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Sisters pay terrible price for seeking justice

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Saturday June 28 2008

[Michael McHugh](#)

[Robert McCartney's](#) sisters have led a global crusade for justice for their murdered brother -- but it has taken a huge toll on their own lives.

Despite ongoing threats and intimidation, a broken relationship, a trail of forced moves and shattered career prospects, the five working class women from a nationalist family in east Belfast have never given up.

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over two years

Sisters Donna (42), Paula (43), Gemma (44), Claire (30) and Catherine (40) have taken their campaign to political leaders in [Dublin](#), [London](#), [Washington](#) and [Brussels](#) in a bid to force more cooperation from republicans with the police investigation.

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I Catherine worked at a further education college but now cares for her four children and has shelved plans to emigrate to [Australia](#).

I Donna ran a busy sandwich shop in [Belfast](#) city centre but there were threats after her brother's murder and she was forced to close it down.

I Paula has moved out of the area where the family grew up, in disgust at the way they have been treated since the killing.

I Claire's relationship broke up less than a year after her brother was killed.

I Gemma was forced to leave a mobile cervical cancer screening service in the area last November after being abused and spat at.

Their lives changed the night their brother was beaten and stabbed to death outside a pub in the republican Markets area near their Short Strand homes.

Within hours of the killing in Magennis's pub in January 2005, it was claimed that [IRA](#) members had been involved.

But [Sinn Fein](#) immediately rejected the allegations.

The killing came at a crucial time for the party, when it was involved in delicate political negotiations aimed at securing its support for the police.

The McCartneys accused republicans of hindering the murder investigation by covering up what happened, and threatening witnesses.


There were about 50 people in the pub on the night of the killing, but none appeared willing to talk to police.

Many were clearly afraid of the consequences, but Mr McCartney's sisters weren't.

Eventually, the pressure of their campaign bore fruit. Sinn Fein announced that it had suspended seven members of the party who were in the pub on the night of the murder, and the IRA even offered to shoot those responsible.

It was alleged that the fight started after Robert McCartney made a rude gesture to the wife of the man acquitted of his murder, [Terence Davison](#).

The trial exposed the extent of the IRA's continuing influence in working-class areas.

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