



# HEALING THROUGH REMEMBERING BULLETIN

ISSUE 1

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## THE ROUGH GUIDE TO HEALING THROUGH REMEMBERING?

**H**ealing Through Remembering (HTR) is an extensive cross-community project made up of a range of individual members holding different political perspectives. They have come together over the past number of years to focus on the issue of how to deal with the past relating to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland.

### BACKGROUND

In March 2000 the *All Truth is Bitter Report* was launched – it documents the visit of Dr. Alex Boraine in February 1999 and his discussions with a wide variety of groups and individuals on the lessons to be learnt from international examples of countries emerging from conflict.

*All Truth is Bitter* recommended wide-ranging discussion to explore and debate ways of examining the past and remembering so as to build a better future. A number of individuals were invited by the authors of *All Truth is Bitter* to form a Board. After much discussion, in June 2001 a diverse group of individuals formally agreed to become the Healing Through Remembering Project Board.

### CONSULTATION

The Board carried out an extensive consultation which asked individuals, organisations and communities “How should people remember the events connected with the conflict, in and about Northern Ireland and in so doing, individually and collectively contribute to the healing of the wounds of society?”

### REPORT

In June 2002 the Board published the findings of the consultation in the form of the *Healing Through Remembering Report*. This report summarised and grouped the issues raised into five recommendations including a Healing Through Remembering Initiative.

### INITIATIVE

The Healing Through Remembering Initiative is a limited company with charitable status. The Initiative brings together people from diverse backgrounds to address how to further the recommendations of the Report.

To do this Healing Through Remembering has formed subgroups which – like the original board – are comprised of a wide number of individuals with different perspectives and social experiences.

Each of the sub groups carry out research, dialogue and discussion in order to fully examine the recommendations made in the 2002 Report.

The Initiative operates through independent funding which has been sourced internationally.

### SUB GROUPS

#### Storytelling

This sub group are examining the possibility of a collective storytelling and archiving process relating to the conflict. To date they have published an audit and held a public one-day conference. They are currently working towards a guide to good storytelling practice and continue to investigate the issues around a collective process.

#### Day of Reflection

The Day of Reflection sub group have conducted three pieces of research to date including a study of international days of remembrance and reflection (copies available from HTR. See page 4).

#### Living Memorial Museum

To date the Living Memorial Museum sub group have established a joint fellowship post in conjunction with the Institute of Irish Studies at QUB to carry out an audit of artefacts relating to the conflict. The group are also well underway with plans for an



Entrance to HTR offices on Ormeau Avenue

Open Call for Ideas on what form a museum to the conflict could take.

### Truth Recovery & Acknowledgement

Two pieces of research are nearing completion from this sub group. The first, a local scoping study on acknowledgment and the second, an options paper on possible truth recovery processes regarding the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. Both are due for publication in the coming months.

### Network of Commemoration

Having struggled initially with their role, the sub group are now focussing on issues of commemoration and what that involves. Research papers are being commissioned and a round-table discussion is planned.

More information on recent events, publications and research by HTR is inside.

*Please visit our website  
[www.healingthroughremembering.org](http://www.healingthroughremembering.org)  
for more information on our ongoing work.*



Pictured during the plenary session at the conference from left to right are: Samson Munn, Andrew Rawding, Claire Hackett, Maureen Hetherington and Brandon Hamber.

## SPOTLIGHT ON STORYTELLING

The 29th of November marked another big step in the life of Healing Through Remembering.

On behalf of its Storytelling sub group HTR held its first public conference since the current phase of the project began in August 2004.

The conference, entitled *Storytelling as the Vehicle?*, was initiated by the Storytelling sub group. The group felt it was important to hold a public event to gather initial thoughts on the concept of a collective storytelling process to deal with the legacy of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. The conference was also to act as a stimulus for debate on the issue of storytelling.

Held in the Dunadry Hotel, Co. Antrim, the conference was attended by over 80 individuals. Participants were given an overview of the work of the HTR Storytelling sub group by the Chair of the group, Maureen Hetherington (Founder member of The Junction), and the Vice-Chair of the group, Claire Hackett (Coordinator of the Falls Community Council oral history project, Dúchas). Their presentation was followed by two speakers, Kevin Whelan (Keough Centre-Notre Dame, Dublin) and Samson Munn (The Austrian Encounter).

Participants were then invited to offer their personal thoughts and views on the three presentations in discussion groups. Following lunch, participants returned to the discussion groups for a more in-depth analysis and debate on the issues of storytelling and the possibility of a collective storytelling process.

Returning to a plenary session questions were invited from the audience to a panel consisting of Maureen Hetherington, Claire Hackett, Samson Munn and Andrew Rawding (a member of the HTR Truth Recovery & Acknowledgement sub group).

Questions posed included:

*Who is the process of storytelling for?*

*What mechanisms have been put into place to protect the individual during disclosure? How do you protect people at a collective level?*

*Is there a relationship between storytelling and truth recovery? Could a storytelling process hinder truth recovery?*

*How far do you think we will get in trying to get the stories from perpetrators? How free are they going to be to tell their stories, given that so many of them are involved in paramilitary groups or security forces when so many of them would have an ethos or code which would prevent that?*

*What impact would storytelling have on trans-generational violence?*

*How can telling your story contribute to a sense of peaceful regret, togetherness and looking to the future?*

*Is there a common future that we can aspire to and, if so, what would that common future be?*

A full conference report has been commissioned and will include the transcripts of the two keynote speeches and a record of the plenary discussion. The report will be available from HTR in June 2006.

### Next Issue

*In the next HTR Information Bulletin the Spotlight will be on Day of Reflection and the launch of the International Experiences of Days of Remembrance and Reflection report at the end of March.*

[Please see page 4 for details of how to order copies of all Healing Through Remembering Reports.]



## OTHER VOICES

### FACING OR EVADING WIDER TRUTHS

by Dr. Brandon Hamber

The recent BBC series “Facing the Truth”, which brought victims of political violence face-to-face with perpetrators, has got people talking. The dialogues, facilitated by Archbishop Tutu, are a stark reminder of the suffering caused by the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. It is sobering to think that the cases featured are a fragment of the thousands of stories that need to be told. The programmes were a bold move and may have helped individual victims. They provide some hope for the future, along with the work of organisations that have fostered similar dialogues over the years, albeit behind closed doors. But we also have to ask what other messages such programmes convey, and what else might need to be done to reckon with the past?

Although the programmes are not a truth commission but a dialogue, the central idea leans heavily on the South African experience. It draws on the idea of publicly airing grievances as a way of addressing the past, as championed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). There are profound differences, however. The South African TRC’s primary focus was on outlining the causes, nature and extent of the conflict through victim and perpetrator testimony. This testimony took place in separate victim and amnesty or perpetrator hearings. Although most amnesty hearings took place publicly, only approximately 2,000 of the 21,000 victims who gave statements to the Commission gave testimony in public.

When perpetrators applied for amnesty in exchange for speaking the truth, victims or their lawyers could question perpetrators as to the veracity of their statements, but this was not billed as a meeting or as necessarily reconciliatory. The South African TRC was not primarily about victims meeting perpetrators and nowhere in its legal mandate does it say it was. The BBC programmes have now created this myth. Victim-offender meetings did happen on occasion as a result, but largely outside the remit of the Commission. In addition, such meetings and the TRC itself were part of a more extensive political

process. This leaves one wondering: is Northern Ireland trying to walk before it can crawl, or are high-profile encounters needed to move the process forward?

Given the stalled peace process, the programmes might get people to re-engage with resolving the conflict. The courage shown by participants can demonstrate what is possible despite the dense fog of political dilly-dallying. However, focusing on the victims can also inadvertently suggest that it is the responsibility of victims, rather than wider society, to reconcile as the first step to change, thus burdening victims with another liability. Some victims could feel pressured to forgive, or perpetrators compelled into expressing remorse they don’t really feel, especially on television. The programmes’ focus is the stories of those directly affected by or acting in the conflict. There is no context provided or debate about the causes. There was no questioning of the statements given by offenders, thus allowing *them* to define the truth. Truth commissions traditionally question and try to reach forensic truth.

Emotive television of this type also invariably draws one to the plight of the victims. This is important, but conflict resolution is not only about sympathising with victims, important as that is. It demands that everyone across society recognise their own capacity for wrongdoing at the same time. In Healing Through Remembering, a five-year-old initiative that brings together over eighty people from different political perspectives each month to wrestle with questions about the past, the issue of considering one’s own role in the past is discussed under the rubric of “reflection”. Reflecting on the past, not merely remembering it, necessitates that we consider not only victims’ suffering, but also how we all supported or fuelled the conflict through direct action, our attitudes or our failure to act.

Resolving conflict requires reflection and public debate on levels of complicity and guilt, not only recognition of the hurt caused or confessions from direct actors. This process should be

supported by public acknowledgement of hurts inflicted. This leaves no one untouched and all institutions need to examine their role in the past—among others paramilitaries, the governments, churches, the judiciary, political parties, the education system and the media.

The view of Healing Through Remembering is that there are no quick fixes and no-one is neutral in protracted political conflict. A range of interrelated options for dealing with the past are required, such as a living memorial museum, a Day of Reflection, a network of commemoration projects, and collective storytelling. For truth-recovery an informed debate is necessary, evidenced by the misperceptions created by the recent programmes. To this end Healing Through Remembering will shortly be launching five detailed options for truth-recovery for public discussion.

There is no doubt the BBC programmes have stimulated debate on dealing with the past. Questions however remain as to whether the focus on victims and offenders, as the first major media intervention on this issue, has not confounded the reconciliation discussion. It certainly has confused many as to what really happened in South Africa. A more complicated, nuanced and reflexive debate about the past is needed, with a healthy and functional political context, and of course the media have a role in this. But in the long run this will demand something more subtle than eerie music and darkly lit forums where victims and perpetrators meet in the glare of the camera, no matter how moving or personally transformative such meetings might be.

*Dr Brandon Hamber is a conflict transformation expert from South Africa, living in Belfast and a consultant to Healing Through Remembering. His views do not necessarily reflect those of all the members of HTR.*

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## PUBLICATIONS AND EVENTS

### HEALING THROUGH REMEMBERING EVENTS

The next public event being held by Healing Through Remembering will be the launch of the Storytelling Conference Report. Full launch details to be confirmed. Please check the HTR website

[www.healingthroughremembering.org](http://www.healingthroughremembering.org)

regularly for updates on forthcoming events, seminars and conferences.

### ORDERING HTR REPORTS

Copies of all reports produced and published by Healing Through Remembering are available to order direct from the Healing Through Remembering offices or online in the publications section of the HTR website [www.healingthroughremembering.org](http://www.healingthroughremembering.org)

Larger text versions are also available to download and/or order.

Publications currently available to order are:

**Report of the Healing Through Remembering Project**  
June 2002

**Storytelling Audit. An audit of personal story, narrative and testimony initiatives related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland.**  
September 2005

**International Experiences of Days of Remembrance and Reflection**  
January 2006

### HAVE YOUR SAY HTR WEBSITE & DISCUSSION FORUM

The Healing Through Remembering website underwent major redevelopment and re-design in 2005. The new site, launched on the 18th October 2005, features news, background information, press releases and information on current work relating to the ongoing work of the project and the organisation.

If you would like to contribute your views, opinions or thoughts on either the work of the project or on any relevant issue please feel free to use the interactive messaging forum.

This is an opportunity for you to have your say.

### EVENTS & INFORMATION FROM OTHER ORGANISATIONS

#### Saturday Morning Workshops

Glencree Centre for Reconciliation  
Workshops on each area of the Centre's work  
More information from [info@glencree.ie](mailto:info@glencree.ie)

#### Irish School of Ecumenics

M.Phil. in Reconciliation Studies  
Now recruiting for October  
More information on [www.tcd.ie/ise](http://www.tcd.ie/ise)

#### The Challenge of Change

A conference addressing the impact of diversity on Northern Ireland  
5 & 7 June 2006  
Canal Court Hotel, Newry  
More information from [www.challengeofchange.org](http://www.challengeofchange.org)

#### International Conference and NIPPA AGM

'Diversity and Inclusion in the Early Years'  
14-16 June 2006  
Ramada Hotel, Belfast  
More information [www.qub.ac.uk/edu/conference/](http://www.qub.ac.uk/edu/conference/)

#### The Role of the Community & Voluntary Sector in Building Peace and Democracy, North & South

Community Workers Co-Operative  
15 June 2006  
Fairways Hotel, Dundalk  
More information at [www.cwc.ie](http://www.cwc.ie)

#### Facing History and Ourselves

International Seminar  
Holocaust and Human Behaviour  
London 24 -28 July 2006  
More information at [www.facinghistorycampus.org](http://www.facinghistorycampus.org)

If you have any events you would like included in the next issue please email them to [newsletter@healingthroughremembering.org](mailto:newsletter@healingthroughremembering.org)



Editor: Lainey Dunne  
with thanks to the HTR Newsletter sub group