down here with neighbours and family than we do with members of the extended family in the North particularly because we are working with them and we are all in the same type of business together, whereas their attitude, now I don't say their attitude to farming is different, but there is a bit of a difference in the farming in the North than there is here. I couldn't define it.

I suppose generally the Protestant community had a bit more land and they were able to make work for themselves as it were, and in the towns as well, you had Protestant businesses that took in Protestant boys from the countryside. They took in a balance shall we say in some cases but there would sometimes have been a preference in giving jobs to Protestant people. Our family would not have consciously chosen to shop in exclusively Protestant businesses. We would have done business anywhere.

There has been no issue about selling land to Catholics. We were on the other end of it, we were buying land! My grandfather came here to 29 acres and he put it up to 52 acres, and my father added 45 acres, and that made it up near 95 or thereabouts, 97, and I bought 97 acres. But I suppose, it was partly a preservation in that all of the pieces of land that we bought belonged to Protestant families that were moving. Although we would have bought them competitively, it wouldn't be a case of doing a private deal or anything like that.

It would be second or third owner afterwards that we bought back Protestant land as it were. I bought the land in 1968 and the Troubles were just starting in the North and there was agitation against my buying it. Other local farmers wanted the land commission to take the land and divide it, and circumstances really worked in my favour. Circumstances which might seem a little bit bizarre. This mightn't

actually have been true but I think it was an influence – the Troubles were just starting in the North and Ian Paisley was sabre-rattling to such a degree – and if the story got across the border or into his hands that they were pushing a Protestant farmer out from expanding, it would have been grist to his mill, and it partially helped me in keeping the land. But then if that was a factor, there was also another factor in that a Catholic friend who had connections in high places made my case for me at a higher level. Religion didn't come into it in effect. It had to go through the system and eventually I was allowed to keep the farm, but I think these other factors worked in my favour. 'We had better get this settled before it goes onto the airwaves' or whatever it might be.

I had a very helpful land commission inspector who came here and helped me in small and unnoticeable ways you might say. His attitude was that the objectors were unfair in having taken up the case after I had bought the land. If they had taken up the case before I had bought it, fair enough. He says, 'I'm not looking to do you any favours, I just want to see fair play being done'. And it all worked out fine, but we still had to work and pay for it in the end!

If there hadn't been a resolution in the 1920's and if the British government hadn't agreed to handing over administration here and made the partition as it were, you would still have a situation similar to that in Northern Ireland for the last 30 years, festering on a continuous basis. It would have had to come to a resolution at some time or another. But what I see today, putting it in a modern context, for example, will Libya become something like we have here? Or the Basque people in Spain – not wanting to live under the other person's rule? Israel and Palestinians and all these sort of things. Because we have become a separate state it has insulated us from the Troubles that did go on in the North.

In the early '70s two men came with me to the North. We had to go across the border and the man that was with me was older than I was and from once we crossed the border the poor fellow was in tension, he was looking, eyes around him everywhere, and as we were coming back across the border, there was a trailer with a load of straw bales on it, right near the border. The load seemed to have scattered and they were rebuilding it, but the man that was with me thought that it was an ambush being set up. 'Put the foot down' he shouted, 'get out of here as quick as you can'. The fear that poor fellow had of the

British army, of the soldiers. We were always going over and back and I didn't have any fear. I suppose because we had people in the RUC, my cousins' husband and my wife's cousin as well, that if we were picked up, we would have someone to use as a reference. And my wife on the other hand would always have been a little bit less comfortable in the North then I would have been. She was fearful of the soldiers and the army and the RUC.

People did talk to us about incidents in the North, not a lot, but they would a bit, when atrocities would happen. If we take the time of Bloody Sunday, the man that was working with me at that time, he took the Nationalist side as it were in that and was a bit hostile towards me for a little while. It wore off and we remained good friends afterwards and it's understandable, you know. But people's attitudes towards us as a community never changed.

I suppose everything is advancing in some way or another all the time and trying to look back at the past is negative. You have to move with the way things are evolving. There are far more important and difficult things than your religion and the politics of the country. Economic survival is far more important than any of those things I think. I've seen down through the years so many people showing a degree of bitterness and resentment and they have never sought or made many advances of their own. It eats away at you. Life is short and I would think the best approach is to try not to create unhappiness for yourself.

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'Silent Voices' is powerful, original, deeply moving - at times searingly so - and gives invaluable insight into what was suffered by real people on this island, and why, over recent decades. This book is also a timely warning against attitudes which would have us bound by the past, rather than bow to it. It is a reminder that, while we cannot change that past, "we have chosen to change the future," as President McAleese has said.

Patsy McGarry,
Religious Affairs Correspondent, The Irish Times

Perception and reality are inseparable themes in these stories of courage, betrayal, resilience, perception and pain. Landscape writer Rebecca Solnit once noted that if a border is natural, it must have no history. The experience of reading 'Silent Voices' bears testimony to that.

Lorna Siggins,
Western Correspondent, The Irish Times

These are stories of ordinary men, women and children who were caught on the wrong side of the line: the Border in the case of the Protestant community; the uniform for the Catholic in the UDR; ethnicity for Travellers and refugees; the perimeter fence for the prisoner. The official record appears superficial and contrived when set alongside these riveting personal stories of loss, displacement, hurt, misunderstanding and endurance.

Paddy Logue, Irish Peace Centre

Secrets, subterfuge and sometimes shocking, these stories reveal a Sligo I barely recognise, but the voices from the grass roots cannot be discounted. The truth in these accounts is unsettling, but rightly so.

Mary Branley