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Daily Features

Day three: The Victims

Wednesday, February 14, 2007

Killed by the IRA for supplying the security forces - a Kilkeel woman on her dad's brutal slaying

Kenneth Graham (46), the owner of J Graham and Sons, a building suppliers in Kilkeel, Co Down, was killed by an IRA bomb underneath his car on April 27, 1990. The IRA said it was because he supplied building materials to the security forces. His daughter Manya was 13 and her sister Ashley was 10. Manya is now 30 and married to Kilkeel fisherman Gary Dickinson (34), with two daughters of her own, Kenzie (7) and three-year-old Heidi. Here, she tells Chrissie Russell about that fateful day

I was 13 and on my way back from a school hockey trip to Holland when it happened. As I came off the boat, my mum was waiting. She told me, 'Bad men have killed your dad'. This April, dad will be dead and buried 17 years, but I still feel we're left picking up the pieces, with no one ever held accountable.

Everyone thinks 'It's all over now', but it's nowhere near over for the innocent families left behind. It will never be over for us. People ask me if it gets easier over time - it doesn't. The pain never goes away, you just learn to live with it.

Dad was the owner of a family business in Kilkeel supplying building materials. Mum and dad always kept it from Ashley and me, but the IRA had been threatening dad because he supplied building materials to the security forces. Dad's attitude was that he 'wasn't going to let them beat him', but on April 27, 1990, he was killed when a bomb exploded under his car outside his house.

I remember shortly after his funeral mum, Ashley and I were in Kilkeel when a carload of lads drove past. They wound down the window, spat at us and cheered 'We got him'.

Both sides

My mum always told me that religion was not an issue in our house and dad built houses for both sides of the community. Until dad's death the Troubles had been a very distant thing to me, and it was very hard for me to understand why a republican would want to kill a Protestant just because he was supplying building materials. After his death, the firm stopped supplying the security forces - dad would have hated that.

I still feel very angry and I'm getting more angry as time goes on. Everything that happens in my life, I find myself wishing dad was there. When I did my GCSEs and my driving test and on my 18th and 21st birthdays - he wasn't there. When I married Gary we went to the Bahamas and did it on our own, because I couldn't face walking up the aisle without my dad there to give me away. But the worst thing is knowing that my children will never know their granddad.

It's insulting to hear Gerry Adams talking about a 'new beginning' - it doesn't work like that. He needs to sit down with me and give me answers that I feel make sense of what happened. The IRA's apology meant absolutely nothing to me. What they did never should have happened in the first place and I disagreed with prisoners being let out under the Good Friday Agreement. No one who killed innocent people should have been let out of prison, either IRA or loyalist. The IRA killed more during the Troubles, but no family from any background should have to go through what our family went through.

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Sometimes I feel people aren't sure if they should mention Dad because they're worried they'll upset me, but Ashley and I talk about him all the time and I like to tell my daughters about him. He used to take us to the show houses he'd built in Newcastle and let us play house - he loved having us with him, and I know he would have loved my daughters, Kenzie and Heidi.

My parents divorced when I was nine because the threats dad was getting put their marriage under pressure. The fact they were divorced almost made my grief more difficult, because I felt like I hadn't seen him as much as I wanted to.

I suffered from anorexia and bulimia for 10 years and only recovered quite recently. My family were very worried about me, but counselling helped me realise that it was my way of dealing with the trauma of dad's death. I now work part-time with Families Acting for Innocent Relatives (FAIR) and I'm studying at Queen's University, Belfast, for a qualification in counselling - it helped me so much, I want to be able to do the same for other people. The families left behind need more support and need to know that they won't be forgotten. Everybody keeps saying 'You must move forward', but most of us can't do that. It feels like now the IRA have supposedly decommissioned, the victims don't count anymore.

Realistically, I know there will probably never be people behind bars for killing dad, but if I could even get the names of the people who did it and make those names public, it would be something. I want it publicly recognised that people killed my dad ... I don't want his death just to be a statistic.

My sister and I never received any financial recompense for dad's death, but it really wouldn't have made a difference if we had. I would rather have justice than a cheque. My family and I now live in the house that dad built for my mother when they got married. Sometimes it's difficult, because every room is a memory. There are times I look out the window and I can see his car there.

I want to make sure dad's name is not forgotten; he needs a voice and for someone to keep fighting for him. I can't let it go and I know that he wouldn't. There are so many unheard voices, but maybe if mine is heard something will be done to recognise the others.

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