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## New Lodge Respect week

(Susan McKay, [Irish News](#))

Alan McBride agreed to take part in a panel discussion in the New Lodge last week, then spent the week worrying that the man who murdered his wife would turn up. He did not go to the remembrance ceremony before the discussion, because he thought it likely Sean Kelly would be there.

Kelly is the man who, with Thomas 'Bootsie' Begley, planted the IRA's Shankill bomb in 1993, killing 10 people, including Begley and injuring dozens more.

All of the dead, apart from the bomber, were ordinary working-class Protestants. They included Mr McBride's wife, Sharon and her father, Desmond Frizzell, who owned the fish shop chosen for the attack.

Kelly was jailed, wrote to *The Irish News* expressing regret about those who died and later claimed in a book called *Ardoyne – the Untold Truth* that on the way to plant the bomb, he and Begley had repeatedly spoken about their determination that no innocent civilians would be killed.

It was madness, and for its sheer recklessness, the Shankill bomb could only be seen as an act of mass sectarian slaughter.

Gerry Adams carried Begley's coffin. Kelly got early release under the Good Friday Agreement. He was rearrested at the behest of the DUP, released at the behest of Sinn Féin. Last year, he turned up at a cross-community gala at Belfast Castle, leading to some Shankill people walking out (though others stayed).

Mr McBride has become one of the bravest campaigners for peace and reconciliation and has been acknowledged and honoured as such within the nationalist and republican communities.

When he speaks, he describes his personal 'journey', moving in his grief from rage to an acceptance of, among other things, the early release of Kelly and others as part of the price of peace.

The event in the New Lodge was part of the community

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partnership's Respect week, a fine, inclusive and imaginative programme of events addressing race, age, gender, sectarianism, human rights and the aftermath of conflict.

This part of north Belfast was hard hit – as the long list of names on the local memorial testifies. At the commemoration, which Kelly attended, speakers gave high praise to IRA volunteers. One claimed they "gave this community its self-respect".

However, there was also an attempt to reach out to others whose names were not carved on the granite memorial, notably those the IRA killed. British soldiers were even mentioned.

"In war all sides do terrible things," said one speaker. "The basis of respect is affording equal recognition to all who died."

Children laid candles in memory of "all the families, everywhere, who have lost loved ones."

It felt tentative and awkward but also real and decent.

At the discussion afterwards, John Loughran of Relatives for Justice said: "We are not absolved either – we need to take responsibility for things done in our name."

Kelly was not there. Out of respect for Mr McBride's feelings, some of the organisers had asked him to stay away.

Mr McBride talked about why he didn't want to come face to face with him, even though he is happy to take part in events which include ex-IRA people.

"We are screwed if we only think in terms of what happened to our people," he said. "The most important thing is for people to take responsibility for what they did. People who committed murder have to take responsibility and not try to hide behind the fact that we were in a conflict."

Begley and Kelly killed his wife but they "weren't responsible for the Troubles" he said.

However, having read Kelly's account of the bombing mission in [Ardoyne – the Untold Truth](#), Mr McBride was disappointed.

"There was no sense of him taking responsibility. He was making out it was an accident. I need people to look me in the eye and acknowledge it was wrong."

He said he regretted the loss of Begley and respected his mother's rights as a victim.

"Her sense of loss may be even greater than mine. My wife was innocent. I don't know how I'd feel if Sharon had been responsible for the deaths of nine other people."

Mr McBride had clearly braced himself to say this to an audience that included Kelly.

"If you know him, maybe you could take this back to him," he said.

Someone should do that and maybe have a word, too, with whoever sent him and Begley out that day.

Denial has no place in a community which is committing itself to respect, as the New Lodge so honourably did last week.

March 21, 2007

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This article appeared first in the March 20, 2007 edition of the [Irish News](#).

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