

BORDERLINES

personal stories and **experiences** from the border counties

Research, photography and interviews by the Borderlines Team // Tom Brady

Aine Duffy

Kevin Duffy

Liz Groves

Anthony Haughey

Andrew Kernaghan

Trish Lambe

Colm Laigneach

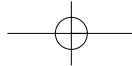
Mary McAnulty

Peter McKee

Wesley Mitchell

Martin Snoddon

Michael Walsh



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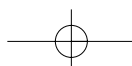
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Dougie	John McGuinness	Diarmaid Rankin
Eddie Filgate	Úna McGuill	Peter Sands
Maynard Hanna	Peter O'Connor	Frank Short
Katie	Stephen O'Donnell	Padraig Warren

Acknowledgements > Borderlines

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Borderlines Management Team:

Kevin Duffy, Anthony Haughey, Trish Lambe, Mary McAnulty, Peter McKee.

For further information visit the Gallery of Photography website: www.gallery@irish-photography.com or contact Trish Lambe, Gallery of Photography, Meeting House Square, Temple Bar, Dublin 2, Ireland.

Editorial Team:

Áine Duffy, Anthony Haughey, Trish Lambe, Mary McAnulty, Peter McKee, Wesley Mitchell and Jan O'Neill.

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Foreword > Borderlines

I am deeply honoured to be asked to pen a foreword to this very special publication. This is a unique collection of very personal stories, giving us penetrating insights into life along a border. This border has become a symbol of social division, fear, alienation and the invisible line of demarcation which separates two political jurisdictions.

As I reflect on these stories and the accompanying photography, I am struck by three things.

Firstly, they are **real**. They are told through the eyes and the experiences of those whose lives have been influenced by the border, rather than through the eyes of a professional journalist. This is life as it is, not what we might imagine it to be, or would wish it to be from our own perspective. This is what makes Borderlines different and credible.

Secondly, they are **representative**. As we read these stories we need to be reminded that there will be many more unheard and unrecorded accounts of life along the border. They may differ in detail, but not in substance. These stories give us but a glimpse into a life which will be unfamiliar to many of us, but all too familiar to a largely unrepresented and too often forgotten section of our community.

Thirdly, these stories are highly **relevant**, particularly at this moment of political change and challenge. As I read some of the stories, I am brought back in time to where I was born as well as to a place where I once served at a particularly troubled period of our history.

I am deeply indebted to those who, having shared their stories, have reminded me that our personal histories must not be forgotten in our seemingly endless debates about the shape of “our shared future.”

If we have ears to hear and eyes to see, it is these stories that will bring us down to earth!

Reverend Harold Good OBE

Introduction > Borderlines

This book contains edited versions of 100 oral interviews, one part of the Borderlines project, an oral and photographic archive project recording peoples' experiences of life along the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Borderlines offers a mechanism to the people of the border area or those affected by the existence of the border to speak out and place their experiences in the public domain for present and future generations. This book is an integral part of the Borderlines project that includes an audiovisual archive and exhibition.

The border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is a constitutionally and ethnically contested area, born out of civil and political strife in 1921. The border counties have experienced considerable political violence since then, more particularly over the past 35 years. The project provides an opportunity for the voices of 100 people whose lives have been influenced by the border to be heard and their memories to be recorded. The voices are individual and give their own unique views of experiences connected to the border. The project opens the possibility for a society to learn from its past and hopes to contribute to personal and societal healing.

The researchers and the Borderlines co-ordinators came together in September 2004 to connect with the aims of the project and to develop the way forward. The researchers were all local to the border or working within those communities. The research approach was phenomenological, seeking to understand and record the reality as the participants perceived it, whilst being mindful of personal subjectivity. The fact that the researchers were local to the area and of diverse background was essential for local ownership and control. It was also the intention that the training and expertise gained through this experience would remain in the locality to continue the archiving process that Borderlines has begun. Since the Good Friday Agreement, people have sought to address the legacy of 30 years of conflict. Dialogue began then on how we deal with the past. In 2001, the Healing Through Remembering project was founded and sought out answers to the question "How should we remember the events connected with the conflict in and about Northern Ireland so as to individually and collectively contribute to the healing of the wounds of our society?" One of the forms of remembering suggested was a collective storytelling and archiving process.

"One way of dealing with what has happened is to seek understanding of our separate psychological, emotional and spiritual wounds through their disclosure to each other. It is our belief that we need to share our stories, tell our truths, actively listen to each and document what has taken place. As such we recommend that storytelling continues and becomes a national project in which all our stories are recorded and archived. These narratives should be available for future generations to learn from the past."

HTR Report June 2002.

Borderlines emerged within this context. This project was planned within the spirit of optimism that coincided with the peace process. There was sense of a new kind of possibility that we could deal with our past, turn our back on it and move forward into the future. However, where centuries of protracted conflict have brought about generational trauma in society, as here on this island, the past refuses to be shrugged off easily. The past demands, at the very least, attention and acknowledgement. The difficulties in the political arena of the peace process changed the atmosphere from hope and stability into fear and insecurity; this influenced the process of Borderlines. Some interviewees chose to retract their participation at this time; others wanted to be in the archive but not in the book, others needed more time to consider.

Each interview is unique. Some took place over several days in the privacy of the kitchen or sitting room; some took place in a car or in a hotel lobby; one in hotel room in Bosnia, one in a street. Most interviews

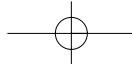
are with individuals, some are couples and one is with four people. Some are two or three hours, one is half an hour and one is eight hours long. Some are very personal; others less so. The place, the tone and shape of the interview were negotiated between the interviewer and participant. The underlying premise throughout is to give ownership to the participants. Some chose to be anonymous, some use pseudonyms and others use their own names. The process continued with a lengthy process of researching, interviewing, transcribing, editing, preparing the transcript and the images for deposit in an archive and, returning later, to review and make corrections in those transcripts.

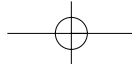
The photographic element was a collective endeavour facilitated by artist Anthony Haughey. Many of the photographs were made by the Borderlines team during field trips throughout the border region. The process began with a series of illustrated discussions examining issues around visual representation. Researchers were introduced to examples of how photographs can define a sense of place, for example, how newspaper photographs have historically defined Northern Ireland as a one dimensional country of violence and how contemporary photographers have taken an oppositional position to offer contradictory and critical viewpoints. Researchers were encouraged to consider how photographs could be used to 'map' the in-between spaces of the border region. The resulting photographs produced for the archive are situated where the border divides rivers, fields, villages, farms, roads etc. The researchers were also encouraged to work with the Borderlines interviewees collecting participants personal photographic archives, including family album photographs, newspaper cuttings and images which would add a visual element and historical reference to personal narratives.

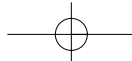
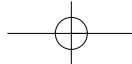
The editorial panel took the collective role to oversee the work of identifying the criteria for selection of extracts and images that would form the content of the Borderlines book and exhibition, with respect and sensitivity. The task was an enormous responsibility knowing that the final product would be a very edited version. The panel was aware that the purpose of the project and the motivations of the individuals involved created strong threads that consciously and unconsciously guided the editing process. They attempted to make those motivations as conscious as possible, so as to become more alert to the essence of the individual stories and the purpose of the project.

Whilst the archive holds each interview and as such has the authentic voice of the participants, the book has a necessary and integral function as a signpost to the archive. The stories of the people in this book portray the human condition, tragedy and sadness, humour and optimism, resilience and courage, loss and pain, love and longing, confusion and clarity, despair and faith. There are personal stories of major traumatic events; there are the "normal" daily events like getting the children to school through roadblocks, or telling "lies" about your whereabouts or your job to protect your life, or having to leave your land and community. There are socio-economic changes like the move from dealing cattle in the street to cattle marts; there are smuggling stories; there is the perspective of a Traveller woman, an academic who studies borders, politicians, an English man whose son was killed on this island, community workers, mothers, ex-combatants, customs man and members of the security forces.

The interviews were all invitations to talk about one's life in its wholeness, not only the conflict and its repercussions. This results in richness and depth that goes below our differences and our stereotypical labels to the well of our common humanity. This book is an invitation to go on a physical journey along the border that divides Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland travelling from west to east. As you travel along the border you will encounter people, events and experiences that will challenge your perceptions of the "other." You can choose to only read those narratives that resonate with your own personal perspective or you can choose to also read those that are diametrically opposed to your perspective. Our invitation is that you take the latter choice so that we all take the journey towards greater understanding of ourselves and each other; in so doing, we contribute to building a more peaceful future for our children and grandchildren.





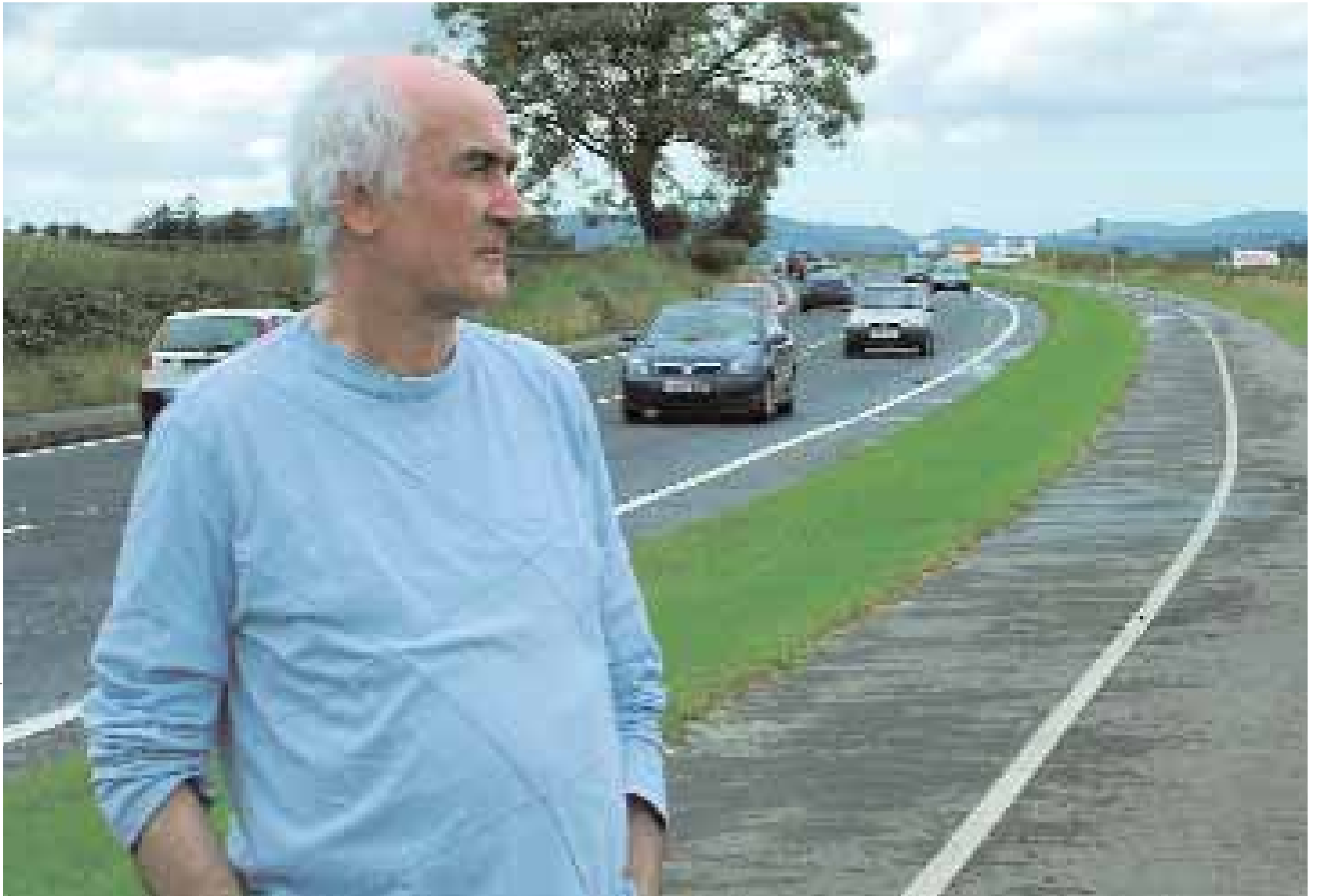


DONEGAL // DERRY/LONDON DERRY

personal stories and **experiences** from the border counties

Eamon Baker
Brian Bethell
Linda Britton
Catherine Cooke
Robert Crockett
David
Michael Doherty
Joe
Tom Fraser
Frank
Francine
Amanda Fullerton
Nigel Gardiner

Mildred Garfield
Dermot Harkin
Maureen
John Hume
Margaret
Raymond Millar
Donn Mullan
Brian O'Donnell
Jim O'Neill
Margaret O'Neill
Rose



The border was man-made. I don't think it was women who created it, I think it was men-made politicians created it. I always wonder what the world would be like if there was as many women running the show as there currently are men.

Eamon Baker > County Derry

As a family we were not well enough off to be going on holiday, so a day to Buncrana had an excitement to it, sandwiches being prepared, flasks being filled, going to the beach. It never occurred to me to say, “Why do we go to Buncrana, why do we not go to Portstewart?” I didn’t even know where Portstewart was. We always went west. If you went east you were still within Northern Ireland, within a place where there were these troubles, bombs, explosions, murders, sectarianism, pressure. So to go east, say to go to some place like Portrush, could have consequences, negative consequences, like running into people who wanted to bash Catholics, or wanted to be sectarian and aggressive in their behaviour.

I can remember instances of going to Burnfoot to the Foot Inn, and having three or four pints. Hopefully whoever was driving would be sober when stopped by soldiers or police. There was friction, a level of impatience, frustration, and bitterness. It was like being in a movie with a Berlin Wall type of scenario. I remember at the Buncrana checkpoint there used to be massive big corrugated tin sheds where you had to drive your car in and then you were within the shadows of this structure. You would be feeling vulnerable and there are police and army, everybody is armed, they are searching your car. Maybe, you have just come from the Foot Inn and are sort of jolly and suddenly there is this intervention. What you are bringing out towards these people is hostility. The whole perception is that the army and the police are responsible for some of the most awful things that have happened, say after 1972 and Bloody Sunday, and you just resent them being there. You’re not treating them like human beings. You are treating them fairly coldly and, arguably I think, brutally. And so, then a vicious circle is created: I’m being as taciturn and as cold to them as they are in turn being to me, and there is a spiral of poison relationships going on.

As I drive across the border, one of the things I’m sometimes aware of is the colossal bomb at Coshquin. Paddy Gillespie was forced to drive his vehicle—tied into his vehicle with a bomb—and he knew that not only is he going to die but other people are going to die. That, to me, is one of the most horrific incidents of republican violence in these parts. I find it revolting now and I found it revolting then. “We will take the life of this man because he is working in a British Army base as a catering guy, and therefore he is a legitimate target, and we will strap a bomb onto him and we will force him...” it’s horrendous, the whole thing is horrendous and I don’t know how it can be justified.

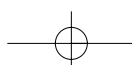
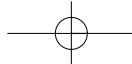
Driving through Coshquin on the road to Buncrana there is a little memento to the people who were killed there, so I am wondering what’s happening. What kind of contamination of spirit exists there? What kind of ghosts exist there? What kind of healing is needed there? So, even though there is a big wide road, European money to make this road happen, sometimes I have the sense (not all the time as sometimes I just have my £10 sterling for the 14 litres of diesel to get this bargain) but sometimes I spy that wee plaque, the inscription, and I feel sad. I think it is one of the worst things that happened. I feel a bit tearful even thinking about it now; and that there are people about in this town at the minute who were involved in those things. It reminds me of the plot of Seamus Deane’s book, *Reading in the Dark*. We are left with ghosts in this city and a need for more healing to happen—maybe even healing events at the border.

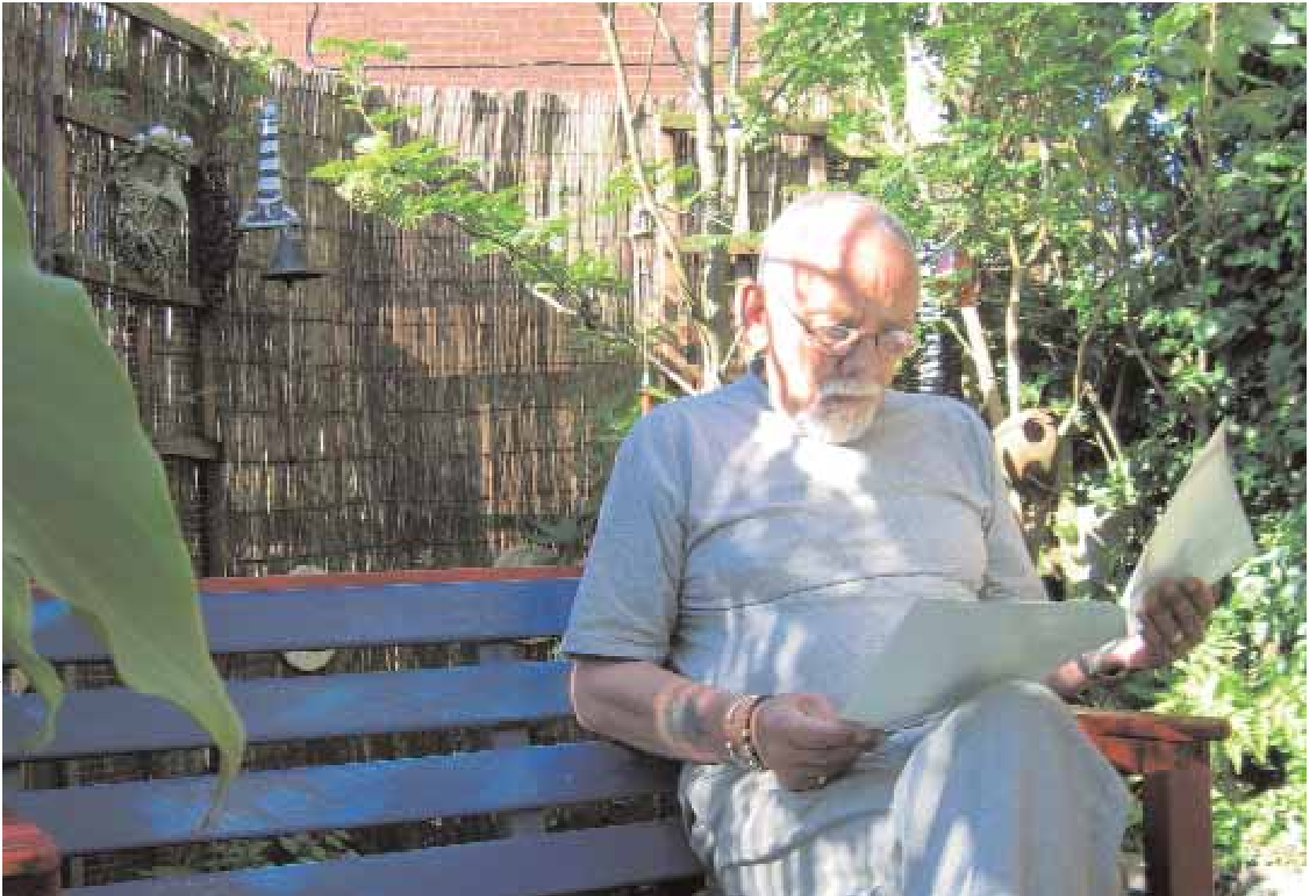
...It reminds me of the plot of Seamus Deane’s book, *Reading in the Dark*. We are left with ghosts in this city and a need for more healing to happen—maybe even healing events at the border

The numbers of the protestant minority are so depleted that they cannot elect a unionist councillor, so they are in the rather anomalous position of being represented by the SDLP or Sinn Fein

I have misgivings about what has been the protestant experience in the twenty-six counties. I have misgivings about how those protestant people were treated and how their culture was just obliterated. I certainly feel more comfortable in my own identity as an Irish person but I don't want anybody to infer from this that I am supporting some kind of rampant, devouring catholicism. What strikes me is that the west bank now is maybe almost 100 percent catholic. The numbers of the protestant minority are so depleted that they cannot elect a unionist councillor, so they are in the rather anomalous position of being represented by the SDLP or Sinn Féin. I think the people who are protestant, unionist, feel more at ease going east. There is this movement of population, which some unionist commentators call "ethnic cleansing" not only leaving the west bank but also the Waterside and moving further east. This city is not served by becoming a monoculture, it is not served by becoming a place where what we see almost exclusively is Celtic tops. We are better served by having a diverse multi-cultural society.

The border was man-made. I don't think it was women who created it, I think it was men—male politicians created it. I always wonder what the world would be like if there was as many women running the show as there currently are men. I think women maybe would be closer to the earth, and well, I am not getting into that, but I think there is a sense in which west of the Foyle almost runs without thinking.





On the morning of 24 October 1990. There was a knock on the door; my wife answered and it was then that I heard my wife scream. I've never heard anything like it, ever.

Brian Bethell > Cheshire // England

My name is Brian. I live in Cheshire. I am, for the want of a better phrase, a victim of the Northern Ireland conflict; my son, Paul Bethell, was a soldier who served in Northern Ireland and died (was killed) in Coshquin in Derry in Northern Ireland on 24 October 1990.

My only prior connection to Ireland was that my maternal grandmother came from Fermanagh and my paternal grandparents came from Wexford. I have always had an interest in Ireland but not Northern Ireland specifically until Paul was killed; then I developed an interest in the conflict, why it happened, why Paul was killed and who killed him. I want to try and understand why Paul was killed.

And so it was on the morning of 24th October 1990 there was a knock on the door; my wife answered and it was then that I heard my wife scream. I've never heard anything like it, ever. I ran into the hall and there was a policewoman and three people in civilian uniform, two men and a woman. Gloria had one of those dressing gowns with a big Chinese dragon on it and I remember trying to focus on the dragon. One of the guys said to me, "I'm Captain so and so..." I knew. Until this day, the army has never actually said to me, "Paul's dead." You just take it for granted, why else would they be there?

Paul's death was high profile. Five other men were killed with him plus the civilian. People were injured and a nearby estate was badly damaged. It was also the first time in about twenty odd years that the IRA had used a proxy bomb. It was the second time that a civilian had been put in that position; the previous time he had managed to get out of the vehicle; not this time, because IRA men had held his family captive over and told him that, unless he did this, his family would be shot.

We were besieged with reporters, Sky, BBC, Radio Merseyside etc. I was determined to keep control of the whole situation. I didn't allow anyone a photograph of Paul; I didn't allow anyone to speak about Paul; I would speak about Paul. I would issue a statement to our local newspaper and then I gave instructions to any other journalists to refer themselves to our local paper. So whatever came out about Paul was consistent.

After it had all died down there was a long period of silence and loneliness, several years where I didn't talk to anybody about it, because there was nobody to talk to about it. There was no victim support in this. I set up this thing called Friends of the Regiment. In the British Army when there was a death, the army would only ever concern themselves with the next of kin; if the soldier was married, it went no further than his wife, the parents weren't considered, the grandparents weren't considered. So I set up this thing called Friends of the Regiment, which I encouraged all the regiments to be consistent in their after care, so if a soldier lived in Hertfordshire and got killed, his family would get the same after care as a soldier from Scotland, for instance.

It was also the first time in about twenty odd years that the IRA had used a proxy bomb

I honestly dread to think of some woman who maybe lives up in the Yorkshire Moors or in Scotland and she's the only person in 30 or 40 miles who has lost someone to the IRA just because their son was in the army or their daughter was in the army...

I was fortunate, if that's the right word, in that four other families were involved in Coshquin. In the beginning it was a great help because we were able to cry or get angry together and go to places, like when we went to the memorial service together. So there was a support group in amongst ourselves in that we all suffered the same thing and there was a pulling together.

I honestly dread to think of some woman who maybe lives up in the Yorkshire Moors or in Scotland and she's the only person in 30 or 40 miles who has lost someone to the IRA, just because their son was in the army or their daughter was in the army. Who do they talk to? I think the greatest gift you can give any victim is to listen. Talking about it heals, being heard heals, and there's not enough people who will listen. Victims just want somebody to tell them "It's going to be OK," because victims who don't have contact with somebody who has gone through a similar tragedy, they don't know it's going to be OK, they never know it's going to be OK.

My aim was that Paul should not be forgotten, that his death should not be just another statistic, another dead soldier. The next Remembrance Sunday I went down to the Cenotaph and I saw the names there. I asked why isn't Paul's name there? Nobody could answer me. So I wrote to the local council and to the British Legion. They said exactly the same thing "It's a war memorial, and he didn't die in a war." So then I wrote to the Queen, the Archbishop of Liverpool, different generals and brigadiers, the Queen Mother and Prince Charles. It took about three years and then I got a letter from the council saying we would like to add your son's name to the war memorial. My younger son was in the army by then and he laid the wreath; it was a hell of a moment. Katie, my granddaughter who never met Paul would now know that is her uncle's name on the war memorial. For the next fifty years at least his name would live on because Katie would be able to point it out.

There was a kind of investigation. Lots of dreadful incidents and crimes were going on in Northern Ireland and I have no doubt that the entire RUC was overwhelmed and under great stress. So why was the incident in which my son was killed deserving of more attention than any others? It doesn't, but it does deserve attention, and it deserves answers. I was informed, not by the RUC, but by a politician, that a certain number of people were arrested and charged with belonging to the IRA and charged with this, that and the other. Then the whole thing sort of, well, I can't say it petered out, let's put it this way, I was kept in the dark. I wasn't told, I didn't know what was happening, I didn't know what the state of the investigation was, so in the absence of any information at all, I have to conclude that there wasn't one.

What is required is for the victims of Northern Ireland to approach the victims this side of the water and say, "Welcome home, brother, we belong to the victim community of Northern Ireland." All that's separating us is a stretch of water. We are no different to them—different wounds, same pain. The people of Northern Ireland need to accept us as victims of their conflict. We are then a group of people who (might) have a voice. The government keeps stifling us by giving us small amounts of money to do a needs analysis a report or to do this or that.

It is when victims start to look round for help and assistance and find there is none, that feelings of abandonment set in. Contrast that with seeing prisoners being released on TV and all the other things that the IRA and the republicans are getting; these are people victims perceive to have been responsible for the death of their loved ones and the author of all their troubles.

I know that those who killed Paul are never, ever going to come to court; and if they did, they would be going home tomorrow because of the Good Friday Agreement. I know that I'm not going to get closure through the traditional system. Had they gone to jail and served their sentence, then I would be quite prepared to wait outside for them and tell them that it's over now "You've done what you've done, you've paid, I've paid, Paul's paid for whatever crime you perceived him to have committed by being in your country."

I know how the IRA views British soldiers. So I got the feeling that because Paul was a soldier and in uniform that he was in some way depersonalised, that they had killed a symbol. Maybe it's easier for them to deal with what they've done by telling themselves they've killed a symbol of the state as opposed to a human being.

All I want to do is humanise Paul. I would like to meet the people who killed him, so then they can look at me, and this anonymous thing that they killed fifteen years ago has now got a face, because I'm his father and you can hear my voice and you can hear what I'm saying, and I'm telling you about him, what he looked like. But he's not anonymous any more. It's very difficult for me to say this and I don't know how I'm going to do that, but I'll listen with respect and with patience. Talk to me, Brian, and don't come to me with a potted history of Ireland and how bad the British are. Come and talk to me, person to person, not Irishman to Englishman. Tell me why your path and my path had to cross that way, when it could have been so different.

I sometimes used to fantasise that I would write the perfect poem that would say it all and I would never have to say anything again, that piece of poetry would empty my mind of all of this and that would be it—this magic stroke, a blinding, flashing light that would say, "Everything's OK, Brian." But if what I'm saying here now is read by those people who did it, and I don't see the end result of that, then I'd be quite happy, happier than I am now. I'm hoping that what I'm saying here now may get to the people who did it and may make them think.

I feel very strongly that I've been excluded from the history of Northern Ireland, and whether that's intentional by Northern Ireland society or by the politicians in general, by circumstances, there is no getting away from the fact that I am inextricably linked to the history of Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland recent history, these thirty-six years is also my history now: and remembering what I said earlier on in the interview, there is a much wider connection that I have with Ireland. So it's sort of tied everything together for me, it has sort of completed something that I thought was disjointed. At one time I actually felt that I had no right to speak about this because it wasn't my conflict. My son had just wandered into it because he was a soldier. I know that's not true now, and whatever he was, or wherever he was, he had a right to life and he lost it in Northern Ireland and that links me and that community together for ever. It is only right that what I have to say about it and how I feel about it and everything else should be held on record for the people (of these islands) to listen to and to look at.

