



Sister was 'basically incinerated by blast'

(Seamus McKinney, [Irish News](#))

Twenty-five years ago tonight (Thursday) an INLA bomb ripped through the Droppin Well bar in Co Derry killing 17 people. Seamus McKinney speaks to one woman bereaved by one of the biggest losses of life in the Troubles

Pat Cooke held on for 10 full days before she became the 17th victim of the INLA's Droppin Well bombing.

The baby of her family, the 21-year-old had been working in the Ballykelly bar, which was owned by her brother John, when the explosion ripped through it on the night of December 6 1982.

Also injured were her niece Tanya and friend Cilla White, who died seven years ago aged 35.

Pat's older sister Monica recalls the many nights her daughters Tanya and Cheryl spent with Pat working on each other's make-up and hair in their bedrooms.

Having just completed a beautician course in Manchester, Pat had been working at the Droppin Well before embarking on a career of her own.

Monica recalls every detail of December 6 1982.

"I didn't hear the bomb but a friend of Tanya's came to the door – one of the lads who was a regular in the bar – he said 'I'm terribly sorry about Tanya'. This was about half past eleven that night," she said.

"He said they have blown up the Well."

Monica immediately contacted Cheryl, who was working as a radiographer at Altnagelvin hospital.

Cheryl told her mother how staff had been placed on full alert.

"Then another friend from the village carried Tanya in through the front door."

Monica said she was in a state of shock and was one of the walking wounded.

This article appears thanks to the *Irish News*. Subscribe to the [Irish News](#)

[HOME](#)

[History](#)

[NewsoftheIrish](#)

[Book Reviews & Book Forum](#)

[Search / Archive](#)
Back to 10/96

[Papers](#)

[Reference](#)

[About](#)

[Contact](#)



"I got her wrapped in a blanket. She was burnt and we found out afterwards that a light from the ceiling was embedded in her leg."

After getting her daughter to hospital Monica went to the bar where she met her father, also John, who told her Pat had been hurt.

"I left then. The scene was just awful. It was not something I wished to witness, plus I had to go to see my mum. I didn't know how badly hurt Pat was," Monica said.

She met Cheryl, who had helped treat Pat and was able to tell her how badly injured the 21-year-old was.

"Cheryl said she's not going to make it. Pat was just basically incinerated. She got the full blast. It's surprising that she even lived for 10 days."

Later that week Monica travelled to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast to be with her sister and stayed a number of days.

In what is obviously a difficult memory, Monica recalled her last conversation with her sister, just two days before Pat died.

Monica told her to get well as she had booked a holiday for January for three friends.

"Pat remained fully conscious right up to the time I left her. But I remember that night, leaving her, I noticed a change," she said.

Breaking down, she added: "She was full of rascality and full of confidence. Full of the joys of life. I can still hear her throwing that head of black curls back and laughing."

Pat's death had an awful impact on the Cooke family. Monica recalls her mother crying for no apparent reason many years later.

"She said it was such a beautiful day. Why wasn't Pat here to enjoy it," Monica said.

The family didn't talk a lot about the tragedy. The bombing left them isolated, dealing with the trauma in their own way.

Monica also said her parents never talked of revenge despite the fact that five people were convicted in connection with the killings.

She said she did not think she could personally bear the burden which the killers have had to carry since that night.

"I'll be very, very honest with you and I'll say that I feel sorry for

**For
more
about
the new
Belfast
store**

CLICK HERE



Home is the most
important place
in the world.

them, because they have committed themselves to a life of regrets and of a guilty conscience and they do have conscience. Don't think they haven't, because they do," she said.

As well as ripping families apart, the bombing also had a devastating impact on the village of Ballykelly.

Monica said religion and politics did not matter in the village.

"To this day there are people who lived opposite who brought blankets out and they still remember."

Monica finds it too difficult to visit Pat's grave. Today, she will mark the 25th anniversary in private with her own thoughts of the sister who was snatched away from her just as she started out on life's adventure.

She wishes she could turn the clock back so that Pat, who would be 46 this year, and the 16 others who died could have been saved.

"But, as they say, those who did it, if they repent, God will forgive them," Monica said.

Fatalities

CIVILIANS

Alan Callaghan (17)

Patricia Cooke (21)

Ruth Dixon (17)

Angela Hoole (19)

Valerie McIntyre (21)

Carol Watts (25)

BRITISH SOLDIERS

Private Terence Adams (20)

Private Paul Delaney (18)

Lance Corporal Steven Bagshaw (21)

Lance Corporal Clinton Collins (20)

Private David Murray (18)

Corporal David Salthouse (23)

Private Steven Smith (24)

Lance Corporal Philip McDonough (26)

Private Neil Williams (18)

Private Anthony S Williamson (20)

Lance Corporal David Wilson-Stitt (27)

December 7, 2007

This article appeared first in the December 6, 2007 edition of the [*Irish News*](#).

[BACK TO TOP](#)

[About](#)

[Home](#)

[History](#)

[News of the Irish](#)

[Books](#)

[Bookstore](#)

[Contact](#)