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## Grieving mother still hopes for justice

### 10th ANNIVERSARY - THE OMAGH BOMBING

BY Seamus McKinney

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In the second part of a special feature marking the 10th anniversary of the Omagh bombing, Co Donegal woman Bernie Doherty tells

Seamus

McKinney she believes she will never know real happiness again after the death of her beloved

son, Oran

Last week, Cillán Doherty broke his mother, Bernie's heart when he told her he wished he could have seen his big brother, Oran.

Cillán was born just months after the eight-year-old was killed in the Omagh bombing. The family named him Cillán Oran, but he's called Cillán.

Bernie Doherty, who is from Buncrana, Co Donegal, was told at 7am on August 16 1998 that Oran, her fifth child, had been killed in the carnage in the Co Tyrone town.

Her husband Michael had travelled to Omagh the previous night to look for his son, who had been on a fun day out to the Ulster American Folk Park with Spanish students who were staying in Buncrana.

"At about 7 o'clock I saw people hugging outside wee Sean's house [Sean McLaughlin, a 12-year-old neighbour who also died] and my sister came in and said: 'Wee Sean's dead.'

"My husband phoned and said did I hear and I said yes, I knew Sean was dead, and my husband said: 'Oran's dead too.'

"I threw the phone across the room. That's how I found out Oran was dead."

Images from the next few days have haunted Bernie Doherty for the last 10 years.

Later that day she travelled to the make-shift mortuary at Lisenally army barracks in Omagh.

"I went in and saw him. His hair had all darkened down; it must have been the shrapnel or whatever and his hair was all wet.

"There was a big gash on his forehead and bruises on his cheek and wee burns on every finger.

"And whatever way his bottom lip was out, I believed he was crying when he died."

Bernie has been told Oran died instantly or very quickly but the image still haunts her.

She found some solace from a young Omagh woman who was with Oran at the time.

"About a week after, a girl wrote to us and she said she was with Oran and he didn't die alone.

"She said he held his hand, even after they covered him on the street.

"She kept holding his hand and people were telling her to let him die with dignity. But she felt she was with this wee boy who probably felt all alone and she was going to wait until someone came for him; his mammy or whatever."

After Oran's death, Bernie said she believed she would not be able to cope and that she would never laugh again.

She thanks her father and family for helping her through. They took her younger children – one aged eight months and one three-and-a-half – at nights. But they left them back with her during the day and Bernie thinks the fact that she had no choice but to care for them pulled her through.

Ten years on, Oran's name is mentioned in her home every day. Like other Omagh families, she even turns to

her son for help, asking him if he can sort out problems.

Oran's death changed Bernie in many ways. She said she sometimes wonders what comes after this life but takes great comfort that some day she will be with him again.

“At the time I believed I could never be happy again.

I have laughed and I have been happy, but I will never know real happiness again,” she said.

Perhaps the biggest change Bernie has experienced is in the way she views authority.

“Before, if police or the gardai or a priest – and I'm not anti-clergy, they were very good to me – says something; if authority said something, I believed it. But not now; I could never be as accepting again. I am a lot more cynical.”

She stresses she is not bitter, but wants justice.

“I would love to have anyone who had anything to do with Omagh brought to justice,” she said.

She also wants the men who made the bomb and took the life of her much-loved and

innocent son to hear the stories of the dead.

“I would like the dissident republicans to hear the stories; not to read them, but to hear them. I suppose I would like them to give themselves up but they won't do that.

“I would just hope the paramilitaries would stop and we could work towards peace.

“I would hope nothing else ever happens to my family again.”

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