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Youth deserve a future beyond troubled past

(Breidge Gadd, [Irish News](#))

Smart new-blazered children, bumper-to-bumper traffic on south Belfast's Stranmillis Road and the realisation sinks in. Summer is well and truly over and a new year begins.

September though has always had the feel of a new start about it, rather than three months before year end.

And similarly June 30, with people heading off in all directions, always feels more like the end of something.

This left July and August as the in-between months, a time that in Northern Ireland in the past was when the political – and indeed economic – parameters for the incoming year would be defined.

During the hot-tempered months of July and August, how much trouble would there be?

How many people killed?

How many areas burnt out?

Who could score the most points in blaming the other side? Etc, etc.

Summer unrest and ongoing acrimony was so familiar that we all could have had a go at writing the well-tested scripts of our summers past.

Now peace has been creeping slowly up on us as the intense violence diminished over the years.

However, this year with the assembly up and running and signs of the new Belfast visible in new buildings throughout the city, there is no doubt that, for the young at least, the Troubles and their shadows are fast disappearing.

Summer 2007 will be remembered not for its fierce rioting and destruction but for the quality of the outdoor concerts – not just the big ones in Belfast and Bangor but also for the imaginative get-togethers throughout the country (and congratulations, Newtownabbey, on a super outdoors live

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opera event).

Northern Ireland has turned a corner and people are discovering that they can have fun and that visitors from other countries will come to join in, not just because of our post-Troubles novelty value but also because it is a beautiful country with a people who have great capacity to enjoy themselves.

However, now that we have given ourselves permission to enjoy life and it looks like there will be a rising tide of prosperity for a while – not least caused by the wealth generated by building work in Belfast alone – what do we do about those people who can't yet put the past behind them?

The young people flocking to Ormeau Park or Ward Park Bangor to hear local (and internationally famous) bands perform do not dwell much on past events.

They look not backwards but forward.

They are carefree and happy as they should be and if they worry at all, it is about serious things such as global warming and the war in Iraq.

It is right that they have put the Troubles behind them.

But not everyone has.

There are many people still who await answers – parents, children, brothers and sisters whose loved ones were killed and who still do not know why or in some cases where or how.

As they grow older and as years pass between the setting up of public inquiries and the actual start of their work, many people wearily wonder if they will ever be able to close the book on the past and bring peace into their lives too.

As well as public inquiries we have the Historical Enquiries Team set up with such promise by the British government in 2005 to help solve unsolved murders.

Then the most recent initiative, the Eames/Bradley task force, set up not to bring about closure but to continue the talking about whether we want or need a truth process to enable closure.

The cynical among us can be forgiven for believing that the government strategy regarding the unfinished business of the Troubles is to slowly string out the processes – so that the people most concerned over time die out literally, as they are

fed crumbs of hope regarding establishing the truth about what happened.

Is this the best we can do though?

As the country moves on, swiftly kicking the dust of conflict off its heels, is it good enough to continue to delude those people who still have questions into believing that serious commitment and energy is being devoted to finding answers?

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