

Making The Peace Process Personal: The Ireland/Northern Ireland Troubles Through the Eyes of Combatants Turned Peace Workers

Edited and compiled by Shel Horowitz, editor, Peace And Politics

To the Catholics/Republicans/Nationalists, it's Derry. To the Protestants/Unionists/Loyalists, the same city, Northern Ireland's second-largest, is Londonderry.

Here are voices of people involved in all aspects of the Troubles, and the peace process that followed: Catholics and Protestants who were on the front lines of war, and later, the front lines of peace—men who had every reason to fear for their lives and yet could not be stopped. You'll read the incredible personal stories of the Catholic, Jon McCourt, who came within inches of being killed on Bloody Sunday, and the Protestant, John Guthrie, who was arrested for nine murders he did not commit. You'll hear from John Hume, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his part in bringing the sides together. And you'll even meet Catholic and Protestant muralists, a generation apart, who put their differences aside to paint public art together.

These stories were gathered from presentations to students from the University of Massachusetts attending an extended program on the Irish peace process at Inch House Centre for Irish Studies (<http://www.inchhouse.com>), in County Donegal on the Republic side of the border, but only a 20-minute drive from Derry/Londonderry, supplemented by private interviews. All quotes were gathered in May, 2012.

Italics are my comments. Non-italic is as close to the words of the speakers and interviewees as possible—SH

John Guthrie, Protestant Peace Activist

My task is to tell you what it was like as a Protestant throughout the Troubles in Northern Ireland. A Protestant born into a working-class family in 1960. It was an accident of birth, just as you were born an American. Raised and educated, political thinking as a Protestant...

1969, the Troubles started. Before that was the nearest thing to peace that you had in Ireland, and I was able to freely associate with whomever I liked, except for July and August. July and August are commonly known as the Marching Season. They go out and celebrate the victory of King William III over Roman Catholic James II at the Battle of Boyne, 1690. And that's where the Troubles started. It was a struggle for power, who was going to become King of England. There was an inbred fear in the Protestant people of Roman Catholics. From the early 1700s to the present day, Protestants were told they couldn't trust Catholics. Under the Penal Laws, Catholics couldn't get an education, couldn't own a horse valued at more than £5, couldn't pass land down to their heirs.

I can't say that the same hatred of Protestants existed in the Catholic community. I don't believe the Catholic Church was preaching hatred against Protestants.

The Troubles happened because of the Civil Rights movement in the US at the time. But when the Catholics felt they could get more education, etc., the government at the time saw this as a threat. There was gerrymandering. And starting in 1969, Protestants were not allowed to associate in any way with Catholics, and that was hard for a young boy to understand. I could understand about July and August, because that had gone on for generations. So I joined the Orange Order and the Francis Boys and the Order of _____. Until I was "invited" to leave when my politics changed. But at 9 or 10, it was difficult to understand why yesterday I could play with

wee Paddy down the street, and today I can't. We're being told by our parents, our political leaders, our educators, and our church leaders, "don't trust them, they'll knife you in the back. Give them an inch, they'll want a mile." And if I tell you something for long enough, you'll begin to believe it. So we began to believe maybe there is something strange and different about these Catholics...

In the 1960s and 1970s, the housing was substandard. We didn't even have indoor toilets. At 2-3 o'clock on a cold November or December morning, when you have to pee, it's not pleasant running through the frost, with no light. That was the same for Protestants and Catholics. We were equally as poor. But because Protestants had smaller families, whatever income was coming in was spread a bit farther. So Protestants were seen to be better off. They were better off, because Protestants were guaranteed employment. Therefore, Protestant kids didn't need to be educated. We used to be able to leave school at 14 and go off to work. Then they started raising the age (slowly). The school door opened, the kids flowed out, and the factory and shipyard doors opened, and the kids flowed in—if they were Protestant. When the Catholic school doors opened, they took a sharp left turn and got third-level education. The Catholic Church was forward looking and saw that education would come back ten-fold. So the Catholic Church preached the need for education and supported third-level education. Where it could be afforded, that was fine. Where it couldn't, the Catholic church aided.

And it worked. Catholic kids got their education, and they were having businesses, and coming back to their home city. And there was a wealth unknown to the Protestant people. All of a sudden, the Catholic community were a lot better off than the Protestants. And a lot of Protestants even today believe the worst thing that ever happened was that Catholics got educated.

Many families were affected directly by the Troubles. They were injured, lost members of their family, lost homes and businesses. I wasn't directly involved in anything like that. But a lot of the kids I went to school with became members of the Loyalist paramilitary (many groups, he listed). There were something like 3000 killed during the Troubles. Northern Ireland has only 1.5 million people. Per capita, that would be like millions in the US.

There were 34 in my [high school graduation] year, 1976. There are seven of us left. Some did die by natural causes, some were killed in accidents, but the majority lost their lives to the Troubles. Some took their own life because they couldn't live with what they'd done. 27 out of 34. It's a very sobering thought.

Schooling in Northern Ireland was segregated from the age of four years old. That's still the case. Only when they get to third-level education do they begin to reintegrate...

I left school in 1976, with little or no qualifications—the least that I could get away with. But I didn't need it, I knew I was going to get a job. I wanted to go on to 3rd-level education, but there wasn't the funds available. And there was an attitude, why are you superior to everyone else? You'll go out and work and contribute to the family income. The shirt factories were the major employers, and I went and worked at one. But in the early 1980s, all of that disappeared. It was cheaper to have those shirts made in Kuala Lumpur or Morocco or Beijing. They stopped

building ships in Belfast. The engineering jobs disappeared. And all these jobs were held by young Protestants who were thrown onto the unemployment lists. And not only were they unemployed, they were unemployable because they had no education. Their right of passage came around and bit them on the ass. The only thing I knew how to do was to cut shirts.

And the unemployment benefit was nominal, at best. A few pounds a week. To these guys who had been earning fairly decent wages, all of a sudden they found themselves with no money in their pockets. The paramilitaries realized that the young Protestants needed a way of making money, and many of them were suckered in. Go shoot a Catholic, we'll give you £75, and we'll take care of your family if you get caught. When the government is paying you £10, £75 sounds like a lot of money...

People were being blown up or shot. But it wasn't my family they were shooting. And a lot of people were thinking like that. And we very quickly became acclimatized to violence. You'd hear the newscast about the latest bombing, and you'd say, 'shut up and get to the sport.' It was part of life.

It was in the world of work that I realized these Catholics are no different than I am, they didn't have horns and tails and their eyes weren't set in. They were equally as badly off as I was, they had no facilities either. I began to think, 'were all these people lying to me all these years?' I'm 17, 18... I was sick and tired of going out to the pubs and clubs, and constantly looking over my shoulder. I used to go into a pub and either sit facing the door, or a mirror, because I could see behind me. And when I learned to drive, I had to go out and check under my car.

It was just at that point that America was talking about peace in Northern Ireland, because the IRA had declared cease-fires. It was wonderful! It was safe to go out. I thought, why can't it be like this all the time?

So very slowly, little seeds were starting to grow. My generation was starting to think, enough's enough. You can only dig a hole so deep, and then you start to dig your way out. American and Europe were promising money if we made peace. There will be billions of pounds waiting if we worked on peace and reconciliation. But one of the strands was you had to work on cross-community. Ooooooh dear! We have to talk to Catholics. to Feinians. To the enemy.

You have to wear a school uniform, so just by looking, you can tell if a kid is Catholic or Protestant. And I was going home one day, and out stepped these guys in military uniforms and balaclavas—ski masks. I'm in a Protestant uniform, going through a Protestant area to my home, so I thought they were Protestant paramilitaries. It was generally accepted that these guys could stop you at any time and question you. My parents always told me, don't give these guys any reason to hurt you. If they ask questions, answer politely. So I gave them my name. 'Where are you coming from?' 'School.' 'Where are you going to?' 'Home.' They asked, 'what Church?' I said 'Christ Church.' They said 'No! Are you Presbyterian?' I said 'no, Church of Ireland.' And I got half a brick in the side of the head. I woke up three hours later in hospital. They weren't the brightest bulbs and thought Church of Ireland was Catholic. That was my first introduction to the Troubles.

But cuts heal. We hadn't a clue what peace and reconciliation was. But we realized Catholics were getting boatloads of money, and we were wondering how they were getting it all. So what do we do? The obvious thing is we're going to talk to them. Yeah, but they're going to laugh at us. We've been persecuting them for 800 years. But we were given contact details for a person "on the other side," and we did. We were pleasantly surprised. They invited us across and said come over, we'll talk to you and we will help you. And we thought, what a wonderful way to draw people in and shoot them.

But they were true to their word. We were able to draw some funding to employ a worker, and we got a rare Protestant with a degree. And we formed a long-lasting relationship with that grouping on the other side. But we were castigated by our own community. I had to move house four times in three months. They tried to shoot me, tried to blow me up, tried to burn me to death, attacked my children, tried to break into my house.

I moved to a mixed area because it was safer and that's how I wanted my kids to grow up. I got employed by the local council. Sanitation worker, and on the cleanup crew following terrorist incidents. The IRA killed two Ulster police, put their bodies in a booby-trapped car, and then called the British. The explosion killed four soldiers. I was on call for the cleanup. It is not nice to peel pieces of flesh off the wall of a building and place it into a plastic bag and write a number on it and hand it to some guy who takes it away to examine it. And then it hit home, I don't want any more of this, from anybody. I got involved pretty much at the start of the peace process, which grew from the ground up. It was John Hume who said, I am going to talk to Gerry Adams and bring Sinn Fein to the table. And all of a sudden, things started to move. And things were wonderful for a while.

But during the very first assembly, we had the Omagh bomb, the worst atrocity in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. We don't know if they phoned in an incorrect warning or if it was misinterpreted, but the police moved people toward the bomb. 29 innocent people were killed, and two eight-month-term twins. That was carried out by the so-called real IRA.

That was the final straw and led to the peace we have today. Your then-president Bill Clinton came with the First Lady and held the hands of people in Omagh and grieved with them. But they came back a second time, not as a President and First Lady, but as Bill and Hillary Clinton, no cameras allowed. They cried real tears and were genuinely sympathetic. This was when the Senate was debating what he did or didn't do with Monica, and he was here being a genuine human being. People of Omagh feel he was a saint. And he urged the politicians to do something. He told the leader of the Protestants to go to a Catholic funeral and say something, and he did. And then we [could get to where we are today].

The Real IRA bombed a fishmonger in Belfast, August 1993. to destroy the peace and generate Protestant retaliation. The Protestants did retaliate, on 31 October 1993. They chose Halloween because everyone gathers for parties. There's a pub in a village six miles east of Derry. A pub was having a Halloween party. They were told this was the HQ of the local IRA, and they were told this would be a "soft target." A herd of Loyalist paramilitaries went to this bar, kicked in the doors, stood in the doorway and shouted "trick or treat." And they sprayed the bar with gunfire. They reloaded and sprayed the bar again. The guns jammed on the third time, and they made

their getaway. That took all of about five minutes. And after those horrendous five minutes, nine people were dead. Eight Catholics, one Protestant.

They made their escape at 10:20. Two hours later, I was arrested and charged with the nine murders. I was taken to Armagh in handcuffs to be interrogated by the REC. They said I was the Supreme Commander of the Ulster Freedom Fighters. I can't even command the respect of my dog! They said I may not have pulled the trigger but I ordered the murder. I was arrested because my car, which I had sold that morning, was used as the getaway vehicle.

As far as the police were concerned, I was guilty. They interrogated me for three days. They could give the guys in Guantanamo lessons. Their first words were 'confess now, because we're going to beat a confession from you.'

All through the Troubles, Protestants had heard [and disregarded] complaints from Catholics about police abuse. We felt if you're in jail, you must be guilty. But there is no smoke without fire. I was innocent. So innocent that I didn't want a lawyer. I didn't need one; I didn't do anything. But these guys believed I did. They threw everything under the sun at me. They denied me food. There was light deprivation. They used noise pollution. I wasn't permitted to wash, to use a toilet. They threatened to arrest my wife, my parents, and my parents-in-law. They threatened to have my children put into care. By the third day, my words to the lead officer were "look, you ignorant bastard, give me a fucking piece of white paper and I'll sign the bottom, and you write whatever the fuck you like." I was prepared to sign a blank confession because at that point, spending the next 225 years in jail was preferable to more interrogation. And it was at that point that I felt those young Catholics were right. Because these guys were capable of anything. Thankfully, I did have a lawyer, who advised me not to admit to doing anything I didn't do, and not to sign anything, and he would get me out that evening. And he did keep his word. I was released without charges, but they still hold my DNA and my fingerprints on file. I lost 56 pounds in two weeks, because of the stress that caused me. I didn't sleep properly for 18 months. Every time I closed my eyes, I would hear the bolts.

My politics changed at that point. Because tomorrow, if they decide to have a united Ireland, I will work for a United Ireland. But if that doesn't work, in 50-60 years, we can go and look for another model of government.

My passport says I'm British, but I know I'm an Irishman.

Am I still a Protestant? Yes, by accident of birth. Am I still a unionist? Yes, but I believe in a different union: the union of Ireland. You can't have a state within a state. It would be like Wyoming trying to rule Massachusetts. Am I still a Loyalist? Yes, I'm loyal to those who are loyal to me. And I believe the way forward for us is if we can take the religion out of politics, the politics out of religion, and both out of education.

Nigel Gardner, former UDP member, now working to integrate ex-prisoners back into society (Ex-Prisoners Interpretive Centre, EPIC), from working-class Londonderry.

My first introduction to a Roman Catholic was working at a shirt factory. 14th August, the British army were deployed to the streets of Londonderry. We thought it would go to civil war, and I thought, what are my options? Join a paramilitary organization? My mom said, the conflict will start with the gun and end with the gun. And I took a step back.

In April, the Ulster Defense regiment was formed, and I joined. But I questioned myself why? Could I contribute something to the community? 1971-74 were the most horrific years. 475+ murdered. I realized then I had taken the right decision. I was contributing to peace. A friend of mine was kidnapped, held for two days, tortured, murdered, and mutilated beyond recognition. That was my first insight to losing someone close. I felt extremely bitter. Did I want revenge? Absolutely. But I realized I'd be as bad as them. I'm a trained professional soldier and I must get on with the job.

I lost 34 close friends, murdered at their workplace, at home, or turning the ignition on their car, or gunned down from a passing car.

How has it shaped me? I ask myself day in and day out, was it worth it? I think it was.

1985, signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement by Thatcher. I opposed that, not by violence, but by protests. I believed Ian Paisley was God. I realized in 1994 how stupid I was. Mr. Paisley incited hatred. 1986, I went full-time into the regiment, posted to England for two years. In 1992, the regiment was disbanded and mustered into the Royal Irish Regiment. Our commander said "Walk into history with your head held high." And I said "How can you fucking say that?" 300+ in the regiment killed, many more wounded. I resigned. Went to England and came back Valentine's Day 1997. I was back home where I belong, but no job. I looked at the area where I lived: abject poverty. What can I do to make a difference? And part of me said, you served 22 years in the army, you've done your bit. But my conscience spoke louder.

That was a process that led to my engaging in the other. With people who had been my enemy, who had tried to kill.

I was told I was in extreme danger, move out of your home. I refused. But I carried a gun. Nobody has the right to take life. Yeah, I was apprehensive. But the skin was the same, the laughter, the blood, and tears were the same. And I thought, my god, why were people involved in the conflict over a piece of grass. No war, no conflict is worth 4000 lives.

After three years, I was offered a position with React Northwest, working with prisoners. It took me a different direction. To meet elements of the Republican movement.

The commonality is very important to remember. What have we got in common to unite us as people?

After my funding had dried up, I was offered a position with Community Restorative Justice—still to this day, the only Protestant employed by them. I had to learn to understand the ethos. They believed their own propaganda, and I challenged them: there are two sides to every story. But the truth eventually comes out. It has not been accepted that working-class Protestants also had inadequate housing, poor education, the same inequalities...

I cannot take sides in the work that I do. We got funding from Northern Ireland and from Europe. All the groups got together and we formed a coalition including IRA, Provo IRA, UDA, Ulster Freedom Fighters, and one of the most violent—INLA. We devised a program that focuses on

- Conflict transformation
- Citizenship
- Social change

We deal with conflict—how do we transform not just the combatants, but all those involved. That includes the government.

Citizenship: going into schools, with all sides, telling their story. The stories are not glamorous. Jack McDonald, former UDA commander, says when the bell rings, 'I'm not finished.'

Social change: how can we deal with fragmented communities? Build an infrastructure? Create employment? We create employment for young builders, electricians, and plumbers, building affordable housing. And that money is plowed back in through a credit union. 1%.

Sectarianism is no different than racism or homophobia. All hate crimes. We looked at areas where minority groups were moving in and people were taking offense at it. We looked at human rights, at equality. We don't discriminate against anyone. Those days are long gone. They are delivering an equitable service.

After the killing of two soldiers, some Loyalists wanted to go back to war. Three people kept them talking with the diverse groups involved with our personal peace project. It was hard talking, blue language. But it was confident and resolute that we are here to support the peace process. I find that very encouraging...

A small minority do not like homosexuals. So we held a day conference and we light on the social time together, and we let people know, I'm straight, do you have a problem with me sitting here with people from the gay-lesbian community?

And there are young kids who are labeled antisocial. We have drug problems, serious underage drinking (12-15 year olds). They get paralytic. The scumbags who put tablets in their drinks—all of a sudden the dealer has a recruit. £10 to a 13-year-old—it's a hell of a lot of money. He eventually becomes not only a drug addict but a dealer. This is how Republicans or Loyalists still control an area. I'm working hard to reach the children. We get the kids to come together. As you'd expect, they sit on one side and the others sit on the other side. No mixing. WE looked at sports team, then looking at the structure of the communities. What does this neighborhood bring, who came from that neighborhood. And over time, friendship, Facebook connections. That fear of the unknown has gone away.

People talk about our shared future, our shared history, let's embrace. But how do you embrace everybody's history, everybody's culture? Nobody owns it.

And if we don't learn from the past, we're damned to repeat it. It's important that our politicians stop playing the orange and green card.

I look at conflict today in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq—it's the working class communities who suffer. The leaders have gold rings and Rolexes, while the kids are starving.

Through the conflict, the churches stayed away. I'm a great believer in pastoral guidance and care, to get the kids off the street. There's a Cornerstone Church in Londonderry that does street pastoring in the hard-hit areas. Not to preach the Gospel but to know them and talk to them.

We tell them, there's a better alternative. Once you get a criminal conviction, [your life is] not going anywhere...

I'm not asking anyone to forget the past. But we can park it. We talk today of victims and survivors. Define your own personal meaning of what is a victim and what is a survivor.

I'm involved in politics because I want to look at the bread and butter issues. I want equilibrium across the board. David Irvine, the only paramilitary to admit involvement, was forced to defuse his own bomb. He became a peace maker, and Gerry Addams, other Sinn Féin leaders attended his funeral. Mark Irvine (muralist) is his son...

Should Ireland be united? I think it will be, but not in my lifetime. If under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, they hold the referendum and a majority votes for the Republic—this is where reparation comes in. The Brits would rather get rid of us, we're costing too much bloody money. We're talking billions to stem the conflict. But I believe the British Government, the European Parliament, and the US would pay billions to have an Ireland that everyone would like to see. I think this is achievable but not in my lifetime.

If we are prepared to stand above the parapet and take a risk—life's a gamble—let's enjoy it instead of antagonizing one another. I look at the kids starving. If you're a person of any emotion, you'll shed a tear. So I believe charity begins at home. I believe Britain should pull out of Afghanistan and Iraq, and likewise American forces. We look at abject poverty in the US, people living on the streets. Is that any way to protect citizens? I don't think President Obama or Prime Minister Cameron has done enough, because it's based on politics. Governments gamble with our lives. That's what they did in Northern Ireland.

1972, Sinn Féin were already in negotiations, how can we achieve peace in Northern Ireland? Brits weren't willing to negotiate. That year also was the Munich games, and the Israeli athletes gunned down in their rooms. I believe the bigger picture—what did the state of Israel know in 1972? Golda Meir ordered [retaliation]. The bigger picture is international global terrorism—Al Qaida. Northern Ireland was a training ground for British in Afghanistan, similar terrain.

A Northern Ireland Home Secretary in the 1970s said Northern Ireland had reached an "acceptable level of violence." Violence at any level is not acceptable.

If I can make a difference one rung on the ladder, I will achieve something. I've got to keep studying morning, noon, and night: how can I make things better for you? If we sit down together, we can achieve something. I believe nothing is impossible...

I go into some of the prisons in Northern Ireland, and I bring former combatants. If you're in prison, your life is wasted. Perception has become a reality.

Re-imaging: changing the murals from violence messages to peace messages.

Jon McCourt, Catholic Peace Activist

I've spent the last 32 years as a volunteer with the Peace and Reconciliation Group in Derry. 32 years in which I believe every day we've been involved, we've made something change. We've helped alter a situation.

1979, coming to 1980, just before the first hunger strike. We had a war still going on, people dying on a weekly basis. We had 5-6000 soldiers on the streets, over 600 policemen, for a population of around 100,000. And they could call in an extra thousand police and up to 20,000 soldiers if they felt they needed them.

My initial purpose wasn't to stop the war, but to make war not the only option...

My father was knocked down and had brain injuries. My mother was eight months pregnant with my younger sister, and she went into labor.

Somebody made a decision that temporarily we'd go into care. That temporary care lasted ten years. I was brought up in a boys' home...I didn't meet my two brothers until I was in that home seven years. We were separated. I was put in the juniors, my older brother was in the middle section, my little brother in the nursery. They took away our names. I was #10...

I came out of there when I was 14, My mother got a house in public housing, and we lived in the Craggin, the housing estate [housing project] that overlooks the city...

Because I was tall, I played basketball. By the time I came out of the school, I'd been given a scholarship to an engineering school, and I thought, I am set for life...

Class started in September. Someone put a poster about a civil rights march in Derry, October 5, 1968. Civil rights—that's Martin Luther King territory, what's that got to do with us? They were talking about jobs, housing, and votes. But I was living in a 3-bedroom house; it had nothing to do with me. I was 17 and too young to vote.

But I'm curious, and took a walk over to the demonstration, on the other side of the river. Local government didn't want a bunch of Fenians in the middle of the sacred city of Londonderry, so they banned the march. I had prearranged to meet up with a friend—a Protestant. We stood around figuring out what to do. Then I saw the big police tenders drive past with 10 or 15 police in each. They went off across the bridge. I turned to my Protestant friend and asked if he was going with me, and he said no. I didn't see him again for 35 years.

The Catholic community had had more fear of the priests than the police. We'd had no contact with them. We had no crime. There hadn't been a murder in Derry since 1923. Nobody broke into houses. They had closed two police stations for lack of use...

I was heading across the bridge and then I heard screaming, saw water cannon spray. The police were beating people back across the river—the cream of Catholic society. I followed this demonstration. It had started with about 400; there were 200 left, and they made it to Guild Hall [a major Derry civic building]. They took it inside to a dance hall in a hotel. They were talking about police brutality, and then they started talking about local government, the economy, gerrymandering, and the connections between these.

Derry had had a 70% Catholic majority since time immemorial, but from 1922 to 1972, that majority never had a majority on the City Council, because the government drew the electoral boundaries.

In the North Ward, 6000 people, the business community, predominately Unionist, were entitled to eight representatives, and they elected eight Unionists.

The South Ward was 90% Catholic, high population density. 12-13,000. They elected eight Nationalists. But the East Ward elected four more Unionists, with its 60% Unionist majority.

Our council buries the dead, sweeps the streets, supplies services, sets the tax rate. But uniquely in Northern Ireland, the local council and the mayor were responsible for the allocation of housing, and whether housing is going to be built.

There was always a property qualification in voting. So the 70% Catholic majority—how do you stop Catholics from voting? You don't build houses for Catholics.

And out the window went the engineering career and all the rest of it. I spent ten years in a boys' home because my mother couldn't get a house in Derry, as a Catholic. So I started marching, waved the placards, sang the songs. We ended up almost with a weekly riot after the protest march.

In January 1969, there was a civil rights march from Belfast to Derry. 50 or 60 at the start, maybe 120 by Derry. Six miles out of Derry is a dip in the road by a narrow, mucky river. And as they entered that small valley, the police escort magically disappeared, and Loyalists started ambushing the demonstrators with rocks and bottles.

Word got into Derry and quite a few of us were making our way out there, to Burntollet. We went on and the march got to the Guild Hall, beaten and bloodied.

January 3, 1969, the police decided they'd get their own back. They went down to the Bogside [Derry's largest Catholic neighborhood], a 100% Unionist police force, started kicking in the doors and beating anyone they found. Someone wrote on the wall, in black paint, "You are now entering Free Derry." In one night, we almost completely barricaded off an area 3/4 mile deep, 1/2 mile wide. That was a no-go area to the servants of government for the next 2-1/2 years. When the government wanted to take it back, in July, 1972, they sent 22,500 soldiers—twice the

force the Americans used to conquer Falujah. With tanks and armored cars, heavy-duty machine guns. Almost two soldiers for every adult that lived in the area.

I got involved in quite a few of the riots going on in 1969. Some demonstrators were chased by police, escaped through the back door, and the police beat the family that lived there, including a three-year-old girl. The father died of his injuries. There was a lot of anger. Sammy was buried in July 1969, and the first opportunity the younger people thought we would have a chance to get our own back on the police was 11 August, when tens of thousands of "apprentice boys" came to celebrate the victory of [Protestant] King William. So that afternoon, we waited for the parade. The police turned up on time. Eventually the first stone was thrown, and then the first bottle. And then the police tried a batten charge. August 11-14, 1969 was the three-day Battle of the Bogside. They fired 3000 canisters of tear gas. There were three big blocks of apartments, 9-10 stories high. From the top, stones and petrol bombs rained down. On the third day, Wednesday, the RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Unionist police] were almost beaten and they authorized use of the special constabulary. The B Specials were authorized to open fire on anything that moved in the Bogside.

When the first young soldier jumped out of the truck, no one knew that half a million soldiers' feet would be part of Britains' longest military operation, and cost 3700 lives.

And then to take the pressure off us in Derry, Belfast and other cities started rioting.

There was a sort of negotiation between the people inside the barricades and the police outside. And if there was anything that would have normally needed police, we could use the military police and not bring in the RUC.

There was talk of Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Jesus. But at 17, I felt that once I'd turned both cheeks, I had no alternative to violence. I knew the army were here to complete the job the army had started. In August 1969, I joined the IRA. And that's where I spent the next seven years. I fought, I built barricades, I spent most of my time fighting. Within six months, some of our people started dying. The conflict had an escalation over the next year, year and a half. And in response to what they saw as total breakdown, they introduced internment. Any police officer higher than an inspector who felt someone could be a threat to the security of the state—he could be held for as long as that threat existed. In 1971, in one night, they took away 400 people in 4000 house raids. They used isolation, sleep deprivation, white noise. People tied and hooded, stuck in boilers, put in stress positions—40 years later, they were using the same thing in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. There was no judge, no arrest warrant. You were just detained on the word of a police officer. No habeas corpus.

The Civil Rights Association decided to hold a big anti-internment rally in Derry January 30, 1972. This was Bloody Sunday.

There were probably 20,000 people on this march. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association didn't want a conflict with the Army, so 100-150 yards short of the army barrier, they placed their stewards to redirect the march into Free Derry. And thousands of people complied.

I'm 19, coming on 20, and I have a choice: go and listen to speeches—been listening to speeches for three years, and my view then was nothing had changed. It was more exciting to throw rocks at the army. A bunch of us broke through the stewards and ended up about 250 yards short of where the march was supposed to end. Stones were thrown, rubber bullets and tear gas starts getting fired. When they started the water cannon, I noticed they were taking the front line soldiers off the front line. They knew the ritual of this riot: someone's mother would call and they'd all go home for tea. But they were moving a different batch of soldiers in, and I knew I didn't want to be caught by these soldiers. Three minutes passed; they pulled back their barriers. The armored cars went into the Bogside and shot nine people in 18 minutes. Some of them were personal friends. The first of Peggy Deary's sons joined the IRA because the army shot his mother on Bloody Sunday, and three of her sons successively joined the IRA.

Later, walking the streets of Derry, McCourt gets even more personal:

"Here's where they killed an 11-year old boy, shooting a rubber bullet into his head at 200 miles per hour. Over here is where my friend Michael Kelly tried to help, and was shot."

Every block and alley had its own tragedy, either on Bloody Sunday or on a different day, and Jon McCourt knew all of their names, ages, and how they died. He knew where each unit of four soldiers were deployed, and when and how they fired. He showed us pictures taken that day by a French news photographer, Gilles Peress—and one that he hadn't seen until many years later when he testified before the inquiry commission:

"Over here is where James Wray and I were running to take cover. When I got to the corner, James was no longer beside me. I didn't realize at first that he had been killed. We used to play basketball together. And then I looked across and saw the soldier, holding his rifle in shooting position. He looked at me, shrugged, and pointed his rifle down."

That day, they brought their war to us. And we would bring our war to them. And for the next 4-5 years, that's what happened.

I spent three years sleeping in cars and ditches and sofas and not one night in bed. I got Farmer's Lung and couldn't go to hospital because the police and army were looking for me.

In 1978 I came back, intending to reengage in this conflict. But I looked at what we'd done, ten years after we started, we were in a worse place than we'd been. 20,000 army, 23,000 police on the streets, Loyalists looking for Catholics, Catholics looking for Loyalists, businesses in the old city blown up, and Derry had probably lost 300 people.

By 1974, five of my 1964 classmates were dead, and I watched three of them die. There was no investment in Derry. The shirt industry had started to collapse. By 1980, there wouldn't be a shirt industry in Derry. Our young people were without futures and without hope.

I looked and thought if we had been responsible for creating this, surely we had a responsibility for fixing it.

In 1978, I started talking with other people who had fought. We eventually looked at a small community project started by Catholic priests... And we worked with a Protestant pastor who was burned out of his house for walking across the street to wish the Catholic priest a happy Christmas.

And I realized that my community was not the only one suffering. We started taking practical steps to reengage people.

1969-76. Thousands of Protestants had left their side of the river. They had lived next door to us, worked in the same factories. And that gave us some inroad to engage with them. Eventually, questions started to be asked about what this big Fenian was doing in a Protestant area. I told them I was trying to change the condition on the ground to allow them to rebuild their lives and their community. One guy I worked with, Cecil McKnight. We were sitting in his living room, and someone walked up to his window and killed him. This was not a risk-free thing. I hadn't got a major problem with the IRA. I was clear with them that this was not about compromising their war effort, their weapons, their manpower, but about trying to create some kind of hope for our young people. So for over 30 years, that is what I did.

I've had my car burned, my house bombed, my kids beaten. Peace back then was a dirty word.

And I was pulled into the back of a car and a guy held a Colt 45 to my head. So I had a conversation with him.

Back in 1988, having had the army come kicking down my door for almost seven years in the early '70s, we decided to go kick down theirs. We were trying to divert our young people into youth projects and clubs, rather than be on the street with stones and bottles and risk being shot or run down by an armored car. We needed to talk to all the parties to the conflict, and that meant the army. After a week of going to see them, sitting at a table with the Commander of Land Forces, the equivalent of Colin Powell, who sat there and asked us how they would contribute and how we would achieve. We met every soldier who came into the city, and told them what the city was like, where the threat was. And that their behavior dictated the level of threat that would come at them. It was very uncomfortable, and for the people training them in England, extremely uncomfortable. But it was the truth.

At that point, we had definitely started what would become the peace process.

I still remember the first time I went to the army base, and wanting to skulk down in the van so nobody would see me. But that's how change was made...

Put me back in the same place in August 1969, and I would not do one thing different. But I'd try not to lose so many friends...

I lobbied for prisoner release as part of the Good Friday Agreement, but I realized there are grieving family members who have to walk past the murderers of their loved ones. We don't get to pick. Sometimes there are very hard pills to swallow.

Paul Connor, Pat Finucane Centre for Human Rights

Tony: Finucane was a solicitor who was murdered during the Troubles, in front of his family. His son married my wife's niece. It brings the issue right into my own family. Paul used to be on every time I turned on the television, talking about support for bereaved families.

Paul: The Rathmore Centre is a social economy enterprise, with shopping centre, post office—not-for-profit to benefit the local working class community. We have two more caseworkers in Armagh and one in Dublin.

Following Finucane's murder (1989), there were allegations of collusion between the army/police/MI5 and the loyalist paramilitaries.

Last year, the Prime Minister acknowledged and apologized for the collusion, but refused to open an inquiry. That would uncover too much of the dirty war.

We would dispute the notion that the conflict we've had here since 1968 has fundamentally been sectarian. We would dispute that it was about Catholics vs. Protestants. There's convincing evidence against that. We're not arguing that sectarianism and religious divisions have not been a cause. But we argue that they are a symptom of the economic discrimination that had its roots in the colonization of this country. And we don't believe in individualizing the guilt to say it's in their genetic makeup.

That doesn't recognize the structures and the history. And it completely and absolutely lets Britain off the hook. Their [frame] is that the British Army were peacekeepers. We would dispute that, and we have ample evidence. We frequently go to the National Archives in London and look at what's been declassified. They're really quite revealing. patfinucanecentre.org

British saw one enemy: IRA. They did not consider the Loyalist paramilitaries as the enemy. UVF and UVA (Protestant) were together responsible for 1200 deaths. Now the IRA did a lot of terrible things, but Loyalist paramilitaries murdered hundreds of other people, and there's clear evidence that the government were using them to carry out a dirty war that they could not be seen carrying out.

Yesterday, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, the Catholic Archbishop and the Church of Ireland bishop were commemorating the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. The investigator's report stated very clearly that the government was aware ahead [and involved].

Why? The IRA was fighting to bring an end to British rule in Ireland, one Ireland. The role of the British government was to stop that. And the Loyalists shared that goal.

You grew up and you saw the IRA killing your neighbors, and you wanted to defend your community. You had a number of choices: part-time or full-time police or soldier, and you fought the IRA. But if you thought, their hands are tied because of the need to stay within the law. Or you could join a paramilitary and take the war to the IRA, terrorize the community that produced the IRA. To carry out random acts of violence against Catholic civilians had the *raison d'être* of getting the people to withdraw support from the IRA: 'No, you can't stay in my house tonight.' It's a common counterinsurgency strategy around the world. The Russians did it in

Chechnya, the US in Nicaragua—created guerrillas. From our point of view, many of the actions of the paramilitaries here can be traced to that. And a lot of civilians died who didn't need to die.

What we do here, on a daily level: write and research articles, contribute to seminars and discussions of how to deal with the legacy of conflict. A lot of people have hurt a lot of people, across the board. If you extrapolated the death toll of 3,500 over a population of 1.5 million to the 300 million of the US, you're talking over a million dead. How do we come to terms of that so we're not sowing the further seeds of bitterness? And how do you get to the truth, and does the truth upset the peace?

If we begin prosecuting people now, for things that happened in the past 30-40 years. Some 19-year-old old soldier who's now in his 50s and diabetic and living in a flat in Manchester? We're never going to bring in the generals, the secretaries of state. The people who gave the orders.

One of the soldiers at Bloody Sunday, Soldier G (we didn't know their names) was responsible for four deaths. He killed his brother. John wants to see Soldier G prosecuted. And if you look at the actions, you say it's completely logical. Soldier G also killed the father of a friend of mine, Patrick Doherty. Tony (the son) is completely opposed to prosecution.

We are five caseworkers and one administrator. We provide a free confidential service to families who've lost loved ones, who want to find out more about how they lost a family member. And we engage with officials whose responsibility it is to [have that information].

In the US, you'd imagine that a family dealing with a violent death would have immediate contact with the police, district attorney, etc. But here, because one sector was completely disenfranchised and did not trust the police, the army, the institutions of state—my family thought Northern Ireland was an illegitimate state, and we were quite normal. My father would put up an Irish flag every St. Patrick's Day and the police would come around and tell him it was illegal. We used to cross the border on our bicycles, buy little flags, wave them in front of the police and run away. So in the immediate aftermath, they had almost zero contact. They often didn't even know when there was a trial. They weren't at the coroner's inquest, they weren't at the trial. They had only the information they gleaned from their own networks. Nothing from an official source. And there was massive distrust anyway.

Several years ago, a new Chief of Police was first brought over to investigate the murder of Pat Finucane and a number of others. He set up a new unit, the Historical Enquiry Team (HET)

A small number are from here. They review every single conflict-related death from 1969-98. They open the box, see what's in it, what should be in it, where they need to search, write to the family and ask, what questions do you have? We're going to produce a 30- to 50-page report. Within the confines of data protection and human rights protection (they won't tell the identities of the subjects). The investigations had been closed after 5-6 weeks; the files were very sparse. But sometimes, there's new evidence. On rare occasions, it could lead to new arrests.

We interface between the families and the HET, and the one other office—office of police ombudsman (where police did the killing). These investigations can take 6 months to 3-4 years.

Our job is to

1. Ensure that the process is the least traumatic as possible
2. Ensure that as much information is provided to the family as is humanly and legally possible.

How should a family know what questions to ask: was there a duty book, what was the forensics lab report? We're almost cultural translators. Families will recount the circumstances. Sometimes what you've been told makes sense if you grew up here, but no sense if you grow up in England. Why was a woman banging a rubbish bin lid? To warn people to get out of their houses because there was a raid.

It meant something for us if an area had been secured and then the army was no where to be found during the murder [collusion with the paramilitaries]. In one murder, we knew the army helicopter had been over her house for 18 of the previous 24 hours. How did the paramilitaries get in to plant the bomb? For us, it meant something, but to the HET investigators, you have to say, go and look there, this is what it means.

The other thing, as a new add-on, we realized the families were left with a report that was maybe helpful, but it was written in dry police language. It didn't tell the story of the rest of the family who didn't know their father, brother, mother growing up. Very often, families didn't speak of the person that had died. They were afraid if they spoke too much, that the son would get so angry he'd join a unit himself. So the second part of it is for us to do that part, to interview the family, blend the dry forensic report with the more holistic narrative.

[Have there been safe-situation dialogues between combatants and victims?]

A big problem is that all the soldiers' identities have been withheld. The HET has to do a lot of work to figure out which soldiers were in what unit when. It's illegal not to have kept the records, but the British say they have no records of which soldiers are involved.

In a couple of those cases, we've asked that the HET deliver a letter from the family. We've never gotten a response.

But there have been cases where the soldier or the Minister of Defence apologizes to the family, but it's framed in legalisms because they're afraid they could still get charged. The law stops a process that could be very helpful to families. So when it came to the Bloody Sunday tribunal, the soldiers were all anonymized. We actually know who they are for Bloody Sunday—it would be interesting if that were made public—but the families don't.

One soldier said he didn't know he had killed an unarmed civilian until he'd gotten back to England. Communication was so bad! They were on duty/off duty four hours, here for four months and then back out. For them to be supplied took a convoy of heavily armored trucks. This base (where we are now) was attacked every day all day long except for the hour when kids got out of school. They felt they were very far away, they'd call it "over there." They saw us as an enemy terrorist population and we saw them as an army of occupation.

A few attempts have been done to bring both parties together, by the BCC, and they were completely ham-fisted, and it went all wrong. But there's other examples. There's an IRA man, Patrick McGee, who bombed a hotel in Brighton. He almost killed Margaret Thatcher and did kill several others. The daughter of one of the victims has become friends with McGee.

We receive independent donations, from an American Law society, from Germany. But our main stream of funding is EU peace funding.

There's a criticism that we're naive working with the HET because it is still part of the British police. And we're called naive for "letting the soldiers off the hook." But we start and end with the needs of the family. It's grand if you have highfallutin' ideas, but if you have a family that are aging, lost a loved one, trying to find out what happened and get acknowledgement, that can often be fulfilled not through the justice system but by people. We're willing to go off the record and use different ways, if it works for a family. But there's always a tension with the more legal approach and the campaign against immunity.

One case: official story, they'd killed a gunman. When you looked at the facts, where the man was standing, where the soldier was, it couldn't stand up. It was absurd. And he did acknowledge that, though he didn't give an explanation for what did happen. We then went to the Ministry of Defence and said, this was an innocent man, you should acknowledge that. And the Chief of Staff (head of the British army) wrote to the family. But they haven't done more. They're worried that we'll keep coming, and we are. At the beginning of that process, that family had very little trust in the HT, and their first report was very bad. They believed the official story. But by the final report, they were in a much better place. And then we hold a press conf, release the official results, and get the official record corrected. That can be really helpful for a family. You think 4-5 family members will come to the press conference, and there'll be 30-40 of them there. But it takes a long time to get the HET to that point. It's always an uphill battle. It takes a long time to trust that process.

Comparing with South Africa: There are a number of lessons. South Africa's process was deeply problematic, even though it's held up as the Rolls-Royce of tribunals. Only about 5% participated, and the interviews were only 20 minutes. It was very linked to Christian ideas that you could only have truth if you have reconciliation. We would argue that we'd never applied that process to truth processes in other situations. We'd never hide child abuse because it would upset people. So we've learned good and bad lessons from South Africa. A lot of people—I met a woman from Argentina at a conference. For the first time, they're seeing prosecutions in the military who did the dirty war. I think it's important that these prosecutions are happening. A soldier in Guatemala got 300 years recently. If you don't learn those lessons, those human rights violations will reappear elsewhere. I think it's important that [war criminals are] on trial in Yugoslavia.

There have been only four prosecutions of British soldiers. They were found guilty, sentenced to life, released early, and all reenlisted. What message does it send when the man next to you in Afghanistan got away with murdering a white kid in Belfast?

I do believe that had soldiers been convicted here in the early 1970s of killing civilians, we would not have had the violence. It was the immunity that convinced people that we had an illegitimate state.

We only found the ruling when it was declassified many years later, and it said "the soldier could not have committed murder because he was on duty and didn't know the person he shot. He did not have malice aforethought and therefore could not commit murder." That Attorney General to me is as criminally culpable. That was six weeks before Bloody Sunday. What message does that send to soldiers?

There is another commission that can take evidence that can never be used in criminal prosecutions, and that unlocks the door.

If you have a 19-year-old soldier, terrified in the middle of the night, and he kills a civilian—that was wrong, but it's relative to the situation. If you lead soldiers into the Bogside on Bloody Sunday in broad daylight, clearly there's a level of command responsibility that goes right up the ladder. The adjutant on that day was Capt. Mike Jackson. The soldiers were based in Belfast. He invented the [doctored] casualty list that talked about nail bombs, etc. He went on to become Chief of Staff of the British Army. He led the first Iraq invasion. I still think he [rather than the soldier who shot] should have faced charges for a number of things that happened here. But it's easy for me to stand back; I didn't lose anyone.

When we get a report, we never accept it as final. We work with the families, interview witnesses, and come back with a list of 10 to 60 questions.

[Paul's personal motivation?]

I spent a lot of time abroad, and I learned it was actually possible to achieve something. A lot of it had been just oppositional. But we realized a lot of things had happened but nobody had ever documented it. And we decided to go to the people responsible and demand answers. And we started bothering them all over the place, they were really fed up. Getting answers was the single most important thing. And it's not rocket science. It's pretty straightforward. We are almost finished a book on a certain set of cases we worked with in mid-Ulster, where there was a death squad of police, paras, and army who were responsible for more than 100 deaths. That will be ready later this year.

John Hume (Nobel Peace Prize Laureate)

I brought Teddy Kennedy to a little ruined cottage outside of Buncrana, told him this is where his grandfather was born.

The world is a much smaller place now, and therefore we're in a stronger position to achieve a world in which there is no longer any war.

Principles of conflict resolution—I learned them when I first joined the European Parliament. I stood on the bridge between France and Germany.

- Respect for difference.
- Create institutions that respect the differences

- Get those sections working together on their common interests, spilling sweat together, not blood

When you look at the EU Council of Ministers, civil service, parliament—all countries are there, working in their common interest. 100 years ago, people couldn't have believed a united Europe was possible. This message should be sent to any area of conflict in the world.

Proportionally elected parliament, and the government ensures participation in social and economic development.

E pluribus unum sums up what I've been saying: from many, we are one. The essence of our unity is respect for our diversity. We need to make that the philosophy of the whole world.

Founding of the credit union movement in Northern Ireland. I studied CUs in the US and thought we should have it here. It cost a fortune to borrow money. I was 23, my father was unemployed. When we needed anything, we had to go to pawn shops. CUs let ordinary people use money to help themselves. I traveled the country setting them up, they made me president of the CU League when I was 27. And we joined the US CU insurance fund, so when you die, your payments are made.

This city was the WWII HQ of the American Navy. And American sailors started going with Derry girls, and Hitler's U-Boats surrendered in our harbour.

Padraig McLochlin, Sinn Fein Member of Irish Republic Parliament

The Ulster Plantation system, with Scottish and English emigrées, was a way for the British to fill the power vacuum created by the flight of the Earls (who left from right near Inch Island, many of them traveling across the island to the debarkation point)—and were deliberately concentrated in Ulster because that's where the resistance had been strongest.

Today, there about 6 million people on the island of Ireland, 4.5 million of them in the Republic. Before the potato famine of 1840s, it had been about 8 million, but one in four either emigrated or died. Of those, only about 60,000 are fluent in Irish (though many more speak a little).

And those were part of the Irish culture movement of the late 19th/early 20th centuries, rescuing from oblivion a language that had been forbidden. The rise of Irish nationalism caused not only a resurgence of Irish language, sports, and culture, but also a political awakening, fueled by resentment in the south of Ireland over Irish boys dying for Britain during WWI (while in the north, it was pride: "we die for king and country.") Other sparks were the women's rights and labour/trade union rights movements. Thus, the Easter Rising proclamation of independence was nonsexist, nonsectarian.

The Irish were looking for civil liberties and equal rights, but not necessarily independence. They were largely unsupportive of Easter Rising, but shocked into more radical stance when the British executed all the ringleaders. Sinn Fein (SF) stepped into the breach, and elected a pro-independence slate to the British Parliament in 1918, and the first Irish Parliament, with a programme based on the Easter Rising proclamation, forming in 1919. This led to the Irish

Republican Brotherhood reinventing itself as the Irish Republican Army (led by Michael Collins), and waging a two-year war for independence. Those in the south got their rights in 1922, but Republicans in the north essentially faced apartheid.

After Bloody Sunday, a lot of young men joined the IRA. My father was one, and he was arrested and jailed for nine years of a 12-year sentence. I was one-and-a-half. I used to visit him in jails all across the country. Some time after he got out, I said I wanted to join the IRA. I was 12. My father said he hoped to God the Troubles would be over by the time I was old enough; he didn't want that life for me.

Through 1976, IRA prisoners were held in camps. Then the British began to treat them as criminals. First, one prisoner refused to don the prison garb or cooperate in any way; this spread and was known as the Blanket Rebellion, because the prisoners wore blankets. The next step was a hunger strike in 1980, followed by another in 1981, this one led by Bobby Sands; 10 men starved to death. The Brits claimed the independence movement was a small minority, but Sands, dying in prison, was elected to Parliament, as were two other hunger strikers—this was a major PR coup against the Brits. And these were the seeds of the peace process. It showed that there could be another way.

John Hume every now and then tried to engage with the IRA. And they eventually agreed to a ceasefire.

Now, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Israel, and other countries are studying our peace process. It is a beacon for the world. If we can do it here, with hundreds of years of hatred, we can do it anywhere. To see all the different factions sitting together in the Stormont (Northern Ireland Parliament) is amazing...

Danny Devenny and Mark Irvine, Catholic and Protestant muralists of Belfast

100-year old tradition of murals in the Loyalist community. Mark was involved with murals that celebrated his culture, rather than sectarian. Danny began by muraling against the oppression. They've been working together since 2007, friends/colleagues before. Inspired to work together when Ian Paisley began working with Martin McGuinness.

In the old days, the British soldiers would dump buckets of paint on the more radical murals, and then the artists would come in the early hours and repair them.

They look for themes that express commonality. The current mural depicts refugees from the Titanic in two lifeboats: a crowded one with women and children, and a spacious one showing the rich people who paid for a seat, just 12 to a boat. Looking on: the workers who built or operated the ship.

Now they've become very popular, getting commissions, and also continue to do separate work in their own communities. Many on historical themes (e.g., penal laws). They have to fight against some of the "do-gooder commissions who want to paint sunflowers." But these message murals are what people come to see. It is both visual and verbal communication, and much cheaper than doing 10,000 posters.

We'd had a quick look at a few of the Nationalist murals on Falls Road on our way to meet Danny and Mark, which were similar in subject matter to the Bogside murals in Derry. Later we got an even quicker look at some Loyalist murals in East Belfast, but so much of their subject matter was focused on violence, it left me feeling queasy—a feeling that deeply intensified when a car drove by and its passenger pretended he was shooting a machine gun at the 20 of us who had gathered to look at one of the Titanic murals.

One extra bit of interest: during the Troubles, bus drivers started refusing to go into the dangerous neighborhoods. So a bunch of people started importing used black taxicabs from London, and now both on the Catholic Falls Road and the Protestant Shankill Road, collective taxis go up and down their respective hills, taking full loads of people at a lower cost than the bus.

Note: the above was written from memory a few hours after we met with Danny and Mark. It was not possible to type exact quotes while standing in a crowd on the streets of Belfast, in front of their latest (still-in-progress) mural.

Tony Johnston, proprietor of Inch House Centre for Irish Studies

The center opened in 2002, but I've been running programs like this since 1989, in conjunction with the university, and as a community effort.

The first university to come was UMass Boston, and it came because of a link we had built between Boston, Galway, and Derry, as a part of the peace process. It was felt that cultural and educational links, as well as investment links, needed to be developed. And the thinking was that if students came, faculties and universities would follow. And there's more to be done, but, I think it has proved out. Things have changed over time, and in general, universities have become more aware of the need to internationalise and promote trans-world understanding. And in peculiar ways, 9/11 acted as a catalyst to push universities farther along that road.

One of the things that makes educational links unique is that nothing negative can be said about them, so every politician is happy to support educational exchange, whereas they may have difficulty promoting foreign direct investment, as it can be seen to take jobs from their own community.

Since we've opened, we have hosted 27 different US universities and colleges, and this is our 98th or 99th program, totaling over 2000 US students, and approximately 75 US professors. We don't target any other market—for no particular reason—but we have kept students from Scottish universities, and shortly we'll be hosting a London university

Over time, the focus of our programs has changed from what we used to regard as breaking down barriers and presenting the Troubles—to where we now teach a lot of conflict resolution. It's a bit strange, because in the peace process, Americans came here to help us resolve the conflict. And now, given the pain that America's going through on various war fronts, Americans are coming here to learn about conflict resolution, peacemaking, and peacekeeping. One very interesting and poignant aspect of our work here has been with a rising number of young US veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, who are often still in battle mode when they come here, and haven't quite begun to question what the war they were involved in was really all about, and face their own rehabilitation issues. They've turned up from UMass, Grand Rapids, Virginia. We had a badly injured veteran here who stayed for two months after the program was over, because he

reckoned that the whole experience was doing him so much good. He's now employed in Michigan, in a professional job, and keeps in touch.

How did you get Catholics and Protestants to collaborate in the early days?

Personally, I don't stand on much ceremony. I'm quite forward in going directly to an individual and saying, perhaps this is something you should consider. In many places, the doors were open. But there are still places where the doors are tightly shut.

Another positive aspect: the presenters gain confidence in their convictions. They test their convictions on their American audience and get objective feedback. And many speakers come to me and say, 'this is the best thing that ever happened to me.' I never expected that, but it's a tremendous bonus.

One of the things we're struggling with is that the troubles are largely becoming historical. When I began these programmes, the troubles were current. The armored cars and the soldiers were on the streets, the American students walking around Derry were frisked by British soldiers, and there was ever-present and very real danger, though that was never targeted at visitors or tourists.

But there's a light side to what we do, as well. We like to think that we enable these young people to have a real intercultural experience at their own level, whether at music sessions or walking on the causeway coast or shopping in downtown Dublin. There's also a professional non-conflict resolution dimension to many of other programs. We tailor-make the programmes to each individual university—for example, for a school of Management, we will have lots of business input. For a school of history, lots of history input. Our most exciting programme that we're starting this year is palliative care nursing for students from Rhode Island. We have developed this programme with the input of Queens University of Belfast and Letterkenney Institute of Technology, Foyle Hospice in Derry, and the Children's Hospice in Belfast. We're really proud that this new programme is going to contribute significantly to the education of undergraduate nurses from the US, where we have been told children's hospices don't exist. They'll have a lot of professional days, but they will learn a little bit about the Troubles. We've already had enquiries from two other universities with regard to this nursing program. One of the highlights will be a tour of the new cancer research centre in Queens University, which is headed by my first cousin, a world-renowned oncologist, Dr. Patrick Johnston.

One of the things here is that the students who come today are getting to the stage where they were born after the Troubles ended, making it a different task. We're teaching history now. It's also strange for ourselves, because our own young people have no intimate knowledge of the Troubles. We have had law, criminal justice students here. We've had sociology students, management students, accounting students. And we have a thriving accountancy course with the University of Virginia. As part of that course, they spend three days working on joint projects with Irish students in University College, Dublin, translating accounts from US to European systems...

The overarching thing is promoting international understanding, developing young people that are more comfortable with other cultures, and, hopefully, will propagate this toward international understanding. In the last analysis, we are making young people aware of conflict and how it will be resolved—and we hope that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

How did you come to run the programme from Inch House?

This property used to belong to the O'Doughartaigh Association. Mr. Pat Daughtery, the clan herald, who lived here and was a great friend of mine, kept American students here for me from time to time. It became too big for him, and we bought the place. It was in need of massive renovation. There was no roof on the main building, none of those windows were there, the cottage didn't exist. It's a converted stable block. Our goal was to provide comprehensive service to US universities that wanted to send their students to Ireland, and that means planning and delivering their programme, their transport, their meals, their tours, and in some cases, their curriculum. From time to time, we've even graded papers. We have plans for expansion of the number of programmes, but these are difficult economic times. Whilst the number of programmes is rapidly expanding, the number of students on each programme has declined a bit. But all programmes are healthy. One thing we like is that people who come here keep coming back.

It's true that most students learn the most while they're here about themselves. Partly, many are away from home for the first time through another culture.

I was living for part of the Troubles 200 miles south of here, as a marketing executive for Guinness, and then as a department chair at two different institutes.

I came back to Derry because it was the right thing to do. We now know what contribution we can make, and we should come back and make it. Part of what I did at university was found jobs for over 800 students and placed them all over the world, and particularly in Washington DC, where in some years I had as many as 25 of my students working.

Tony has an ancestor who converted from Ulster Protestant to Catholic when he married a Catholic, and had the zeal of a convert. His grandparents lived in a cottage with no flooring, running water, or electricity. His father, in the late 1930s, was the first to have a university education. All 6 of his children did, though. Some of his family settled in Chicago and were very successful, active leaders in the Chicago Irish community, sent back money to educate youths in Chicago.

Three years ago, there were jobs in Ireland for everyone. Now my son works in England and my brothers work in Australia, and they're not coming back.

My purpose here is to give you historical links back to when the Troubles started. There are two issues:

1. The English are here, and they shouldn't be.
2. The Protestants don't like the Catholics

These are the two essentials.

Protestants couldn't cope with the idea that one of them would have a Catholic girlfriend. We had a series of awful butcherings. Catholics would not have done that. When JFK was elected, people bought TVs, and on TV they saw civil rights marchers in US and France, and they thought, we could do that here. And then they marched for their own freedom

and saw themselves beaten up on TV. And now they can't be attacked without it being on TV. TV was [a massive revolution].

I saw "Prince of Donegal" in the movies in the early 1960s. It was the first time we were allowed to see or learn anything about the history of Ireland. My grandfather used the back of the classroom door for Irish language lessons, because coats were hung and the inspectors wouldn't see it.

Pre-1600 Ireland, pre-800 Ireland was littered with religious artifacts. Now, ours is all gone, because of successive waves of invaders from the Vikings to the British. Sometimes something surfaces: the Mulla Chalice (used every Sunday in a service in Roscommon, 100 miles from here), the Book of Kells.

We're sitting in the haybarn of stables built to house Napoleon's soldiers in 1827. The house was the hunting lodge of an English landowner, built in 1710. Until the 1920s. Landlords could be extremely severe. But landlords couldn't run the estate without the tenants, and the tenants couldn't be protected without the landlord.

Tony took us to a Catholic burying ground in Derry. Tony stood at an IRA monument with a statue of a prominent Irish chieftain from hundreds of years ago, and went down the list: "this was my good friend, this was my uncle." Then he went up the hill a bit to another IRA monument that he hated, showing an IRA paramilitary with masked face and rifle. This he said he found deeply offensive, but no one had the courage to remove it, because they'd inevitably be killed.

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