SILENT VOICES

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Contents

Preface

Silent Voices is a collection of personal stories. The contributors are people who have in some way been affected by Partition or the 'Troubles' in Ireland or by conflict elsewhere in the world. All have a specific Sligo connection although the stories are not all set in Sligo. The stories reflect the people who told them and it is their own voice and words that you read in this book. The stories were told to an interviewer and later edited by that interviewer in collaboration with the storyteller. What you read here is the final distillation from that process.

This collection does not set out to represent a definitive view of any event, person or place. It simply tells you, the reader, how the events recounted impacted on the storyteller. Some things you read may make you feel uncomfortable; some may make you feel sad. Others may cause you to laugh or smile or bring to mind friends lost, wisdom gained, times past. For some readers the events in the stories will be part of history, and maybe for many of us little bits of history will emerge through these pages that are made new by being told from a different perspective.

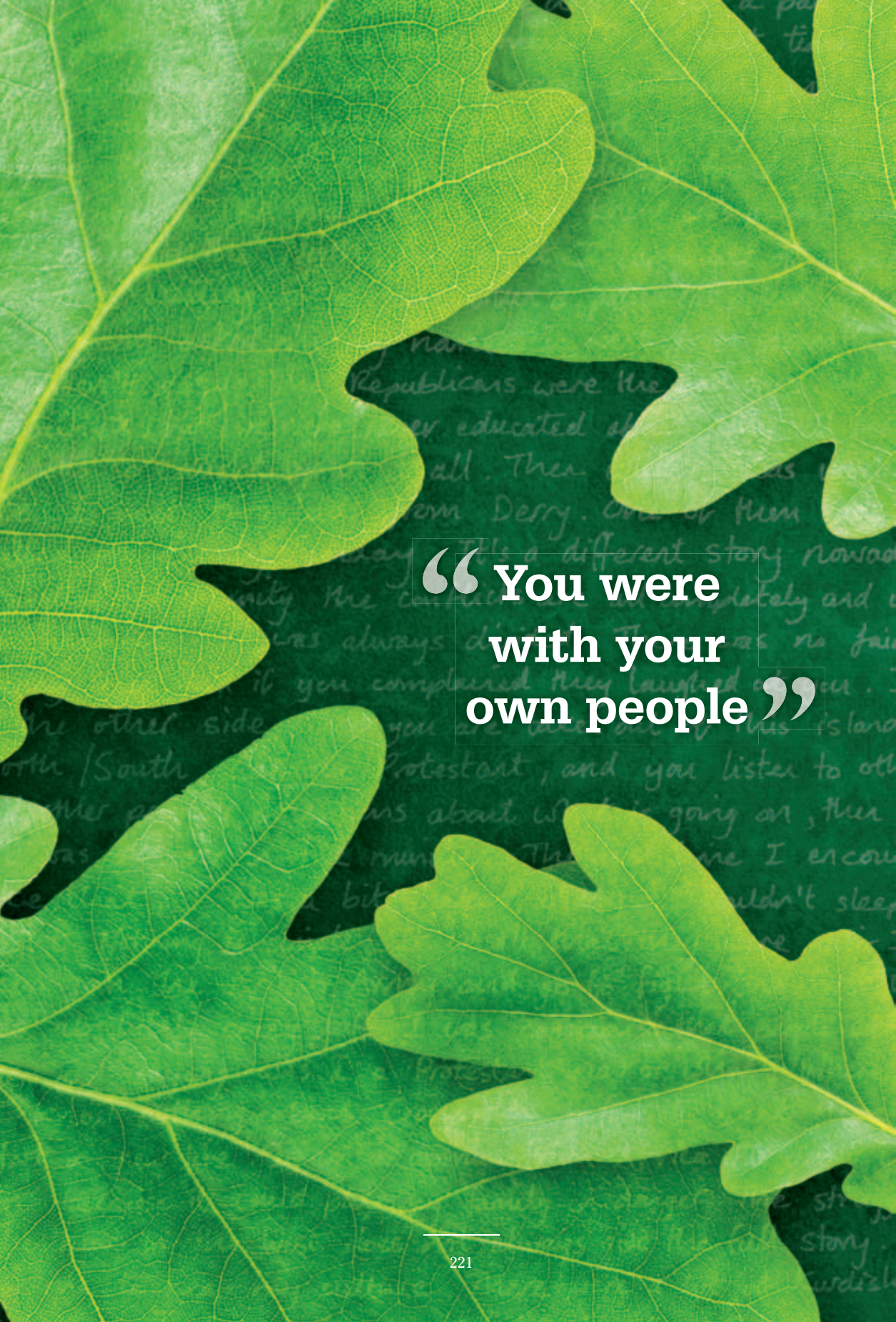
Storytelling is about individual truth telling. It is not about setting any record straight and does not presume that there is a 'true story'. There are many true stories and for every story here there are dozens more untold stories that make us who we are in Sligo in 2011.

Storytelling is a way to make sense of things that have been outside our understanding, or beyond us. Telling is cathartic, it brings closure to the storyteller and many of the contributors reported strong feelings of relief associated with speaking their own truth to another person whose only job was to listen and record what was being said. It takes courage to tell our stories, especially if they are

hard to hear. As you make your way through this book remember that the contributors are just ordinary people trying to live their lives as best they can.

All contributions are anonymous, except where the substance of the contribution demands otherwise. The experiences recounted touch on universal themes associated with the impacts of conflict. Many names, places and other identifying references have been changed in the stories. Images used have been mainly chosen by the contributors.

Nothing is sanitised or tweaked to make it acceptable to any group or viewpoint and it may well be that you will read something in these pages that will make you think again about something and cause you to look at people and events in a different way. If that is so, the collection has done its work.


“You were with your own people”

You were with your own people

As a youngster, I don't think that my Protestantism reckoned that much with me. My father had two men working here and I suppose our farm was a little bit bigger than the other locals. All the farms were generally around 20 acres and we had a little bit more, just through enterprise; my grandfather came here to a 29 acre farm and he expanded it and then my father expanded it also. He had two men working here and it was the fact that we were children of the employer that made us that bit different. My father did some cattle dealing, mostly cows, and he would have grazing land taken in different areas and so forth which made it appear that he had a larger farm.

And then he had a misfortune, he lost the sight in one eye in about 1944. It handicapped him considerably and he wasn't nearly as enterprising or as adventurous as he had been previously. He was one of eight and they all went to America. In fact he also went to Australia first while the rest of the family were on the East Coast of the United States. He considered that Australia was quite undeveloped at the time, even in Melbourne where he was, there weren't many permanent or secured buildings. He said that every place was just a façade and behind it was a temporary structure. And of course letter writing was the only way of communicating and the family in the United States were doing much better than he was and they encouraged him to go there. I think there might have been a little bit of romance involved also! He had a romance with a girl from down the road before going away, I'm not sure if she left Ireland before he did, but he went to Australia and she ended up in the United States. He may have gone there to make contact again – it's a mystery – we won't ever know!

All the family with the exception of one girl emigrated. She waited to mind her mother and later married about 1923.

My grandfather died in 1922 and my father and his sister returned here in 1923. When they came back, there was a slump in the cattle business and his brother who had the farm here got wiped out with the poor prices, and my father had, for that time, a considerable amount of money. He had a farm of his own before he left and he had sold it in 1919 or 1920 for approximately stg£1900, which was a fortune at that time. I daresay if he hadn't had that money he would probably have stayed in Australia. He came home and his brother was in dire straits, not able to pay the rent, all the cattle sold and not enough money to pay the grazing rent so he bought the home farm from his brother. His brother left for America and never came back again because he was so discouraged or maybe soured about his achievements here in Ireland. That family had started dispersing in 1912. There were three girls and five boys and they were enterprising. They had a sheep export business going, shipping, they even got to the stage of killing pork pigs and shipping them and rabbits to Liverpool. They were an enterprising family at that time, very forward-looking, and pulling themselves up by the shoelaces you might say.

It didn't register with us that we were going to a different church when we were young but in school when catechism was taught and when there was an intense programme for the visitation of the priest, we would be moved out to the porch. There was my sister, myself, three cousins and three from another family at that school. We were ever so quiet, not getting rowdy or anything like that, and maybe listening a little bit, eavesdropping – curiosity! I don't think that my parents would have asked that we be taken out of class for catechism but I think the teacher was afraid of indoctrinating us. That was the first evidence that we understood we were a little bit different. There was another time that a gentleman, a Christian Brother, used to come recruiting and he would start off at the end of the row and then the master would tap him on the shoulder to skip one – that would be skipping me!

It didn't make you feel different because you were the same as they were in every other way. You would be doing things on the farm in the evening or morning time. The farm was the focal point and all the others were involved in doing farming chores as well. Neighbouring children would come working for my father at times, so you didn't

feel any different from them. It was only that little bit of teaching that made you feel different. The context for this is that the primary schools were geared towards getting pupils for the seminaries. If you got picked to go to college – it meant that you were going for the priesthood. I remember the schoolmaster was pressurising his eldest son to go to the college but he wouldn't go. On the road from school, he would ask me, 'will you be a Protestant priest?' And I effectively didn't really know what a priest was at that time!

It was a feather in the cap for the teacher that there were a few Protestant families going to his school. It was partly for convenience as the Church of Ireland school at the time was further away from us (about three miles) and also, the local school had a better reputation. Our cousins would have commented on us attending the Catholic school, I think they would have felt we should have attended the Church of Ireland one. In my father's time, the family went to the Church of Ireland school, where there was a very good teacher, rather than to the Roman Catholic school.

Our Minister used to come to the house a few times during the school year to check up on the progress of our religious education, to see if we were learning our Scripture tracts and prayers, learning the 10 Commandments and whatever else was required. We had a Sunday school in our church. It was hit and miss, depending on the teachers who remembered to get there in time! Our service was at 12.30 which was rather late in the day, but still the Sunday school teacher would only arrive at maybe twenty past or a quarter past twelve. We were all ushered into a seat to be ever so quiet. The (Church of Ireland) school teacher was also the Sunday school teacher at one time and it was only the few that weren't going to her school that were effectively caught out.

We didn't go to football matches. I think my mother was probably fairly strict in that line; there was a puritanical thing about Sunday behaviour. We didn't go to the cinema or we didn't go dancing on Sundays and definitely didn't play football. Other cousins who went to the local Church of Ireland school, when some of that family ended up going to dances on a Sunday evening, it was a catastrophe. She thought it was utter damnation for them, as it were, that they were going to Sunday dances. My mother had a girl working here from the house across the road – housekeeper or assistant or pot-walloper or child smacker or whatever you might be. She was looking after us

to a fair extent, and she would go off to the local town on a Sunday afternoon to the dance hall and would come home and tell us who was there, but we dare not go to dances on a Sunday. We could go to the local beach alright and you could hear the music playing from the ballroom but that was all you got. There were also amusements there and you didn't go near those on Sunday either. That was the degree of strictness. However, my mother and her assistant used to go to the amusement arcade on week evenings.

It was acceptable to go to the seaside, go for a walk over the fields or possibly go visiting other families and other families would come visiting us. We didn't have a car but some of the relations from town had cars and would visit us. My mother was from that town originally. Her father was a businessman and I think they had a bit of airs as it were. She mightn't have been so much that way herself but she had an older sister who was a matriarch, who lived in the North and who would be very strict on how the family behaved.

I didn't really feel left out at all. Maybe we felt a little bit superior to some of the others! Because we had relations coming here with motorcars and we could be brought for a drive somewhere and that left us a little bit above their level. Until our schoolmaster got a car, there wasn't anyone else getting spins in cars around the place either.

My sister had ambitions of teaching and there were scholarship exams at that time. The Incorporated Society was a Church of Ireland foundation which had an exam each year resulting in the award of half a dozen scholarships for the whole country. She was awarded the scholarship and was allocated a place in Celbridge school in Kildare, which entailed a long train journey. My turn came to sit the exam the next year and I got a scholarship, but I remember clearly one of the times my sister was going on the bus from the crossroads, and my father hinting, 'sure, you won't need to go away like that, you'll stay and help me' and my mother protested and said, 'he's going to school if at all possible'. My father was crestfallen. But it mightn't have happened only that I got a full scholarship. I think there isn't any way they could have afforded the secondary school if I didn't get the scholarship and that sealed the thing. My father always gave credit to the local schoolmaster for our achievements in being awarded scholarships.

There was a lot of evolution in that period. But you hear about the hungry dismal '50s and '60s. It depends on how bright a picture

you're looking for or what you had endured before that time, but we got through the war times which did cause some problems, but in the countryside you always had enough food at home and there were always enough provisions on the farm. The most thing that was wanted from outside was sugar, etc., Tea was scarce, flour was readily available although the quality wasn't great, and there wasn't an awful lot more the people needed. If you wanted clothing, you bought a bolt of cloth and the local dressmaker made up your suit or costume for the woman of the house. The mother and the father got their clothes made with the local tailor and the youngsters got second-hand clothes or hand-me-downs, or maybe cut-downs of their parents' clothes or whatever it might be. There were dressmakers every few miles. Everyone was wearing the same sort of garb at the time and you didn't feel any bit different.

I went to boarding school. It wasn't unusual for the time. The chaps that went to the local secondary school, they boarded there as well. Some of them, in later years, cycled to college each day. You got a mid-term break and you got home at Christmas. At this time there would be parties in relation's houses and that sort of thing and I suppose when we were well into our teens there were dances in town that we went to or there was a Church of Ireland school fairly local to us and you would go there to dances. The church socials and the church dances wouldn't be held on Sunday, it was always a weekday.

After being married, there was a chap from nearby working with me and his son was getting married, and that was the first time that my wife and myself danced on a Sunday. That had all gone by the time I raised my family and dancing became something different in present-day times as to what it was then.

Various cousins or cousins of my parents and lots of people had migrated from this part of the world to the North in the '30s and '40s. A good many families from around here had gone North, even into the '50s, and they would come back and visit here and they would look on us in a kindly sort of a way. We consider that they felt a bit superior because they were from the North and the North was better off financially than here at that point. Even during the war years, because of food, they got paid handsomely for everything they produced. And going back to the time of the economic war, the tariff war, in the 30's people here were at a huge disadvantage, in that the cattle that were being exported from here, as soon as they got across

the border they were worth double the price. Some people along the border and even inland from the border made lots and lots of money. I'm not begrudging them in any way, as it were, but that survival on the land was really, really difficult in the mid-'30s right up until the outbreak of war.

When I was a youngster I wouldn't have known why those families had left. It was only in later years that we came to realise why they had left. We understood later on that they left generally for economic reasons, that farming was better in the North and also for fear of the family being married to Catholics. They thought that they had a better chance of meeting one of their own in the North than here. Also that the Ne Temere decree was being implemented here caused a lot of discomfort in people's attitudes to their neighbours. I suppose it was because of that we were prohibited from going to Sunday dances. The Roman Catholic people would be going to their dancing on a Sunday and they would be meeting their own people. Then the Church of Ireland socials would be on a Thursday or Friday night or whenever it might be and that kept you apart, you were with your own people. It wasn't good in its own way really, you were too segregated.

I would think my parents shared that fear. If a mixed marriage took place there would be regrets and there was a discomfort I suppose in some ways about it. The regret is that it was taking people away from our church and our congregation, they were usually gone out of the congregation and that was it. But, three of our boys are married to Roman Catholics and it doesn't cause any problems.

There are different attitudes now within the churches to the inter-church marriages as they are calling it now. Inter-church marriages in our family's case have been allowed to live in a liberal way. But in years gone by, the priests gave some of the people in mixed marriages a difficult time. I don't have any concern about how my own grandchildren should be raised. I have five grandchildren in mixed marriages. My daughter is in a mixed marriage and she goes to her own church and he goes to his church. I'm not sure about the others; I think they might go to both. You don't interfere in the matter.

We very much had a sense of loss regarding those families who moved to the North. A lot of regret that they were gone from us. Then going back to visit them in the North and the affinity that they seemed to have with us all the time since, they nearly had their own

little bit of regret of having moved from us; that we were more of an easy-going type of people than the people they met up there.

We never thought they would come back. They were gone. We have papers in our house from the 1800s, 1900s. One of them was a letter written by a man who had left from around here, he had farmed nearby, and my grandfather sent his men with a truck to transport their furniture to Northern Ireland. They might have gone by car or bus or whatever it was. He wrote to my grandfather thanking him and saying how it was great being able to sleep at night without the gun at the end of the bed. That would have been in the '20s, he felt that relief of having gone there. I think on the other hand, the particular type of people who did go, would be less tolerant of the Roman Catholic neighbours I would think. And I know of three particular cases where the husbands were never that content in the North. It was the women that brought them there. I don't really know why they moved. I would think maybe the women were a little bit more, not exactly militant, but something like that, as regards the religion, than the men would have been. And it's a general aspect as well, men would be a little more casual as it were regards observance than the women.

My parents would probably have seen themselves as maybe pro-England rather than pro-British. They still wouldn't class themselves as being English but they would have been sad to have been deprived of their British citizenship I would think. They probably would have been Unionist in outlook whatever that Unionism might have been, that would have been pre-Parnell type of thing. They resented all the trauma their families went through in relation to the troubled times – 1916 to '22 or '23. All of the families that had left were gone by 1920. Uncles and their families used to come home from the States in the '50s and they couldn't see much progress being made here in Ireland, they thought that it was a sort of backwater, maybe backward looking. In fact one of them wanted my father to move to the States. I think that his handicap prevented him and I think he claimed his age as well at the time, that he thought he was too old to make the move at that time. He made the excuse that there was a risk that I would be drafted into the American army as the Korean War was being fought at that time. Before my uncles went, they were fully integrated into the local community and when they came home they had a great time with all the friends they used pal around with. They were welcomed back with open arms and people loved to hear their stories and they

loved to retell the stories of the devilment they used to get up to before they went away.

I think my mother's family would have been nearly royalists, whereas my father's family wouldn't have been. A very important event in our household was Princess Elizabeth's wedding in 1947. It must have been at a weekend because we were at home from school listening to it on the radio and, not through any deliberate indoctrination or anything like that, the girl that my mother had working here was keenly interested in the royalism at the time and ended up going to England in her own time also. On return visits, she jokingly talked about Queenie! She lived in Berkshire, the Royal County and they would have been quite near Windsor Castle and so forth and she kept up her knowledge of the royalty.

The sense of connection with England was waning all the time and it would have been an economic thing at any time more than political. We have inherited the politics of the parents down the line and I suppose it influences your social connections – the other families that you associate with. Yes, there was a political element all through the years. I would think it went back to Civil War politics, that you had one side of the locality would have been pro-Collins and the other would have been pro-deValera. That has remained there all the time and whether it's a prejudice or bias I don't know but you always found that Fine Gael people were better off people in the community and you felt a bit of distrust for the Fianna Fáil type of people. I think because of the families that you associate with, it sort of keeps you voting that way all the time. By continually trying to work on a united Ireland, it causes friction and distrust.

I would think that people in the community wondered about whether we supported unification with Britain as opposed to a united Ireland. Very, very little comment would ever be made about it, but you would partly be classed as pro-English or pro-British I think.

Our family were not very much in favour of the allegiance with Britain but the relations who visited were I suppose, royalist. I'd say they saw the English parliament as more complete than the Irish parliament. That it was running the country in a better manner than the Irish parliament was running its country. And that the Irish one was so influenced by the hierarchy as well was an influencing factor. In fact, one uncle, he was a bit eccentric in some ways, he thought that it was a mistake having set up the Republic and it should go back to the

United Kingdom again. He wasn't thinking the whole thing through I would say. And likewise the ones who had moved to America thought that the Irish state wasn't a very satisfactory administration either.

I think it would have been part of my father's outlook that you can get on in any society, it's up to yourself, if you want to turn in on yourself there's no problem, but it's yourself you're turning in on rather than on everybody else or turning away from everybody else. They would have been an outgoing type of people.

In secondary school, it was the Monaghan people that had the Orange songs, it was the first and maybe the last place I ever heard them being sung. We effectively didn't know what Orange-ism meant even after coming out of school. The pupils from Monaghan weren't any different from the rest of us and there would be an odd night in the dormitories that we would have a little bit of a singsong and these fellows would sing an Orange song – in a good-humoured way. The songs may have had bitterness in them but they were sung in jest.

I couldn't connect with that. The songs were highlighting a difference or they were maintaining a difference. They were living and believing in that, or living it, and we see it since with the Orange-ism which is an influence for evil and bigotry and division. Even with day to day co-operation within communities they had a separateness in spite of all that. They might have been 40-60 percent of the population in Monaghan, they had quite a strong enclave of their own, they associated generally with themselves. They did business with their Roman Catholic neighbours, etc., etc., but it was just doing business with them and maybe they joined together for making the hay and so forth. But I would feel that there was a separateness there all the time.

I don't see any role for the Orange Order. I think they're misguided. I think that it would be quite alright to have their association with one another, but this parading on the streets on the 12th of July, I find it abhorrent. They show themselves up as being almost brainless. And it's also illustrated by the fact that they don't have anyone from higher level who is – what do they call them 'grandmaster' or something like that – he is only a normal person in society. They have lost status within their own community I would think, within the Protestant community, but they are a danger as well.

Going back to the 1960s, from '68 on you had Orange riots and I know a particular man that discussed it with me and he was able

to name people from around here who were supposed to be going up to the North to join in these riots – which was totally untrue. As I see it, the Church of Ireland people didn't involve themselves that much in the Orange Order, it was mainly Presbyterians that involved themselves in it and it creates that bit of a division within their own society. There would be some Church of Ireland people I know in the Order but the majority of those involved would be Presbyterians. I often think about those people who were incorrectly labelled as people who were going up and supporting rioting in the North. The man that talked to me about it was a Fianna Fáil man locally (not active) but he was a broadminded guy and had been away in England for years and years and whatever he had seen away, he related to it, but he still continued the divisions that the Civil War caused here. How many generations will it take to get rid of these attitudes? I think this last election probably was one which was less about that type of nationalism.

You have more of a sense of connection with people from other Protestant churches than you do with people from the Roman Catholic Church. I think that a proportion of our Sunday worship is about going to church and singing hymns, singing the chants and singing the canticles. The sermon is also a focal point of our worship. When we go to a mass and we do go to funerals and to weddings, it's nearly all words. There isn't very much singing and what singing there is, is not the type that we are used to and it tends not to involve the whole congregation. The connection with people from the other Protestant churches is more about the 'practice or the 'ritual' than it is about faith.

A common attitude is the work ethic of the Protestant people. And even today the Methodists would hold onto a strictness of 'no Sunday' activities. I know a family of our own age and the present generation has abandoned the Sunday restrictions. I often wonder, does the mother in particular, cringe about what they would be up to on a Sunday. Playing rugby, I think, did away with a lot of it. I think there is still a fear for the future of our local church that is still drawing a good deal of people to their Church of Ireland church or their Protestant church. There is also, a little bit of distance between the Presbyterians, the Methodists and the Church of Ireland. They seem to want separateness of their own all along the way, which I think is

partly fostered by the clergy themselves, a fear of they themselves being eliminated.

It's extremely interesting in relation to the First World War that you had three or four eligible men here, and none of them joined up. The recruiting officer for the army lived near here. He had two sons who were also of military age and they didn't join up. The fellows here were probably discouraged – they may have said – well if the Major's family aren't joining, why should we join? And the Major as he was known, was a respected man within the community.

There would be some extended family members in the police, more of my wife's cousins than mine. It was very rarely discussed. We would have been very conscious of it, yes. One chap of my age in the '50s joined the RUC, he had an uncle who was a member of the Gardaí here, that policeman type of thing must have been in the genes. He wouldn't join the Gardaí here and went to the North and joined the RUC. Then the family sold the farm, upped sticks, and they all moved to the North in 1959. The father of the family was a very reserved type of individual and it was talked about a lot, about him going to the North, about how brave he was to do this. Was it bravery or just pure determination to get away from here you would wonder? He had five sons and he didn't want them to be married to Roman Catholics.

The son who was in the RUC wouldn't come back to visit in the Republic, he was afraid, fearful for his life. There were examples of some who had come across the border at that time and had ended up getting shot. But since he has retired from the force he has come down and visited us here. It was extraordinary at his father's funeral, how different he had become, in comparison to what he had been. I used to go to dances with him, we were the same age, but he could barely associate with us then. He couldn't connect. They couldn't quite understand how we would stick it down here, you know, and they would say 'down here' as well. I think they would nearly look at it that we had sold out because we stayed and that we were compromised by doing so and not making a stand. I'm only assuming that now.

Then there was a cousin of mine in the North who had married an RUC man, and they used to come here visiting. He had to stop coming. I think they were prohibited by the force itself from coming to the South and he loved coming here. I don't think we would have talked about the family members in the RUC in the Roman Catholic community at all, I think it would only have been amongst the

Protestant people that we would have talked about them. The subject generally wouldn't have been brought up.

We wouldn't see ourselves as having any great similarity with the Protestants in the North. We can go up to them and visit them and get on perfectly well with them and everything like that, they are very welcoming and all the rest, but there is a strictness there, not exactly an intolerance, but something bordering on it. They would have a sympathy for us I suppose. We have had more trips to the North in the last while with a new contact we have made. It was a terrific experience and we get on famously together, but we were still happy to part. We have more of a sense of connection down here with neighbours and family than we do with members of the extended family in the North particularly because we are working with them and we are all in the same type of business together, whereas their attitude, now I don't say their attitude to farming is different, but there is a bit of a difference in the farming in the North than there is here. I couldn't define it.

I suppose generally the Protestant community had a bit more land and they were able to make work for themselves as it were, and in the towns as well, you had Protestant businesses that took in Protestant boys from the countryside. They took in a balance shall we say in some cases but there would sometimes have been a preference in giving jobs to Protestant people. Our family would not have consciously chosen to shop in exclusively Protestant businesses. We would have done business anywhere.

There has been no issue about selling land to Catholics. We were on the other end of it, we were buying land! My grandfather came here to 29 acres and he put it up to 52 acres, and my father added 45 acres, and that made it up near 95 or thereabouts, 97, and I bought 97 acres. But I suppose, it was partly a preservation in that all of the pieces of land that we bought belonged to Protestant families that were moving. Although we would have bought them competitively, it wouldn't be a case of doing a private deal or anything like that.

It would be second or third owner afterwards that we bought back Protestant land as it were. I bought the land in 1968 and the Troubles were just starting in the North and there was agitation against my buying it. Other local farmers wanted the land commission to take the land and divide it, and circumstances really worked in my favour. Circumstances which might seem a little bit bizarre. This mightn't

actually have been true but I think it was an influence – the Troubles were just starting in the North and Ian Paisley was sabre-rattling to such a degree – and if the story got across the border or into his hands that they were pushing a Protestant farmer out from expanding, it would have been grist to his mill, and it partially helped me in keeping the land. But then if that was a factor, there was also another factor in that a Catholic friend who had connections in high places made my case for me at a higher level. Religion didn't come into it in effect. It had to go through the system and eventually I was allowed to keep the farm, but I think these other factors worked in my favour. 'We had better get this settled before it goes onto the airwaves' or whatever it might be.

I had a very helpful land commission inspector who came here and helped me in small and unnoticeable ways you might say. His attitude was that the objectors were unfair in having taken up the case after I had bought the land. If they had taken up the case before I had bought it, fair enough. He says, 'I'm not looking to do you any favours, I just want to see fair play being done'. And it all worked out fine, but we still had to work and pay for it in the end!

If there hadn't been a resolution in the 1920's and if the British government hadn't agreed to handing over administration here and made the partition as it were, you would still have a situation similar to that in Northern Ireland for the last 30 years, festering on a continuous basis. It would have had to come to a resolution at some time or another. But what I see today, putting it in a modern context, for example, will Libya become something like we have here? Or the Basque people in Spain – not wanting to live under the other person's rule? Israel and Palestinians and all these sort of things. Because we have become a separate state it has insulated us from the Troubles that did go on in the North.

In the early '70s two men came with me to the North. We had to go across the border and the man that was with me was older than I was and from once we crossed the border the poor fellow was in tension, he was looking, eyes around him everywhere, and as we were coming back across the border, there was a trailer with a load of straw bales on it, right near the border. The load seemed to have scattered and they were rebuilding it, but the man that was with me thought that it was an ambush being set up. 'Put the foot down' he shouted, 'get out of here as quick as you can'. The fear that poor fellow had of the

British army, of the soldiers. We were always going over and back and I didn't have any fear. I suppose because we had people in the RUC, my cousins' husband and my wife's cousin as well, that if we were picked up, we would have someone to use as a reference. And my wife on the other hand would always have been a little bit less comfortable in the North then I would have been. She was fearful of the soldiers and the army and the RUC.

People did talk to us about incidents in the North, not a lot, but they would a bit, when atrocities would happen. If we take the time of Bloody Sunday, the man that was working with me at that time, he took the Nationalist side as it were in that and was a bit hostile towards me for a little while. It wore off and we remained good friends afterwards and it's understandable, you know. But people's attitudes towards us as a community never changed.

I suppose everything is advancing in some way or another all the time and trying to look back at the past is negative. You have to move with the way things are evolving. There are far more important and difficult things than your religion and the politics of the country. Economic survival is far more important than any of those things I think. I've seen down through the years so many people showing a degree of bitterness and resentment and they have never sought or made many advances of their own. It eats away at you. Life is short and I would think the best approach is to try not to create unhappiness for yourself.

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'Silent Voices' is powerful, original, deeply moving - at times searingly so - and gives invaluable insight into what was suffered by real people on this island, and why, over recent decades. This book is also a timely warning against attitudes which would have us bound by the past, rather than bow to it. It is a reminder that, while we cannot change that past, "we have chosen to change the future," as President McAleese has said.

Patsy McGarry,
Religious Affairs Correspondent, The Irish Times

Perception and reality are inseparable themes in these stories of courage, betrayal, resilience, perception and pain. Landscape writer Rebecca Solnit once noted that if a border is natural, it must have no history. The experience of reading 'Silent Voices' bears testimony to that.

Lorna Siggins,
Western Correspondent, The Irish Times

These are stories of ordinary men, women and children who were caught on the wrong side of the line: the Border in the case of the Protestant community; the uniform for the Catholic in the UDR; ethnicity for Travellers and refugees; the perimeter fence for the prisoner. The official record appears superficial and contrived when set alongside these riveting personal stories of loss, displacement, hurt, misunderstanding and endurance.

Paddy Logue, Irish Peace Centre

Secrets, subterfuge and sometimes shocking, these stories reveal a Sligo I barely recognise, but the voices from the grass roots cannot be discounted. The truth in these accounts is unsettling, but rightly so.

Mary Branley