

# **The forgotten victims**

**H.U.R.T.**

**Victims support group**

**ISLAND** (39) **PAMPHLETS**

ISBN 1 899510 30 3

*Farset Community Think Tanks Project is funded by*  
**The European Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation**  
**The International Fund for Ireland Community Bridges Programme**

*The following persons contributed to the discussions from which  
the material in this document was compiled:*

Marie, Gail, Gareth,  
Hilda, John, June,  
Irene, Mary, Kate  
Thelma and Wendy

The group wish to dedicate this publication to the  
memory of Doreen Lyness, who died on 8 June 2001.

Printed by Regency Press, Belfast

# Introduction

In the course of the last three decades over 3600 people have lost their lives as a direct result of what has been described, with great understatement, as Northern Ireland's 'Troubles'. Even leaving aside the large number of people who have been left permanently scarred – whether physically or emotionally, and often both – those 3600 fatalities represent 3600 extended families – mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, aunts and uncles, grandparents and grandchildren – who have been left to share the burden of trauma and the pain of bereavement. In a society which is still deeply divided one thing unites all these families – a common grief and a shared experience of loss.

In recent years a number of support groups have emerged to try and provide assistance to such families. Invariably, these groups originate from among the victims themselves, largely because government is felt to have ignored their real needs – indeed, these families consider themselves to the 'forgotten' victims of the Northern Ireland conflict.

One such support group, HURT (Homes United by Ruthless Terror), was formed in 1998 and is made up principally of the families of people murdered in the Upper Bann area. Its membership is drawn from both security force families and civilians, and although this membership is predominantly Protestant, its outreach support embraces Catholics who were also victims of sectarian murder.

The major aim of HURT is to improve the quality of life for members of the immediate families of those who were murdered. This might range from the provision of a befriending service run on a voluntary basis by group members, to assisting family members prepare for, and avail themselves of, employment, training and Further Education opportunities. But the group has a number of other objectives, from helping in whatever way it can with the healing process, to actively seeking justice for those whose loved ones had been murdered and where no-one has yet been made amenable to the due process of law.

Above all, the group members have a real desire to reach out to other people affected by similar circumstances. They also wanted to share their personal stories so that others in this society could gain an insight into the reality that they experience every day. To this end they approached the Farset Community Think Tanks Project and over a series of evening meetings (held during April/June, 2001) they described, with much pain but yet with honesty and courage, the largely hidden legacy of the violence which this society has had to endure for the last three decades.

**Michael Hall** *Farset Community Think Tanks Project*

# The forgotten victims

## Needing help

The HURT victims' support group engaged in a range of activities on behalf of a sizeable number of families.

There's 55 families in our group. There's some who want to be members of the group but who will not come to meetings, they find it really hard to come in with a crowd. One of us would go out to their houses to visit them.

We are in contact with different groups; we have attended different conferences. I personally didn't really go out among people, I used to avoid crowds, but from the group started I find now that I look forward to the meetings with other groups and hearing about the different things they are interested in.

As well as providing different support activities we also formed a human rights group. About sixteen families in our catchment area were affected by one particular IRA gang, and about twelve of those families are members of our group. And they work together to try and put pressure on the government to bring that gang to justice – from a human rights perspective, for all their loved ones' right to life was taken from them, and no-one has ever been made accountable. We have had meetings with Adam Ingram<sup>1</sup> about this issue –as well as looking at other cases – and we also link in with the police and try to put pressure on them too.

And we don't just deal with the wives and children of those who were murdered, we have older men, pensioners, who lost their sons. We provide whatever domestic support we can to them; for example, Mary makes soup and takes it out to some of them.

Ours has been the first victims' group to do a lot of things. We're the first to form a children's soccer team, with boys and girls. We cleaned up there at a wee art competition at Christmas – with our children winning three of the top prizes. We want to do practical things with the children – and that's one of the most frustrating things about having no funding because the kids are busting to get doing so many things. One of the points we made recently is that children are children for such a short space of time, and in a few years' time they go on to being adults. Even the Christmas hamper scheme cost a fair wee bit to put together.

We're also lobbying hard on the Libyan connection – it was Libyan weapons

---

1 The then Security Minister with responsibility for Victims.

which were used to murder some of our loved ones. We're working away too with the Dublin government as well. I think they're keen to please; they haven't delivered yet, but I think we will make big inroads there.

Perhaps. I find everyone appears interested in you but once you go back out through their door they forget about you.

What were the basic needs which first brought the group into existence?

We needed a voice.

Yes, nobody was doing anything for us.

Until Gareth came along and helped us to get things done. Even help us find out more details about what had actually happened to our loved ones, things which we were never told about – everything was just left in the background, nobody told us anything. And not only have we learned a lot more by working as a group, we have companionship, we get out for evenings or weekends which we never did before and we can all get together and compare what way we feel and what happened to us in the past. We're all mostly in the same boat, so we are.

The group members claimed that none of their needs were being met by government or other agencies.

The last person I seen was the funeral undertaker, that was it, you were just left to cope on your own. Nobody came to ask: can I help or anything? Your loved one's taken away and you're left sitting on your own, with no help whatsoever. My husband was dead ten years and nobody ever knocked on my door to ask: do you need help, are you coping? My daughter was only thirteen and she spent all her time lying there in her bed. All she wanted to do was die, she was pulling the hair out of her head, and nobody wanted to help. I was left to cope by myself, and I used to dread getting up in the morning to see if she was still living, I was afraid of opening the door in case I found her lying dead on the bed. And all that time, nobody ever said: do you need help? Only for my parents I'd have been dead myself, 'cause there's no way I could have coped. Daddy and Mummy once told me there were days they would have been knocking my door at 8 o'clock in the morning, just to see if I was still living. And it was the same at night when they were leaving, they would say: will you be alright, now don't you be doing anything stupid? And that's the way you're left, on your own to cope.

We can share our problems now, when we get together. And we can identify with one another.

Yes, it's amazing, whenever you talk to everyone you find we've all been through the same thing and been left the same way.

I mean, we weren't even informed about the way the cases were going, or if there was anybody being brought in for questioning or anything. We were left in the dark and forgotten about. Once the funeral was over, as Mary was

saying, you were just left behind closed doors with your own family. There wasn't one ever came, from the police or agencies or anything, nobody ever came to see if you were coping financially, if you were coping mentally, was there anything that could be done for you. And I was left to bring up our two children, one at seven months, and one a three-year-old, and I just had to get on with it, whatever way I could.

The different agencies didn't seem to want to know; you were just a number, you were just forgotten about, they didn't care, it was very, very sad.

And GPs just throw you a box of tablets.

I don't really think GPs are trained to cope with this type of grief. I find it's a case of: how are you keeping – good. And then they go on to something else as quickly as possible. I just felt that in my doctor's practice anyway they didn't know how to cope with the way my husband died and there was a bit of embarrassment about it. Nowadays there's stress clinics and they seem to know more about it, but in those early years they just came in to your house, sympathised with you –and then gave you nerve tablets.

The media's habit of using footage of past murders was something which caused a great deal of upset.

I know one of the things that hits Thelma and Pearl every hard, is that every time there's an article or a documentary on TV their two sons are shown lying dead on the pavement.

Yes, the media's habit of using footage of past murders has caused a great deal of upset to those families concerned. You may be walking into the living room and are caught unawares. And when you see your son on TV lying dead you reach for the tablet bottle again. You just feel numb all over – no-one knows just what goes through you at that moment. It is like a bad dream. But in your heart you know that it is true. David will not walk through that door ever again; no kiss on the cheek, or 'how are you, Mum?' He was a good son and people on both sides knew that he and John Graham were two good community police officers who did their job well.

That's something we have taken up with the police and others, for it must be something which really upsets many families.

We also lobby on different things. We have met Mr Ingram on a number of occasions; we went over to Brussels, and we spoke to people belonging to different groups, and I think they're all of the same opinion. I class myself as a 'forgotten' victim. At the time of my husband's death our politicians were writing in the paper that 'this is terrible, something needs to be done', but that's a seven-day-wonder – after that there's nobody comes and says to you: did you need help or anything?

I think it takes years to get over it, to come to terms with it, and then you start getting a bit stronger. And I think that's what the group has helped with,

building your confidence up. One voice going to these places doesn't mean nothing, but going as a group has more effect on them.

Difficult financial circumstances were an ongoing concern for the group members.

You're left fighting compensation claims on your own, but you don't really know what you're doing, because you're still that much upset, distressed really, after the murder. And if you've got young children – I had a boy five and a half, and one two and a half – and my husband is dead 27 years and I still have never got over it, and I don't think I ever will till the day God calls me. But the politicians have an awful lot to answer for, because they could have come out and done a lot more for victims; they just didn't want to know.

My son was a policeman, and the police welfare don't recognise mothers as 'victims'. The wife and children are classed as immediate family, mothers and fathers are not.

The same with me: the solicitor said I couldn't claim anything because I wasn't depending on my son, but my husband had died the year before so who was I depending on? He was all I had at home, so he was.

Because I was getting the Widow's Pension I was 5 pence over the limit which meant I wasn't entitled to benefits. At that time there was school meals, you could have applied for help with uniforms and things, but I was 5 pence over and couldn't get any help.

I was 12p over. And, as you said, that cuts you out from school meals, prescriptions, everything.

I never got anything in 27 years, I never got Income Support in my life.

I was 3 pence over the limit! The teacher in David's school told him: your mum's bound to get help with school uniforms, I'll fill in the form for you. And it came back saying: you're 3 pence over the limit.

My children's teachers did exactly the same, they said: you should apply for free school dinners, because most of the ones here are on free dinners. And I had to tell them that I did apply and I was just over the limit. So we have to pay for everything.

My widow's pension is £25 a week, that's what they give me to live on and they said it will be reviewed when I become an OAP. I am left with my mortgage. They told me that if I sold my house and was scrapping the barrel I would get whatever I want, but because I own my own house I get nowhere.

All down the line widow women were always badly done by. If you take a young girl now only sixteen and who has a baby, she's kept, she gets a house, her rent, everything paid, and we can't get nothing.

I told them that I would have been better off as a single parent. And if the children go on to further education I'll have to pay for them, because they'll not be eligible for grants.

The woman who runs our post office called me over one day and says: I hope you don't mind me saying this, but you're the only woman comes in here who gets so little money, why is that? And I told her I was a widow, my husband was murdered. And she says: I can't understand it, there's people coming in here and they're even getting an allowance for mobile phones; I'm sitting behind this counter and it would scare the living daylights out of you what they're getting money for – and I could never understand why you're only getting that much money. I told her that as long as I own my own house I can't get any more money, even though I'm still paying my mortgage.

And there's another thing I found very hurtful, when you go for compensation and you're meeting up with your solicitors and different ones. I was told that I 'no longer had my husband to feed' –those are the exact words my barrister told me. He said they'll be counting up how much pension money you have, and family allowance, and I said but that wouldn't compensate for the loss of my husband's weekly wage coming in. And he says: the way they look at it you no longer have your husband to feed or clothe.

They asked me my age. Ivan was 33, I was 30, and they said: you're a young women, you could remarry. And that's 27 years now and I still haven't remarried and have no intention of doing so.

I was told: you're able to go out and work. And I says: where am I going to get work? Who's going to give a job to anybody that's on sleeping tablets and nerve tablets? I rattle with tablets!

I've never had a proper night's sleep since it happened.

You're made to feel like a beggar, you have to beg about compensation, and beg to get justice done. The most humiliating thing is to go to High Court and sit among them barristers, because as sure as anything they have the sum worked out before you're anywhere near the High Court.

The government doesn't understand what it's like to be left a widow – you haven't that extra money of your husband's coming in. The children are looking a new pair of shoes, somebody else up the road got a pair of shoes, maybe £50, but you're sitting there and you haven't got 50p. They don't stop to consider those things. It's a sad thing when they're offering you a claim and they turn round and say: well, you haven't your husband to feed any more. It's about time they were took to task on the little things as well.

Some say that there's no poor people now. But there is poor people, because if you're living on a pension, you can't afford to save because the price of electricity, coal, whatever, uses up all your money. You certainly can't save to take your children away on a holiday like other parents can.

When you're married, as the children grow up your financial situation gets better, if you know what I mean, when there's the pair of youse. But when you're left on your own, and that same income isn't there any more, and

you're left to fend for your children, you don't go anywhere, you just sit at a certain level and you're just hoping that whenever they get to a certain age you'll be able to have money there for them.

Politicians came under strong criticism for allowing such a situation to develop.

Victims shouldn't have been left to chase up things themselves. Our cases have gone by default because of our politicians' lack of interest and effort. If these politicians were actively working for the victims, surely something should have been done about it by now? But it seems they couldn't care less.

In every aspect of life –financially, morally, legally – the politicians have let us down. They have also rubbed our noses in it by letting the prisoners out – and some of our loved ones' murderers will never even be at the court, so they'll not serve a minute.

There was also the long-term physical and emotional consequences of loss.

There is a 'ripple effect'. Everyone only sees the immediate victim, but the number of cases where parents died within a short space of time, or illness develops, is widespread. We have three people suffering from cancer, and I have no doubt that in two of the cases it is related to the trauma of their loved one being murdered, without a doubt.

My son's girlfriend has never got over his murder, she was with him in the car at the time he was killed. But she never got any help either.

The youngest participant to the discussions remarked:

I think we all would have needed to talk. Nobody ever come near us... even your family doctor hadn't really an awful lot of time for you in them days. To be honest I don't even think I can remember six or seven months after it, I have sort of lost all that. I can remember my mummy sitting with a blanket round her on the chair, that's all I remember about her for a year. And she just lived on tablets. We wouldn't have dared mention anything to her.

## **Unnatural deaths**

When it came to discuss the actual circumstances in which the group members' loved ones had died –something which it was agreed would form part of this document – numerous difficulties emerged.

It's still very raw, it's still very personal, so it is.

I'm sorry if I can't speak tonight, I'll try and write it down for you.

I don't even think I could write it down, I'd be sitting crying.

I couldn't talk about it at all.

No, me neither.

Some other members of the group were invited to come, but they said they can't talk about it openly at all.

This inability to discuss the circumstances of the death was not related to the distance in time of the event – the wife whose husband had died 28 years ago had as much of a problem speaking about it as the mother whose son had died only four years ago. This fact alone was a stark indication of just how deeply traumatic the events surrounding each death had been. One group member, who had participated in the first meeting, felt too depressed to attend subsequent meetings, although she had not regretted her earlier participation. For many, the sense of bewilderment was still very much alive.

Our loved ones were law-abiding citizens who went and did their weekly work and they worked hard for their families, and they were gunned down like animals – they weren't even given a chance. And the fact is that those who murdered my husband didn't even know him personally. And that is the legacy that I have to share with my family. I haven't shared everything, the children don't know the half of it, because I just haven't had the strength to tell them. But that's what I have to tell my family when they come of age and I think they can cope with it.

As the deep-seated pain still felt by immediate family members –wives and mothers –clearly prevented them from opening up on this topic, it was left to the brother-in-law of a victim to take the first step in this direction.

My sister's husband was killed, shot down like a dog with two old pensioners he was standing talking to –one was 60-odds, the other was 72. I think the greatest shock of it for everybody was the sheer sectarian nature of the thing. My sister she's sitting in the car waiting for her son and daughter to arrive on the school bus, while her husband's standing talking to these two men. A car pulls up, two men jump out with AK47 rifles, open fire, say nothing, just open fire on the three of them. My sister is sitting in the car, bullets fly through the car, just miss her, and within a couple of minutes the bus comes down, the two kids get off the bus, see their daddy shot dead, two pensioners lying there too, and their mother in hysterics and having nearly been killed herself. Anybody that knew him, or knew these other two man... in fact, one of these men had been featured on a television programme the night before, demonstrating how he made violins, and actually it was people from the other side of the community were buying them off him, like, for céilí groups and things. But the barbarity of the action itself was very hard for everybody to take in – three totally innocent men shot down like animals. And these thugs weren't even satisfied with the barbaric act they carried out but they cheered and laughed as they drove away. Yes, they actually laughed and howled like dogs, they thought it was a great victory shooting these three men. The IRA issued a statement a few hours later exulting in the fact that, as they stated, they had just assassinated 'three members of an active service unit of the UVF'. Now, can you imagine a man of 72, a man who was nearly blind... In actual fact, old Ernie Rankin would have had to come right up to you and look into your face... big thick glasses, couldn't have seen you,

would have needed to have been standing up against you to know who you were. This other totally inoffensive man, 60-odd years, and Leslie himself, 39. To claim that these men were members of a Loyalist paramilitary organisation... I mean, you can't scrape the barrel much deeper than that. It was just a blatant sectarian murder. When the IRA realised the horror it had provoked right across the community they then put out another statement, saying that: well, really, you know we didn't mean to kill the two old pensioners, we were only targeting Leslie Dallas. Well, if they were only targeting Leslie Dallas why would two gunmen with two AK47 rifles need to fire indiscriminately at a group of three people? Even the minority community recognised the act for what it was. Fr. Denis Faul said it was only an excuse for sectarian murder. And Cardinal Ó Fiaich also recognised that it was sheer sectarian slaughter – he said he hoped that everyone would totally disown these people. The police commander at the time said the IRA claims were a pack of Republican lies, these were good upstanding citizens. And whilst the IRA took three lives, they destroyed the lives not only of Hazel, Leslie's wife, son and daughter, but the families of everyone concerned, because since then, I mean, they have all suffered, mentally... I think it's the mental anguish that they've gone through, and nobody on the Republican side has ever had the guts to say: 'sorry, it was a mistake, it shouldn't have happened'. Church leaders, politicians, all agreed all the time that it was a terrible crime, a sectarian slaughter, but, as my sister said on the phone the other night to me: until this group [HURT] actually got in touch with her, nobody has ever bothered to do anything for her since Leslie's death – apart from MP Willie McCrea, who helped a great deal at the time – and she finds it very very hard, even to this day, to discuss it.

Then another of the victims gathered up the courage to recount her own horrific story.

Roy was murdered here in the house in front of me. He run an Army Surplus store in Lurgan and Wednesday was his day off. He had the habit, after his tea, of going down to the bedroom and lying on the bed. So this is what he did; he took his tea and lay down on the bed, and I rid up the dishes and went out to feed the two dogs. And whenever I am walking down the back of the house I have a habit of whistling, and I was whistling 'Amazing Grace'. And I heard someone whistling the same, so I stopped and they stopped. I started and they started again, and this continued as I came round the front of the house. The only thing I could think of was that it was Roy keeping me going, and I looked up at all the windows but could see no sign of him. I came in and went into the bedroom and he was sleeping on the bed and I shook him and says to him: Roy, wake up, I'm out feeding the dogs and every time I whistle, there's somebody mocking me, and I want to know is it you? Answer me, tell me the truth. He turned round to me and he says: Mary, you're cracking up. And at that, I thought it was him, so I went into the kitchen and sat cutting school photographs. Gail, she was thirteen then, came and says: I'm going out to the garage for something, I'll only be a minute – she had a sort of den out in the garage, that's where she done most of her

playing with her mates. I started to cut the photos and then I heard the back door opening and I thought it was Gail coming back in. The next thing I got this poke in the back and when I turned round there was three men standing there, all dressed in army clothing. There was one he was standing with a sledgehammer in his hand and a small gun, and the other two were standing with big guns. The first thing that came into my head, with owning a shop, was robbery. And I just turned round and I says: what're youse playing at! And at that stage there was a phone on the wall and six cups sitting on the bench, and one of them ripped out the phone and flung it across the floor, and he just did the same with the cups. Like, this all happened in moments. And I turned round and the other two, I seen them running up the hall, and I knew then this was no robbery. And I started to scream and shout: Roy, Roy, Roy! And the one with the gun on me said: don't you move or I'll kill you! I jumped up and he said: stay you your ground or I'll shoot you! And I was roaring and screaming: Roy, Roy! And whenever I was going up the hall I seen them, they were coming out of the sitting room; I had left Roy in the bedroom, but I had actually seen them standing shooting into the sitting room. And I run down the hall and the other boy he was coming shouting: I'll kill you, I'll shoot you! But the other two boys put their guns at me and told me to get back or they'd shot me. And I was still screaming: Roy, Roy, Roy! And they said: right, we're going to kill you! And I said: please, don't! – because at this stage I was thinking that Roy was still living, because I had left him in the bedroom, and I pleaded: Please, don't! and then I collapsed on the floor. And they trampled over me and as they left all I could think about was getting to Roy. So I ran into the bedroom. But there was no Roy there, so I went into the sitting room, but I could see nothing, for the room was just full of smoke, it was just like a deep fog, you couldn't have seen that table in front of you. And I looked and couldn't see Roy anywhere, and I thought he *must* be in the bedroom. So I run back into the bedroom and I was shouting all the time for him. But no sign of him there. So I ran back into the sitting room and at this stage the smoke had begun to clear and, just over in front of the TV – whenever Roy watched the TV he never sat in the chair, he always sat on the floor – and he was sitting there, slumped forwards. I run over to him and I could see that he was just riddled, but I thought he was still living. I was shouting at Roy, and there was a phone and I lifted it to ring the police and I says to myself: I'm stupid, 'cause they ripped the phone out up there. I was so confused I assumed all the phones would be off. So I jumped up quick, and I knew Gail was still outside, and the first thing now was to get an ambulance. So I run down the road to my neighbour's house and banged on her door. And she came out and I says: please, please phone the police and an ambulance quick, Roy's been shot! She said to come on in, but I said: no, please, just phone, I want to get back up before Gail reaches him. Follow me up. I came running back up and I met Gail and she was coming through the door with a hatchet in her hand. And I said to her: have you been down in that bottom room yet? And she said: no; why, what's wrong? And I said: don't, stay there, your daddy's been shot, don't follow me down! But she did and started roaring and screaming, and I said: Gail would you try that phone, and

I was holding him and she lifted the phone and she got through. I was holding him and my hands were going everywhere, trying to stop the blood. By the time the police got from Lurgan to here – I'm sure it was about 15 or 20 minutes – they came into the room and they took Gail out. The ambulance men came in too and they came over to me to tell me he was dead. And I shouted: he isn't dead! But they took off their caps and said he was, and I said: he isn't! The police then took me out of the room. I learned afterwards why Gail had come in with a hatchet. She had been in the garage when she heard me screaming and this 'bang, bang, bang!' And she thought it was somebody trying to break down the door, and she locked the garage door and then when the screaming stopped –that was when I was away down the road –the first thing she thought of was to come in with a hatchet.

Her sense of grief and disbelief was still extremely real.

So that's the way it has left me, it's very very unfair. Roy, all he did was run his Army Surplus store, and he worked ... we built the business up, we bought the shop, we paid it off. And once we paid it off we bought the land here, paid it off too, and it was just work, work, work. And when he came in from work at night, he was never back out through the door. I said to the police: why did they pick Roy, did they want the business, did they want the house, or what did they want? And the police said: no, they don't want nothing, it's just another excuse to get shooting somebody; he was an easy target sitting out here in the country. And the IRA issued a statement saying that Roy was a member of some organisation, but at the inquest the police said that they had known Roy for years and he was a totally innocent man. The only reason was that they didn't like the Army surplus clothes that he sold, and that was the excuse for shooting him, because they detest anything to do with the 'Army', and that's why they shot him dead. And my life will never be the same. For years I was relying heavily on sleeping tablets, nerve tablets, I was taking six nerve tablets a day, I was taking sleeping tablets. The sleeping tablets worked for two hours a night and that was all the sleep I was getting, and I couldn't stick it, so the doctor said: right, we'll get you another hour's sleep, and he gave me this tablet to take before I took my sleeping tablet and it did make me get another hour's sleep at night. But eventually I went back again and said I can't stick this, three hours is no good to me. I'm lying awake at night and it's too long, so he says right, we'll give you a stronger tablet. But the morning after I took the first of these new tablets I got up out of bed and just collapsed on the floor. And Gail came running in and says what's wrong with you! And I couldn't even stand I was just completely in a world of my own, and I said: well, that's it, I might as well be dead. And whenever Mummy and Daddy came down I said: those sleeping tablets, you talk about knocking out a horse, I just hit the ground like a shot, and Daddy says right, Mary, that's far enough, he says, you're going to have to stop that and try and avoid them, so I bucked those ones into the fire. And it was after that that I tried to accept: right, three hours' sleep, that's all you're going to get, you're just going to have to put up with that. It probably took me about six years to get off the nerve tablets and sleeping tables, and

Gail was the same: they put her on nerve tablets too. But the IRA ruined her life and they ruined my life. My life will never ever be the same again, and as what John said, it wrecks the whole family. It destroyed my father; for the first time in my life I seen my daddy crying like a child; he was standing at the side of my house and he was saying: why, in the name of the Good Lord, did they murder that man, he was such an innocent, quiet fella; why did they pick that fella to murder! And my dad never got over it; I will never get over it, Gail will never get over it, the whole family will never get over it, it just ruins everybody's life completely. For no reason whatsoever. The same thing again: never said sorry, nothing. There were times Gail was so upset I would have just loved to take her out of her bed and take her to wherever their house was and set her on the doorstep and say: can *you* do anything with that child, for that's the way I'm left with her! That child did not want to live, and there's times I thought I would never see her alive again.

## **The impact on the children**

The impact on the children could not only be devastating, it could add immeasurably to the anguish already being felt by the surviving parent.

I had an awful, awful time with that child. She had just turned thirteen and her whole school life was ruined. All she ever wanted to do was disappear into her bedroom, and any time I went in after her she shouted: Mummy, close the door, out! And she was just lying on the bed, tearing the hair out of her head: I don't want to live, I want to be with my Daddy! I was taking her to school in the morning, I was coming back and would hardly be in the door when the phone was ringing, and somebody from the school was saying: could you please come and collect your daughter from school, she's in the sick room. And this went on for I don't know how long, and the doctors had both me and her on nerve tablets. They sent us to a psychiatrist in Craigavon, and he could do nothing with us. He said that until we accepted that Roy was dead, we were going nowhere, but as we wouldn't accept it, he could do no more for us. I had to watch that child round the clock... and she would never go to the cemetery, or anywhere near it. Then after she turned 18 she started to come out of it a bit. But she would never talk about it or nothing, and then at that stage she started to come round, although I would say it has left her very, very bitter. She cannot understand why it happened to her daddy, for Roy was the apple of her eye.

With the discussion now focused on the impact on the children, the other members of the group began to participate.

My 16-year-old daughter had to leave Lurgan Technical College, had to leave her education because she was being traumatised, every day, every day. At 16-years-of-age she had to leave school altogether, but there's nobody come to me and says: we'll educate her, we'll help her along the way, we'll

do this, we'll do that. My daughter *still* has nightmares, still has them, but she has to get on with things. But she lost her education too. They drew ducks and guns on the wall of the College – they knew my husband was killed at Castor's Bay along with Beverely's husband; they were wildfowlers. And the things they did to that child wasn't ordinary. A lot of them were day-release ones who came from Roman Catholic schools, and she went through an awful time. I did transfer her to Portadown College but by that time it was too late, she just couldn't cope any more, she just had to leave school. Thank God she's got a good job now, she's managed to pull herself together.

That's a common theme. You'll tend to find that the children's education has been wrecked – and it's something that the schools have never addressed even yet. They expect even after two weeks that children can return to class and just carry on as normal. Even in schools today there's still no mechanism for having somebody there to monitor the progress of kids like this. So in that sense we are no further on after 30 years.

The teachers at the school my boys attended sent for me and said they didn't know how to cope with my eldest son. He was maybe telling them: I was dreaming about my daddy last night. And then the other children were shouting: but you have no daddy! Things like that. And I had to go down and talk to the teachers. One teacher sat and cried, and said to me: I just don't know what to do with your boy.

It's always there, and as life goes on and things happen, with the children and things like that there, it's always there. You have nobody to share the enjoyment with, and they miss out so much on having a good father.

You definitely don't want anyone else to go through what you go through; it's a terrible thing, you can't explain it. At the time of my husband's funeral you're just completely out of it, you don't know nothing. But see after it the papers came and they gave me the photographs. Well, I seen my eldest boy walking behind that coffin, and to this day I can't look at that photograph, it upsets me every time. The other wee one was just in the pram at the time, but to look at that young lad standing there... there was a photograph of him standing at his father's grave... it's awful hard.

My son won't talk to me about his dad at all, he might talk to his mates, but he can't talk in the house. I have photographs of his dad in the house and sometimes I go in and he has them turned round; he can't bear some times even looking at his photographs. I remember when the youngest one started school and he brought home a picture he painted. And I said: that's lovely, what's this? And he said: that's you, Daddy, and David and me. And he said: would you put it away for when my daddy comes back home – he thought his daddy was coming back home.

The teachers can't deal with bereavement, when children mention their fathers. I think everybody is walking on eggs, I think they're all scared.

I find that you have parents who won't talk in front of children and children who won't talk in front of parents, because they don't want to upset each other, you can see the depth it goes, and that's even with cases going back 25 years or more.

I would be different; my children talk about their daddy all the time, and even about the day it happened, and what happened, and where they were – we sit and we talk together.

My granddaughter will ask: what happened to Uncle Colin? And she never knew him, she wasn't born until after he died. And I just say: bad men killed him. She talks about him all the time.

It's very hard for the children at times like Father's Day, birthdays, school events...

Certain things can really affect them. Like, when they see other children going away to football matches with their daddies and they've nobody to go with –their uncles might not be interested in football. I could see mine looking at the other youngsters with their daddies, and you could see that forlorn look on their faces, and you knew they were thinking: I have no daddy. And I couldn't have done nothing; I just used to go into the back room and sit and cry 'cause I knew what was in their wee minds.

My sister's two children were doing well at school, and you can imagine what it must have been like for them; they got off the bus, walked round the corner and seen their daddy lying dead. Life became like a nightmare for them after that, I suppose that picture will always be on their minds for as long as they live. The wee girl was particularly bright; she got nine GCSEs and was hoping to go to university. She went back to school, but she had lost all interest and just left, couldn't face any more education. The wee lad was the same. They didn't see psychologists, or psychiatrists or anybody like that, and I think their mother just tried to cope with them the best she could. They have never, ever sat down and talked to me about their daddy's murder.

You're trying to cope with children while at the same time you're not well yourself. The children would maybe have been crying, the young boy used to shout: I want my Daddy, I want my Daddy! And I'm sitting at the bottom of the stairs, crying, couldn't go to him. So I phoned down for a neighbour and she used to come down and go up the stairs and sit with him. One was two and a half, the other one was five and a half, and I couldn't go upstairs near them, because there was no way I could even talk to them for crying.

It's like a knife turning in you, every time they ask about him.

When they're small you're trying your best to look after them and trying to cope with your own grief. My ones were 19, 18, and 15, so I had company in them, they understood what had happened to their father. At the same time they were a help to me as I was to them, because we could talk together.

When they're young you protect them, you don't tell them the full horror of what happened. My girl was three at the time – the youngest was only seven months – and whenever she asked where her daddy was, I just said that God had taken him home, he's with God in Heaven. And that went on for a number of years, every time she would have asked, and I couldn't break down and cry because I didn't want... I wanted her to think that he was happy where he was and I didn't want to cry in front of her and it took me years to get around to telling her what actually did happen, for I went around with this false face on while I was with them. And the children were with me all the time, they got really possessive, I couldn't go anywhere except they were with me. There always seemed to be that fear with them; if they did go out with granny, when they came back the first thing they would have said was: where's my mummy? 'Cause she went to bed one night and the next day her daddy was gone and she never seen him again.

They were afraid of you going too.

I seen my one coming home and saying that the other children were shouting at him that he had no daddy.

In school, my daughter still had a memory of her daddy, she knew her daddy, whereas my son wouldn't have known his daddy, and at school, when the other ones were talking about their daddy, he pretended. In fact, the teacher called me in, she didn't really know what age he was when his daddy died, but the things he was saying seemed impossible. For example, if the other boys had been saying they did such and such with their daddy or whatever, he was saying: yes, so did I. And she called me in and asked me what age he was at the time and I told her seven months, and then she told me the things he was saying in the class, and I said he probably doesn't want to be the odd one out, for children can be cruel with one another.

I know my daughter copes with it by writing, she would write down different things, about what happened to her daddy and her loss, she writes it all down. She's thirteen now. And all her stories for school would be on the theme of criminals; no matter what essay topic she gets she turns it that it always ends with someone being brought to court. When I read them I sometimes wonder what type of home the teacher things she comes from! But it's always the same format –her essays always end with the criminals being taken to court. There was one occasion... she was eight years old and I can remember it as plain as... it was Christmas time and she was missing her daddy – stands to sense, when they see other children with them – and she turned round to me and said: well, are the bad men in jail yet? And I said 'no', and she said: well, why not? What can you say to a child? And last year she went away for the weekend with the youth club. Now, two of her friends' fathers were involved with the youth club. When she came home she cried and cried. And I said there must be something up, I thought she and her friends had fallen out, but when I eventually got it out of her she says: Mummy, it was just when I seen them with their daddies.

I can tell you a similar one. We have some teachers involved in the background, and one of them was telling me that they had a party of kids away, and they all got to stay in their own wee room, and this child, who is otherwise a very confident child, suddenly broke down and cried. But because of having worked with us this teacher could identify immediately what the problem was. It was the suddenness of that kid's father being taken out of his life; that insecurity was still there years later.

You were saying about the group, my children would befriend other children and they get a sense of fellowship that they're not the only ones, and our ones come back and say: I didn't know such and such had lost their daddy, or their granda. And they sort of get comfort or something from that, to know that they're not alone. And that is something that has come out of the group, for my children anyway.

Their wedding day is just a nightmare, wondering where you're going to get the money to help them out, for rig-outs, wedding things, you would like to try to help them when they get a house. I cried the whole way through our David's wedding, I never quit crying, it was terrible. I cried for him and because his dad wasn't there for him –I cried for both of them. It should have been a joyous day, but it wasn't. My brother Jackie stood in for Ivan; indeed, if it hadn't have been for Jackie, my aunt and my sister-in-law I don't know how I would have coped.

Their first day at school, and I can remember leaving her in school and walking away. And I hadn't an eye in my head, but you've nobody to share that enjoyment with, that they've started their first day. I know when the first one started walking, or got their first tooth, well, it was a whole topic: look, they're got their first tooth! But by the time my son reached those same stages my life had just fallen apart round me and I couldn't have cared less what was happening. I don't know how I got through it; well, I do because my mum was that good to us. But I have lost those years, they're growing up now and I've lost all that. What should have been a happy time was robbed from us. I always said those murderers had the choice of being murderers, but whenever our loved ones were murdered they had no choice – their right to life was taken from them.

## **Prisoner releases and politics**

The 'early release' scheme for paramilitary prisoners, an integral component of the Good Friday Agreement, had caused much upset to the group members. For a sizeable number of the families connected to HURT the hardest part to accept was not simply that persons convicted of murder were leaving prison before their sentences had been completed, but that those responsible for the deaths of *their* loved ones had still to be brought before the courts, and the early release

scheme, with its clear overtones of amnesty, meant that such an eventuality was now highly unlikely.

It's disgusting, I don't think they should ever have been let out.

Them three men who murdered my husband has never been before a court, and I think myself they should be made pay the penalty. I've been told who they are. They've families of their own; I often wonder how do they sleep, how do they look at their wives, how do they look at their children? If their families had've seen the way I was left here, the way my husband was left in a pool of blood in front of me and me left cradling him in my arms, what would they think about what their husbands did? I wouldn't even call them human beings, a vulture wouldn't even do what they done on me.

They're the scum of the earth!

What kind of 'heroes' need three guns and a sledgehammer to shoot one man sitting in his front room and then walk out that door laughing. I prayed for my life in that hall, they stamped over me as if I was dirt and I feel angry that the politicians could decide to release the same kind of murderers. If it had happened to the politicians, how would they have liked it? Would they have liked their wives and children to be left the way we were all left?

There was a young man murdered a few months ago from the same batch of bullets that killed David and John. The IRA will never stop their killing.

And would they like to see the murderers of their loved ones still walking about the streets, like we do?

God forgive me if it ever happens, but if I was strong enough and the Lord was telling me he was taking me home in three weeks' time there's a part of me would love to go to their door and do to them what they done on me. It's terrible what they've brought me to, for that's not like me at all – it's just the way they've left me. It would be justice in my heart because nobody else will give me justice – I'll do it myself. It's wrong that they should be let out. And I told Adam Ingram that if they had've put the ones that murdered my husband away – and there's no mistake about it that they could have done it if they had wanted to – all these women sitting here: there's one, two, three, four women wouldn't have been sitting here today as part of this group, their husbands or sons would have still been living, because once they had murdered my husband they went out and murdered all their loved ones. They raked the country murdering, that one gang, and if they had put them away whenever they murdered my husband, all their loved ones would have been alive today, instead of being buried in the same graveyard. It's all round Roy's graves that their loved ones are buried too, all lying together – and the same mob killed them all. And like that wee girl, I'm sure you've read about it in England [Sarah Payne, a murdered 4-year-old]; they've lifted that fella [chief suspect] four times and now they've charged him, and they're not going to let him go, which is right. Well, they could do the same here, they

should be hounding and hounding the ones here, but they don't bother, they don't want to. If I walk up the street, and this is no word of a lie, if I walk up the street in Lurgan them men that murdered my husband can stand and laugh at me. But if I walk into the police station and say: look, why are they allowed to laugh at me? the police just say: we can do nothing about it. The police even told me: don't you put a hand on them because you'll be up before the court. So that gang can murder my husband and be let laugh at me when I walk up the street, yet if I hit one of them a smack across the face the courts can do *me* –yet nobody can do *them* for murder! There's something seriously wrong. And now they're going to let ones just like them back onto the streets. But those types are not going to stop killing, they're just like wild animals, they've got the taste of blood and they will just go on and on killing.

I know how you feel. It *is* hurtful when you see them walking up the main street. I met the man who murdered my husband walking up Lurgan Street and I'm telling you, it was an awful experience.

One bullet wasn't enough for my son; they put thirteen into him. A high-ranking army officer told me the day after my son got killed that he knew who killed him, but they couldn't do nothing about it. I never went out of the house for nearly two years after it, for my husband had just died the year before. And certain ones tormented my son's girlfriend every time she went up the town – they tormented that girl. She has never got over that, and that's ten years ago, so she hasn't. He was sitting with her at the time; she was lucky she didn't get killed. And I'll never forgive them. People say you'll eventually forgive them but I'll never forgive them till the day I die.

I never will either.

They don't ask for forgiveness anyway. You have to ask for it before you receive it and they don't think they've done wrong; they're running about with their heads in the air.

And even when the murderers get out, they've coming out with a full education, they're coming out with more money, big houses, and all the rest which we haven't got. Why should murderers get all that?

This situation wouldn't be tolerated in any other part of the British Isles; they wouldn't have let the whole thing go on for thirty years the way it has here.

And Sinn Féin/IRA are always saying we've had six years ceasefire and Kelly and Mr Adams keep saying that, and there's nobody contradicting them. Yet our boys were murdered four years ago – in 1997.

While the majority of the group are largely unpolitical –concerned more with their personal traumas – a political analysis was indeed voiced.

My sister's is still traumatised, even now, and it happened in '89. I would say that if I went to collect her tonight she couldn't come to this meeting tonight, she never got over it. But I blame the British government, and I blame local

politicians – they’re not interested in the tears of these people. It is political expediency which underlies the suffering of these people. Tony Blair doesn’t want another Canary Wharf, he doesn’t want another Manchester, he doesn’t want any more bombs on the mainland. As long as it’s those ignorant ‘Paddies’ over there, sure what odds? They don’t care about these people sitting here, they are more interested in appeasing gunmen and bombers – because they pose the biggest threat. They’re not talking about compensating or doing the decent thing towards widows and orphans, all they’re talking about is how to engage these people, get them to play footsie under the table. Somehow it doesn’t matter any more about right or wrong, morality or immorality. But the reality is that their efforts will fail, for it’ll all come round full circle again.

Anyway, things haven’t really changed much; they’re still sitting in this new Assembly cutting another’s throats – where’s the change in that?

And they’ll not hand one gun over – if the government thinks they’ll hand guns over they have another thought coming. They’re rubbing our noses in it. These people killed our loved ones and now they’re took by the hand.

One of the group’s organisers felt that government urgently needed to take account of the widespread feelings of injustice increasingly evident among victims.

The big danger at the moment, as I see it, is the total alienation felt by people, about all the immorality of what’s being done. I think government agencies and government bodies for a long time now have tried to put their heads in the sand and pretend they don’t see that alienation. I think there is certainly a policy of appeasement. So much of the work that we do on the ground is entirely non-political, has got nothing to do with politics, but the reality is that there is a sense of exclusion there becoming more and more evident. We even find it especially among young people; you’ll not even get them to the like of meetings like this, because their view is: well, with people like Martin McGuinness as Education Minister, violence obviously pays. And that is becoming more and more of a theme, that violence has been seen to pay, and I think it is becoming very hard to talk to young people about the difference between right and wrong. People in positions of authority have to address the exclusion we all feel, and the double standards in justice. We’ve heard now for a long time about the Bloody Sunday enquiry, or the Pat Finucane and Rosemary Nelson cases – but nothing about any of our cases. There has got to be equality of treatment, and that is sadly lacking at the moment. It’s not that government haven’t been told the difficulties and the problems, but I think there is a political agenda, and therefore people want to put their heads in the sand and pretend it’s not taking place.

The young ones now are sitting back saying: all these men who killed and bombed and murdered, where are they today? They’re sitting with big jobs, it has paid them to do this. Sure they got their education in jail, while our children were deprived of the most important years of *their* education.

My fear is that the things that are being done as part of the 'peace process' will ultimately undermine it. Look at the Israeli/Palestinian 'peace process', a ten-year process, which has gone all wrong. Israel is now led by one of their most hard-line politicians. Anybody can see that in five years' time the DUP and Sinn Féin are going to be the two largest parties in Northern Ireland. The middle ground will have diminished and it's because, I believe, of the instability created by the so-called 'peace process'. There's no-one here doesn't know that the government was trying to do the long draw here with Sinn Féin/IRA, they didn't want bombs on the mainland and they hoped that they could buy them off and draw them in. And the same with the Loyalist paramilitaries. But look at the way criminality and drugs are increasing. We are looking at a Mafia developing here, slowly but surely, in large parts of the country. I come from a rural area about four miles away and for the first time ever they had to set up a Neighbourhood Watch, because nearly every other house has been burgled, including my father's, in the last twelve months. That lawlessness is spreading right across, and I think it is coming from the political system, people's confidence is so bad, it has been undermined, they don't know where to look.

People will say: well, you know, those victims, these survivors, well, really that's all in the past now, we must look to the future. We would *all* like to look to the future, but I don't think anybody can learn any lessons for the future if we don't consider what happened in the past. Victims have by and large been shunted to the one side, and as an act of outright expediency, British governments, of whatever hue, over the years have worked tirelessly to appease those who took the lives of all these men and hundreds and hundreds of others. Now, we would all like to see a prosperous, peaceful, happy country, but if it's based on appeasement of what's wrong, I personally feel they are building a house on sand, it will never stand. And to take people into government and to conjure up a system of government which facilitates those with murderous intent I don't believe it can survive in the long run. I would say, my sister would say, her son and her daughter would say, and the family circles would say, that governments have utterly failed the people of this country. They try to appease the person that has the largest capability of inflicting violence or murder. They dress it up in political language, but at the end of the day, all it is is appeasement. The politicians, here and in London, have betrayed the dead, they have taken the murderers under their wing, into government. They have tramped over the graves of innocent dead people, and they have nullified anything that was decent in this country.

They're expecting people to forget about it. To keep quiet.

I get very angry when I see Gerry Adams on television, all the attention he gets. I will be honest, I see him as responsible for my husband's death. He mightn't have done it with his own hand but he represents those who did.

I would be the same towards Gerry Adams, but I would also be the same towards the Unionists, the DUP, all of them, for not sticking up for us.

They come at the time of the murders for media purposes and they're shown at the funerals, but they never darken your door since.

The IRA ruined my life and the lives of my children, they have left an awful lot of heartbroken, devastated homes. And what for? What good did it ever do anybody? None!

My daughter couldn't get over her brother's death –she had lost her father and her only brother within two years. We miss them so much, even to this day. I thank God that I have my daughter, her husband and my grandchildren to get me through each day, and that I have so much love to give them in return. I pray every night that God will punish those evil people who killed my only son.

## **Problems with funding**

Like many community-based organisations, HURT was greatly limited in the support activities it could embrace because of lack of funding.

We run a range of projects at the moment. We are working on the question of justice –as a human rights issue –for within the group you have many unsolved murders, going back 26 years. We're constantly lobbying people – here, London, Dublin, Brussels. We even visited the Libyan Embassy – we have four people in this room tonight killed by Libyan weapons: the net result of the American air strikes on Tripoli is in this room tonight, and no politician has ever said that, but that is the reality. There is also a lot of youth work going on. The members of our group live all over the place: Lisburn, Magheralin, Lurgan, Portadown, Banbridge, Gilford, Scarva... but we haven't got the manpower to work with them all, we need another outreach worker. We had three full-time staff funded through NIVT, Peace & Reconciliation. But we need funding to keep us going until 'Peace II' comes in. And it would be nice to have our own office and drop-in centre.

Brussels sent in money to help with the conflict, yet 'Peace I' never really came near the victims, other than crumbs off the table. Brussels told us that the faults don't lie with them but with the funding bodies back here. Brussels didn't realise that the funding wasn't coming to us; in fact, they were shocked to hear about the lack of support for victims here.

However, a major problem with trying to get funding is that some of the funding bodies have their own agendas, they have political favourites and cronyism is rife, and that presents real difficulties for victims' groups.

Last week there was what they called a policy-makers and fund-raisers meeting – and no victims' groups from any of our sector were asked along. It was really the funding bodies making their own pitch for part of the big training budget that's apparently coming in under 'Peace II'. They're trying

to make out that people who are on the committees of victims' groups aren't really up to the job, so *their* expertise is required to train them. But ask any of these women sitting in this room what their experience with the funding bodies has been like? It's been horrendous. And as for this 'expertise'...?

It's the usual story: whenever there's a real need it's not the people who are experiencing that need who are given the job of fulfilling it but all these outsiders, people who have no direct experience of the problem whatever.

Unless you have lost a loved one through murder you can't really talk about what it's like, you have to experience that yourself.

Even losing a loved one through illness or a car accident is different, totally different. I lost both my parents and it's not the same, and they both died sudden; but see when a person is murdered, you can't explain how you feel.

Apart from suspecting funding bodies of trying to grab their own slice of the funding cake, they had also found certain organisations openly hostile.

We found Mr Ingram very sympathetic, and he will listen to us. But there are others who are quite different. One of the most frustrating things we have found, right from the start of our lobbying, is that there's certain individuals who try to impress their superiors in the civil service by giving the perception that our group is an anti-Agreement group. Now, obviously there's nobody here who is going to support prisoner releases or support an amnesty for unsolved murders, but these civil servants try to use this fact as confirmation that we are anti-Agreement. People are put into this 'yes/no' category and if you don't agree with certain aspects of the Agreement then you're assumed to not want the whole thing, to not want society to move forward. But that's not the case; I personally believe there are many good things which could take place with a devolved Assembly here, with decent people in it from both communities. Anyway, politics is actually one issue which is never discussed by us, 'cause there's too much 'bread and butter' stuff going on on the ground, too much genuine lobbying for compensation, funding, for redress, and work on human rights issues. But during a meeting with this senior civil servant from the Victims Liaison Unit one of our group must have said something, I can't remember exactly what, which sounded to him like politics. And he turned round and said: "Ah! I thought you weren't political!" His manner showed that it was quite obvious he had been just waiting for something to pounce on – he wasn't really listening to our other concerns.

During that meeting he also came out with a surprising remark, which only confirmed to us that he was mainly interested with trying to impress the minister. It came about when we were trying to explain to this man that victims' groups needed to have access to a handyman, maybe as a core worker – someone who could to respond to problems over plumbing and things like that. Every day you face problems around the house which, if there's no-one there to sort them out for you, can develop into a big issue. I happened to say to him that even a simple thing like a leaking tap could

create problems, especially if you had no husband there to fix it for you. And he turned round and said: 'well, I fix my mother's taps'. Now, the obvious snappy answer would have been: 'well, if you were shot dead, who would fix your mother's taps then?' But decency and good manners prevented it.

It wasn't just that: he stunned us with that remark – we were left speechless. To him it might have seemed a ludicrous request, but to victims it was a genuinely felt need – a handyman would have been a real asset to the group, indeed to all the groups. But it was the put-down aspect of his attitude which stuck with us.

However, the group members felt there were broader problems underlying funding inequalities.

I honestly believe that what the government was doing here with 'Peace I' was a fraud; they took in 'conflict money' from Europe, and they put that money into *everything but* the victims' sector. And then whenever victims raised their heads to say they'd like access to this funding, that's when the funding bodies, as I see it, played very high and mighty, and are now jockeying to get their chunk of giving of it out, without looking at where it is meant to go, which is to grassroots groups. Now I understand why they want to reintegrate ex-prisoners, I personally haven't got a problem with that, but there should be at least twice as much funding going into the victims' sector. No way can 'Peace II' go by the board because of people who think they know better than the victims themselves. Victims are entitled to it, that's who Brussels wants the money to be given to: schemes that help with education, work, employment... The number of people who are employed in the sector who are actually victims is so small it's an embarrassment, and I think the ethos of this group will remain that we want jobs for victims on the ground, and training and help with education.

We didn't make ourselves victims, it was imposed on us, through them murdering our loved ones, and yet it is the prisoners who have been taken by the hand, and they've been given education and employment, and if there's anything to be had they'll have it, and we have nothing.

We talked at the last meeting about the difficulties we all have faced getting compensation; and what has been awarded has usually been pathetic. Following a recent botched police operation down at a bar trying to catch this particular gang of IRA men, there's at least 150 people putting in claims, even though I think only 70 people were in the bar at the time. And there's probably not one of them who are not going to get compensation which will be vastly superior to what the majority of us got. That's how ridiculous the system has become. Sure didn't Gerry Kelly receive £9000 for getting hit by a policeman, and he got £4000 last year as well. There's no justice in the system.

As I said, we never get into politics, but you'll find that people on the ground know more about *real* politics than the politicians. If you put a politician in here now, the people sitting here would leave them streets behind.

People like us have had to confront all the important issues. What is peace? What is morality? What is justice? These are terms which are just bandied around among politicians, but we've have to face them for real in our daily lives.

Another aspect that never gets looked at at all is the church leaders – total neglect, total neglect. Many of the people here are regular churchgoers, but the established churches have failed completely. So, there's educational failure, statutory body failure, medical failure, government failure, security failure, church failure – it is a sad state of affairs.

The whole area has been one of neglect, and if nothing else, the prisoner releases triggered people to get up off their backsides. Work is needed at the ground. You don't need eleven people sitting up at Stormont in a wee room in the Victim Liaison Unit coming up with schemes. You don't need that. All they need to do is listen to people telling them what's needed on the ground, that's where they will see results.

One of my biggest frustrations is that funders are responsible educated people, yet I cannot understand how these people, in control of millions – money supposedly earmarked for the conflict – could have missed the victims' sector. And it is especially frustrating from the children's point of view, because we all know what it means to children, be it computer courses, sports, events, trips, even the walks, things like that. You can't do all that unless you get some sort of funding; you can try to do it but it's all haphazard.

## **The absence of justice**

It was the lack of personal justice which was the group's overriding concern.

We have lost the ultimate –our loved ones lost their lives. And government rub our noses in it by not keeping the murderers inside, or, in a lot of our cases, haven't even managed to bring them anywhere near the courts yet. And there's no chance of them ever serving a minute of a sentence; in fact, I'm sure that in times to come they might even be sitting in the Assembly, who's to know? They have just rubbed our noses in it.

The only ones who are really doing life sentences are ourselves.

Until the day we die.

We have to carry it to our graves.

How are we to tell young ones that they always have to do what's right in life, when they are seeing the people who have murdered and bombed sitting

up in the Assembly in high positions and telling us all how to live our lives.

Look at the number of police on the Rosemary Nelson case. At the last count there was 82 detectives working on that case, and all brought over from the mainland, and the money it cost to bring them over here, and to keep them here. Now, her family deserve to have the killers caught, but so do we. What's the difference between that case and any of ours?

Look at all the attention given to Bloody Sunday, then compare that with La Mon and Bloody Friday. There's been 302 policemen murdered and how many have committed suicide and died, maimed, legs blown off, arms blown off and not one thing said about it. Do you ever hear anything on the TV about them?

But even the civilian population – in both communities – are being neglected as well. There's no extra policemen being drafted in to look at their cases.

They don't even try any more, it's just swept under the carpet.

There is a big problem with inequality at the moment, there's no question about that: inequality in funding, inequality in justice.

There hasn't been one major massacre resulting from IRA violence solved in 30 years, so when people talk about the greatest police force in the world, I think there is a big element there of sympathy for the families of the policemen that died, but not with respect to what has been achieved over the 30 years as far as results go. And that's a reality that even surprises people in the agencies and statutory bodies, for they're only realising now how many murders weren't solved. And the frustration felt by people who had waited 25 years, like June here, for somebody to be arrested and charged, always hoping at the back of their minds that at some stage somebody would be called to account.

I mean, all round the country victims were told the police knew who did it and it would only be 'a matter of time'. I have met victims from different areas, and they were all told the same. And yet nobody has ever been charged for most of these murders, so this was a saying that was just used to pacify people.

I had told my daughter that bad men had killed her daddy. And when she was eight she says to me: Mummy, are them bad men in jail yet? Like, when an eight-year-old knows that when you do wrong you have to be punished for it, and I had to turn round and say 'no'. And when she asked: why not? I said: well, they couldn't get enough evidence on them to put them in jail. And she just says: that's not fair. The children have been left to carry that for the rest of their lives, not seeing justice being done. I mean, there is no justice for the decent, law-abiding citizens of this country, it's just for those who do wrong. And what type of society are we showing our children?

One member of the group who could not attend because of illness –sadly, she died during the period of the meetings –nevertheless asked for the inclusion of this comment:

I have prayed morning and night to see justice done, and have true peace, not only for the sake of my children and grandchildren but for *all* those who lost their loved ones and never saw justice done.

## **A shared sense of grief**

Despite the bitterness the group members clearly felt towards the IRA, they held no bitterness towards the Catholic community; on the contrary they expressed a genuine sympathy for Catholic families left equally bereaved by Loyalist killers.

There's nobody here wouldn't have good Catholic friends. In fact, we have some Catholic members of the group, but because we have police and UDR on our executive they don't want it to be publicly known that they are associated with the group because they would be fearful for their safety in their own community. We try to include them with the likes of memorial forms and such, we will go out and help them in whatever way we can. And these people would be coming from an innocent Catholic background who were maybe the victims of sectarian killings. There is nobody here who wouldn't have Catholic friends.

I have very good Catholic friends. I had a phone call tonight from a Catholic girl before I came out, enquiring how I was keeping and how the boys were keeping, and that's maybe once a fortnight that girl rings me.

My son was a community policeman, and last year there was this lady at his grave leaving flowers. We didn't know her and the flowers just said: 'To John and David'. My oldest boy happened to be there at the time and he went over to her. She was a Catholic woman, and she said that both John and David had helped her once when she was in trouble, and she felt she wanted to leave flowers for them. And Edward was going to take her home, but she said if he were to be seen leaving her home, some of the people around where she lived would make her life not worth living.

My husband was working in the Kilwilkie estate; he was working as a postman at the time, and I still have contact with people that live in Kilwilkie – indeed, it was only yesterday that I was speaking to one of them. And for me I'll never stop speaking to these people, because they didn't do anything, it was the IRA murdered my husband, not the ordinary Catholic people. And I also have Catholic friends in Teghnevin.

We participated in a cross-community activity recently, and our children made good friends there. And it's not the case that our children don't want to

Speak to Catholic children; they ran about playing with them. I thought it was great for them, for where I live it's a Protestant estate so they don't see any Catholics really, but on that trip they were able to play with each other, and it was great, like. I'm all for that kind of thing.

When our sons died the *Gárda Síochána* flew their flag at half mast, and there was people came out at the whole front of the police station. There was candles, everything, and Mass cards sent to us for David and John, because they were that well thought off within the whole community. Now, there's *Gárda McCabe*, he was murdered, and his wife wrote to us and said she will fight to the very end and she will never let her husband's killers get out; she'll keep them in prison for as long as she can. She said she couldn't live with it if they were allowed to walk out on the streets the way they do in Northern Ireland.

My husband was reared round the Catholic community and an awful lot of Catholic people come to my home when he was murdered, an awful lot of them, and I still would hear from them. And I know they care, I know that, but at the same time they're afraid to speak out. But I know how they feel; I know when they see me and they speak to me that they're genuine.

Yes, you can always tell whether people are genuine, or just being sympathetic for talk's sake.

A few days before one of the group discussions a Lurgan man, with an alleged Republican past, was gunned down by presumed Republicans. Rather than this being a cause of any jubilation, the group members responded to the incident with sympathy and concern for the man's family.

I never slept the whole night, waiting to hear who it was; and it didn't matter to me what community he came from, a life is a life and that life had been taken.

And there was nothing of the funeral shown on TV, nothing. Maybe that's a sign of how cheap life has become here.

According to the weekend papers he is meant to have killed three people – it's a full page story –but it could be totally nonsense. Certainly the man's image is smeared now anyway, whether it was true or false.

The media can say or write whatever they want about a dead person, and I think that is very wrong. They can say whatever they want, and there's not a thing you can do about it.

No matter who he was, he was somebody's son.

## Solidarity in grief

The strength which the group members drew from each other was their most important asset, and one which was very much needed.

For me, time makes no difference – it still hurts so much.

We'd be lost without this group. I would be, I would be lost without it. You know that there's always somebody on the end of a telephone. Sometimes you just need to hear a reassuring voice. Like today: I wasn't feeling too good today, and I was speaking to Gareth, and after speaking to him I was able to get up and wash my hair and get ready for this meeting. It gave me a lift, and that was only through talking on the phone.

And Mary too, she would be there at the other end of the phone if you needed help, needed to talk, needed a lift to the hospital, which I have done a few times. We get together, we talk together.

Gareth came to our door at Christmas with a hamper of groceries, and it was just like a Godsend that somebody thought about you, that somebody was thinking about you.

To this day I have nightmares, and I mean terrible, terrible nightmares. It used to be every night screaming, yelling. I was lucky whenever I had Gail here with me; she would come in and waken me. If there's nobody there to waken you, you have to scream and yell and you hurt yourself. I told Mummy and Daddy that if ever I am got dead in bed it'll be because of a nightmare, because of the pain across my chest and down my arms with me screaming, trying to get myself woke. It's okay whenever there is someone there to waken you, you don't get to yell as long. During the day you have plenty to do, you can pass yourself, but whenever your head hits the pillow it's all going through your mind again; and you're thinking about what you would do to the killers, and there's your heart going like the clappers, your mind's never relaxed. To this day –even though Roy's dead twelve years – to this day I do have nightmares, and I mean very, very bad nightmares.

You're left in a living nightmare, I know I'll never, to the day I die, I'll never get over it. I have to *live* with it, but I'll never ever get over it. There's not a day goes past, it's there all the time, no matter what you go to do, it's there, you're living with it, it does not ever go out of my head, and your life's ruined. You go on, you have to go on, but it's just a living nightmare.

They're always in your thoughts.

And the least wee thing: if you go up the town and you see a man and wife looking in the shop window, it just hits you – that's something I can't do, you

just feel: there's a man and wife, they're happy, and here's me left on my own. Same at Christmas, you see a woman buying a present for her husband and it's terrible, you feel: why am I left like this? I can't do these things; that hurts me a lot too.

If only they could see what they've done to you, the way they leave you, to me they just leave you a walking zombie. And not one of them has ever said they were sorry; at least if somebody repented about what they had done, said: look, we made a mistake...

Unless you come through it yourself, you can't explain it to anyone, 'cause I lost my mother and father, both at a young age, and I can accept their death, because my father had a heart problem, my mother hadn't been well for years. But when somebody comes and tells you that your husband has been murdered you can't explain what you feel, you don't even want to live with it, it's that bad.

You always try to hold onto a keepsake, that will always remind you of them. In my case Ivan had an awful habit of wearing a cap when he cycled to work, and every time I open the drawer that cap's there; I wouldn't part with that cap. I just keep it beside the bed, and every time I open that drawer I see that cap and feel the hurt all over again. But there's no way I could ever put that away.

And another hurtful thing I find. You go out to enjoy yourself, you meet new friends, you might meet a man friend, and even if you're only talking to him people make a big issue out of it: they seen you out, you were smiling, they think everything's great. But see when you go home and you close that door... I remember the first time I felt able to go on holidays, and when I came home the car stopped at the front door, and it was just terrible the feeling that came over me. And you just sit and cry, because the house seems so empty.

Yes, every time you walk through that door you know there's an empty chair. It's different if they had died of natural causes, but when they have been taken from you in such a brutal way it's hard to cope with that, and nobody can really help you, you have to learn to live with it. You have to go on for your children's sake, because they have lost one parent and you can't let them lose another one.

And it's no different no matter how many years. It stays with you the whole time.

It was a Monday morning when my son was murdered, and every Monday morning I just . . . at a quarter to twelve I know my David was lying on the street then, and it's every Monday... and if the sun's shining it's worse again, I close all the blinds so as to keep the sunshine out, for it brings it all back – to this very day.