SILENT VOICES

Community & Enterprise Department
Sligo County Council
Riverside
Sligo

Tel: +353 71 9111111

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.

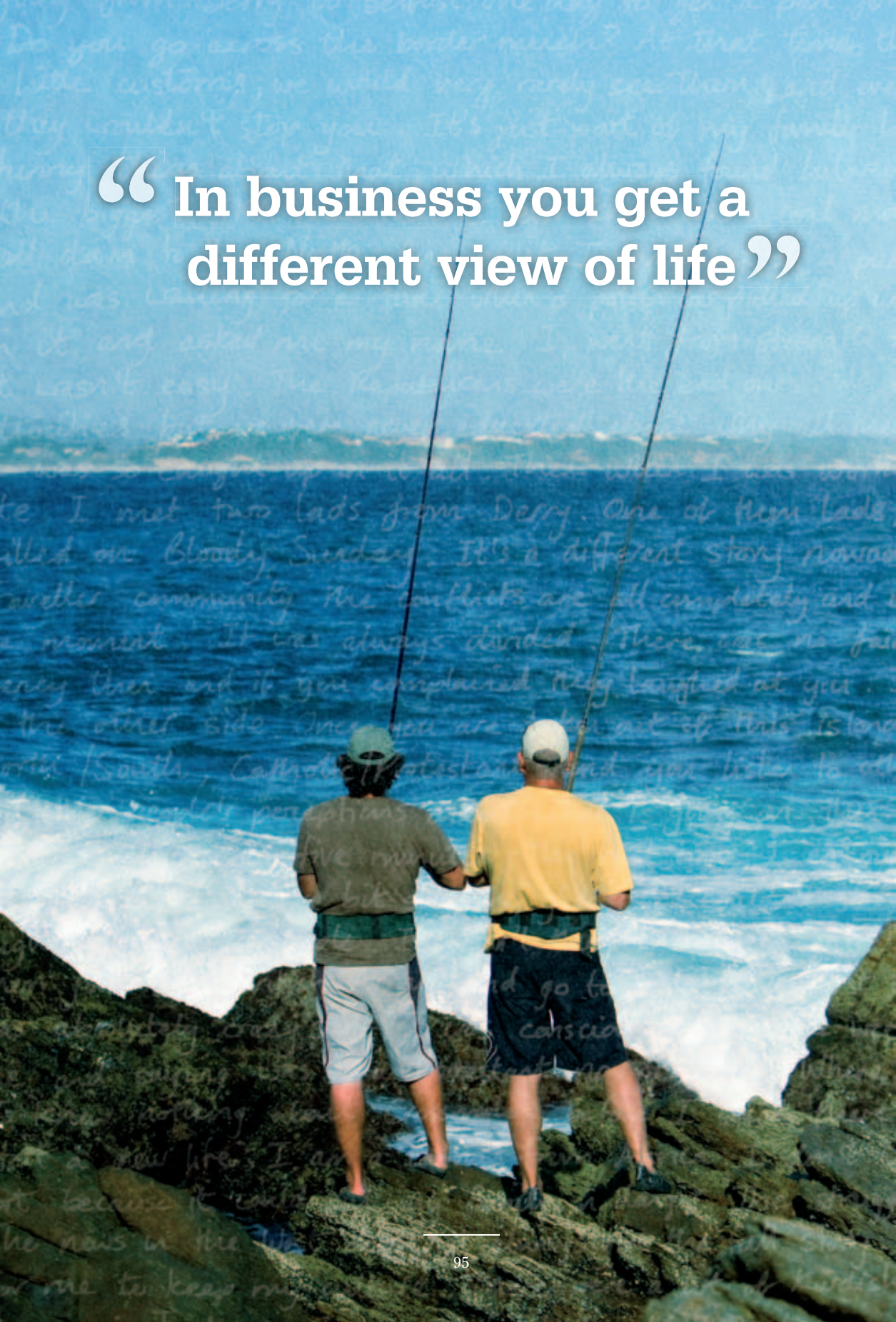
Storytelling is about individual truth telling. It is not about setting any record straight and does not presume that there is a 'true story'. There are many true stories and for every story here there are dozens more untold stories that make us who we are in Sligo in 2011.

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.


“In business you get a different view of life”

In business you get a different view of life

My grandfather was a Home Rule politician for Lisburn Borough, and while I was quite interested in politics, my mother forbade it completely, because my Grandfather Bell lost his business and lost his farm, as my mother called it, politicking. He spent more time at politics than business. He had a public house which was unusual for a Quaker. But they worked hard to make money for themselves. My mother could see our business going the same way as her father's business, but it gave me probably a broader spectrum of life than the average Protestant who was encapsulated within a smaller group, and maybe he had to keep his head down because there was no doubt, in the '30's and 40's and 50's, and 60's, we were basically a minority and a looked-down-at minority and in many ways considered as not really Irish. If we were Protestant we were considered to be pro-British. You couldn't be pro-Irish and Protestant.

There were a lot of false assumptions. For example in 1978, in the little shop down from our shop, a newsagent, it was the 25th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth's accession, and there was a portrait of the Queen in a black flowing robe, I was getting the paper and a man was there and he pointed to the Queen and he said, 'that's the woman you take orders from', and I said, 'what do you mean', and he said, 'she's the head of your church.' I said, 'she's not, she is head of the Church of England and I belong to the Church of Ireland, she has nothing to do with us, I take orders from the government.' He was taken aback. 'But' I said, 'if your Archbishop McQuaid told you to jump and the government told you not to jump, you would jump.' I had more freedom as a Protestant, more freedom of conscience. That was the difference between us.

I was never afraid to talk out, but we did feel restricted in many ways and I always maintained that our own church leaders were never positive enough, they never told us we had an ancient tradition which was as good as anything. I remember a statement made by Archbishop McQuaid at the start of ecumenism; he said he would welcome Protestants back once they renounced their religion. Archbishop Sims, who was the Archbishop of Dublin at that time, he was very polite and very gentlemanly and very quiet spoken, and his answer to that was, 'well you know we are all going to be one some day'. But, what leadership did that give to our young people? The Roman Catholic priests said, 'if you are going to get married, you must come to us, your children must be raised as Roman Catholics' but I felt there was no direction from our church leaders to say 'you must stay within your own church.'

Now it always bothers me to say Catholic when I mean Roman Catholic, because I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, which all Protestants say in their creed, and to be called a non-Catholic is insulting to me, very insulting, but I know most people don't see it that way. I believe we've got to become a society where everyone is equal, where we treat each other with equal respect. When it comes to interchurch marriage or mixed marriage it doesn't bother me. My daughter is in an interchurch marriage. I couldn't tell you how many cousins are in interchurch marriages, so no, it doesn't bother me. We are so small in number; we are bound to be assimilated. But, at the same time, it's sad to see the doctrine that I grew up with being rejected, the doctrine that my child and grandchild was growing up with. Then they marry in an interchurch marriage and one or other of them has to reject all that they learned and say, 'now what I learned isn't that, but I have got to reject what I had and go with you, or you have to reject what you have and go with me.'

Back in the 60's if the Roman Catholic partner came to join the Church of Ireland we were afraid to welcome them because of repercussions. We had one lady, a very faithful attender. They were quite well off, well-to-do and she had a servant. That servant only lasted until she went to confession. What I learned was that priests would say things like 'don't work for her, she's a lapsed catholic, she's left the church, she's not worthy to be worked for' things like that. It was a kind of prejudice and discrimination that wouldn't be allowed legally now but back then it just happened as a matter of course. That lady lost good workers.

There were other repercussions for her down through her life. She died just recently, her husband died a couple of years ago, but her children are still living. They have left for England now.

The Ne Temere decree meant that children of mixed marriages had to be raised as Roman Catholics. The Protestant partner had to agree to it. With the strong pronouncements of Archbishop McQuaid there was no sense that you could marry a Roman Catholic girl and bring her with you into the Church of Ireland. You felt it wasn't allowed by the state, because pretty well, as I said, when Archbishop McQuaid said, 'you must do that,' the state agreed with him. There was a court case in 1950 that showed that the state was fully behind the Roman Catholic Church's position. You had to agree to educate and raise your children as Roman Catholics and in some cases Protestants were expected to convert to Roman Catholicism. So if you married outside your own church you were going to be lost to that church.

In those days, that situation had a detrimental effect on the Protestants. When my daughter was going forward to train as a nurse, we had one minister, not Church of Ireland, and he organised nearly every young Protestant person who had left school to go and work in the North of Ireland. My daughter applied for the Adelaide Hospital in Dublin and she applied for the Royal Hospital in Belfast, She got both, and she was going to the Royal because her aunts were in Belfast and she had no relations in Dublin. Then about a month later word came – 'sorry we can't take you, because we have the new rule that we cannot take citizens from the South'. Now that would have been about 30 years ago. She went to the Adelaide but a lot of my daughter's friends went north to get jobs.

Going back thirty years or forty years, it was a bit strange doing business in Sligo. Almost 70% of shops in Sligo were Protestant owned and they depended on 90% of the Roman Catholics for support, which they got. But there were Protestants who would go north to buy a tie or to buy worms for fishing. A lot of Protestants just wouldn't spend their money in the South; – that would mean paying tax to the Irish Government. It was something they grew up with and it's very hard to change. Some of my own friends will only buy paint in the North or they'll go there to get their teeth done or their eyes tested. It changes depending on the economic situation. Years ago when petrol was cheaper here, everybody came south. When we had near parity with sterling thousands of Southerners shopped up North. My own belief

is that you cannot have a viable town without the businesses that people want.

We have got to change with the times. When I was growing up, some of the old family members came in and said, 'oh if your grandfather could see the place now he would turn in his grave because all the things that he sold that you're not selling', well I said, 'if we were trying to sell what he was selling we would be gone out of business, you've got to change'. I'm a business man. I understand that it's natural for people to try to get the cheapest price for everything. Sligo needs vibrant businesses I have criticised Sligo all the time, I have written to the Chamber of Commerce, they don't even acknowledge my letters. You have to give customers what they want. Times have changed.

I have seen a great deal of changes in business practice over the years. I don't think I could survive in the present, although I did for many years, but then, my mother supervised me until she was 87. I would tell her that it was time she retired, but no, no, she wouldn't retire! So when I was 65 I said to my son 'if things go well, carry on, and if they don't go well you have a good site.'.

My family has had a business on that site for 200 odd years. I could give you my family history back to 1580. I think I'm the 13th generation from that, but I'm still, you know, a 'blow in', not 'truly Irish', according to some. A lot of people don't know their history. There's a lot of ignorance out there. You see 90% of the people are descended from the English stock that came over. Mostly they would be soldiers from the time Cromwell was sending people 'to hell or to Connaught.' There were no men left east of the Shannon and everybody, practically everybody is of mixed stock. The only true Irish people now are the McDonagh's and the Wards and the people that are looked down on as members of the Travelling community. They are basically the old stock. If you look at a map of Ireland of 800 A.D. and look at the names, you see the Wards and the O'Hara's etc. Then you have the McGowan's who changed their name to Smyth with a y, to save their lands. There are a lot of misperceptions about people's identities. We are much more of a mix than people realise.

There are a lot of misperceptions still about Protestants and Masons. For instance, I've heard it said that the British Legion is a Protestant club. I've heard the Masonic order referred to as a Protestant club and the YMCA and the Orange Order. I've said to people 'yes, your Orange Order is a Protestant Club, but it doesn't exist in Sligo'. The Orange

Order did have a hall next door to the library years and years ago, but I think it vanished in the late 20's because there was just no support, but the Masonic order is not a Protestant club. If you go to a Roman Catholic country it is purely Roman Catholic, if you go to Russia it's orthodox, if you go to India there are Muslims and Hindus in it. But when you come to Ireland it is 80 percent Protestant. A lot of people don't realise that at least 20 percent are Roman Catholic in the Masonic Order in Ireland. In Sligo, we never list the religion, but I would say that we are 25 percent Roman Catholic in our Lodge in Sligo.

People often confuse the Orange Order with the Masonic Order. I gave a talk on the radio some time ago and I said I couldn't understand how a good Protestant, or a good mason, could be an Orangeman, and I couldn't understand even more so how a good Orangeman could be a mason, because one is narrowly defined and the other is broad-spectrum. But you do get that, and in the course of that radio interview, I talked about Alderman John Fallon, who had been a First World War Veteran. He was chairman of the British Legion in Sligo; he was an Alderman for 40 years. It is my belief that he had never been made mayor because of his association with the British Legion. The British legion was an association for ex-servicemen and women. Anybody who served in the British Army was entitled to receive help if they needed help from it, it didn't matter about your religion, class, creed or anything. It was only in the last few years of his life that they eventually capitulated and made him mayor of Sligo, and I think he would have been mayor 30 years earlier if it hadn't been for his association with the British Legion.

I remember back in the 70's we did good business with people coming down from the North in the summer to fish. We sold guns and fishing tackle and you would have a bit of banter between two men coming in, and one was obviously nationalist and one unionist, but we wouldn't know it until one fella would be looking at the guns and he would say, 'Jeez if we had those up North we'd fairly… ', and the other fella would say, 'ah they'd be no good to you, we've far better than that', and there was friendly banter like that.

Then we were raided by the IRA. One night the doorbell rang and my mum went down to it and opened the door and there were four outside. They put a gun in her ribs and told her that they were going to take the guns. My mother asked them what they wanted these guns for and they said, 'to shoot UDR men and Protestants.' And my mother

said, 'well I'm a Protestant why would you want to shoot me?' And she argued with them.

Now her brother was the treasurer of a Quaker organised fund for the rehabilitation of people who had been chased out of an area, and at that time he was saying that he had 5 million in the fund – and this would have been in the late 70s, and he just couldn't get rid of it. There weren't enough applicants. And my mother was arguing about this and telling them that if they wanted there was all this fund and one of the younger men was going to start arguing with her, with my mother, and one of the other fellows, obviously the leader, just put his hand up to his lips and said, 'silence, no arguments', in case he would let something slip.

They stole the guns but they didn't harm my mother. They were very polite, very gentle with her. They were going to tie her legs together and she said, 'I have varicose veins.' They said, 'well put your knees together', and they strapped bandage tape around her knees and her hands. Dad always had a scissors in his pocket for use when he'd go fishing and he was in a chair with casters, so he rolled over and she took the scissors out and she cut him free and then they were loose five minutes afterwards. I got a phone call from one of the raiders saying, 'Would you go into the shop, your mother needs you'. So I went into the shop, but by this time my mother had got free and she had gone into the pub next door because they had ripped out her phone and she had rung my sister and they had rung the guards and when I got in the local Super was interviewing my mother and talking about it.

My mother said, 'one of them must have been a woman because she was wearing about size 3 shoes, and if it had been a man of that height, the shoes would have been much larger.' She had been a draper in Anderson and McCauley's in Belfast before she married my father. She was very observant. The guards were confident they knew who had been involved. The guards knew everybody.

Two days later we had a verbal message from one of the local Sinn Féin Cumanns. They sent a message of sympathy and apology that please be assured that it was none of their branch that were involved in it. But to me if you were involved in Sinn Féin you were all one and the same.

It affected my father. He was 85 at the time. I wouldn't say it tore him apart but you could see it affected him. He would come into the shop and I might have sold somebody a gun and he would tap me on

the shoulder and he would say, 'see that thing, get rid of it, throw it in the river.' He never talked too much about it, but I suppose it did have some effect. It didn't seem to have the same effect on my mother. She had sort of said her piece and she was happy that she had argued her piece with them. We carried on with our business, selling guns and fishing tackle and never had any other raids or any difficulties after that.

I remember the time in Mullaghmore when Mountbatten was killed. It saddens me greatly to this day. I knew Lord Mountbatten; he used to come into the shop. He was a tall gentleman, he would come in to buy fishing tackle, and he was polite, he was friendly, he was as good as any other customer, not a pompous person at all. It saddened me greatly and it made me so mad he couldn't have been protected better. I know he said he didn't want protection, but why was his boat not protected at night when they obviously planted a bomb on it? That made me very angry.

I never discussed it with neighbours, no, I don't think I've ever discussed my attitude, or asked them to discuss their attitude because I wouldn't like to hurt them, if they saw that my attitude was different, a lot different from theirs. I wouldn't want them to feel that because I was different from them that I would not like them or they would not like me. We can live together as good friends.

My plan to solve the problem in Ireland was to have a referendum. Then anybody who wants to live under the Queen – off to England you go. Pay them compensation, and off to England, and I think there would be absolute panic and pandemonium for three or four years and after that it would settle down. You see to my mind, the country should be all one. Basically, I am of Republican sympathy, that if you want to live under the Queen, go over to England and live under the Queen, you shouldn't be over here. We are Ireland. You can't live in Ireland and call yourself English. You can't live in Ireland and pledge allegiance to the Crown, to my mind. If you want to be Irish, be Irish.

People who know me have classified me as a Protestant Republican. I suppose that's why I get on with the people around me. I haven't become insular shall we say and then of course in business we depended on 95 percent of our customers who were from the Roman Catholic population. A customer was my lifeline, I couldn't afford to abuse a customer – they were the best of people coming into me, no matter who they were or what they were. I had to give a good service

and I respected them coming in to buy, so that in business you get a different view of life shall we say, you don't become quite as insular because you are depending on all the people in the community.

I think 30 years ago, 40 years ago, if the border had been taken away, the North of Ireland Protestants would have taken over the whole South because they were better business people, in many ways. They would have run the country better than it was run, and better than it is run – honestly, I'm a very unhappy person about the way Ireland has been run. If I ran my business the way the country is being run at the moment the bank would have closed me up years ago. But it was far too many politicians, everybody in the country has a friend who is a politician and you can't get anything done unless you go through the politicians, even though they should have no say in it at all, things like planning applications and getting pensions for constituents. If we had less TD's, if the politicians in the Dáil did their job as legislators, and if local councillors had more power around their local area then the country would be run far better.

There is a lot of bad management, mismanagement. I write letters. I try to get other people to write letters but they say 'what good is it?' I've written and complained, drawn people's attention to trolleys in the river, to scrap metal in the car park, toxic waste in the middle of the town and lots more. It makes me agitated. There is an awful lot more could be done but it seems that anything above the line from Galway to Dublin is not worth doing. Sligo people are second class citizens. I'm proud to be Irish, I'm proud to be from Sligo but when it comes to protesting about things that matter in the community, that affect people's lives I feel I have always been a lone voice. I generally speak up. And I am generally ignored completely. I am aware of an awful lot of things that could be better but my involvement in Masonry is taking up most of my time.

I was at a Masonic meeting in Omagh, and I went out to Pomeroy and the building housed the Orange Hall on the ground floor and the Masonic Hall upstairs. Now, upstairs was nicely carpeted and furnished and downstairs was a bare room and there were 10 or 11 black plaques around the wall. These were to the memory of John, brutally murdered by the IRA, to the memory of George, blown up by the IRA, and I said, 'how can these people ever live in peace, with these sort of plaques?' It's going to take an awful long time for those memories to fade while they are sitting there. I never sort of realised, because you don't see

that in Masonic halls, but in the Orange halls it was all around; instead of photographs, there are these plaques. That's what affected me. Things like bombings drive me around the bend, but there isn't a thing I can do about it. There are times that I would wish that I could get an insight into it and get the people who were responsible brought to justice. It bothers me to see prisoners released under the Agreement, to see people released after five or six years, committing murders that affect people for all the rest of their life.

My son was in the British Navy, and when he come home on leave the guards would come out to see if he had arrived home safely and they would ask us to look under the car to make sure there wasn't a bomb under it. We accepted it as part of their job. The Navy personnel weren't targeted as much as the Army and the Air Force. One day the guards came out to check the house, he wasn't home, he was fine. But now, if they had put a bomb under his car and he had been blown up, I don't think I could ever forgive them, the way Gordon Wilson did – he forgave them the week after his daughter had been killed by a bomb. I don't think I could do that, I'm different.

Even though I describe myself as a Protestant Republican, I wouldn't be in support of the IRA campaign of shootings and bombings. I wouldn't support that policy because I follow the policy of the Masons. When you join the Masons you take on an obligation to never to do anything in contravention of the powers of the state in which you reside.

My own family has lived in this area of Sligo for hundreds of years, back before the Famine. We know from first hand that there was no famine in Ireland. The British starved Ireland during the famine. The native Irish were starved to death to provide profit for the landlords, and we were exporting many hundred thousand tonnes of grain during the famine years.

Here where we are sitting now is a smallholding of my father's Uncle Dan, and he had a house and farm nearby. He was told by his landlord to slate the house, it was a thatched house, he said he couldn't afford it and the landlord said, 'well, be out of it next week' and it wasn't slated for 40 years. So I have no sympathy for the landlords.

My father used to play soccer in 1900, down in Drumcliffe with his friend. He was in the house one day and his friend's mother was saying that when she came in as a bride to the house, one day the landlord was out shooting with his friends, and a sudden rainstorm came on. He trooped into the tenant's cottage, their cottage. The landlord and his

friends were cold and wet, and sure the people of the house went down to the back room and got each of them a thimble-full of whiskey. The agent came the next day and doubled the rent because a tenant was not supposed to be able to afford spirits. Now, you know, no wonder the hatred is there, but the big problem was, our landlords were English, of English stock, in England the landlords were English, in France the landlords were French, in Germany the landlords were German, but in Ireland the landlords were English. That hatred is deep-rooted.

I don't have any allegiance with the English. Everywhere Britain has been she has left a legacy of hate, all over the world, like in India and in Australia with the Aborigines. If a couple of my cousins were here they would shoot me if they heard me saying that, but I have looked at that and I have seen that the British have left a legacy of problems everywhere. I'm Irish first and foremost, others who live here must respect the state, same as I have to respect the state, you bear allegiance to the state in which you reside always, if you are coming from another country, you will bear allegiance to your own state first but you must have allegiance to the state that gives you your livelihood.

Masonry is hard to describe, absolutely hard to describe. We raised 890,000 euro two years ago which we divided up between the Samaritans, the Laura Lynn Hospice and the Northern Ireland Hospice and the Taoiseach handed over the three cheques. There wasn't a photograph or a square inch of newspaper reported that, but if you get something negative or some misperception, it will be published. You hear it on the radio that the Masons are devious or they are organising things underhand, but there's never been a case before the courts about such things. There is no such thing as an oath in Irish freemasonry but there is an obligation. The secrets we have are the CV's of the masons of old, there were no written CV's then; your CV was your handshake and the word. If you were a top-class man earning top class pay, and you went and you gave the wrong word, well that's not top-class, so you can't afford to be paid top-class.

It's the workmanship that matters. Look at Hyde Bridge, built by men who couldn't read or write properly, the masons of 150 years ago. Look at the old palaces, churches and cathedrals, Notre Dame, St. Peter's and the like, several hundred years old all over Europe, built by men who couldn't read or write. They had to be absolutely professional in their work. In the old days it might take 50 years to build some of these magnificent places, and in those days there would

be accidents, maybe the father would be killed so the rest of the masons would look after the family and children, and that is still our benevolence today. We educate five or six hundred children and assist over eight hundred widows.

There is ignorance out there as well. I heard someone say the Masonic Lodge is 'the Protestant version of the Knights of Columbanus'. I thought to myself 'it's time I got this changed, because that attitude – what they think of us, is completely wrong'. So I'm organising an open day up at the Lodge, inviting the head of this that and the other to come and listen to me and ask questions.

I would like to see things simplified. I would love to see a country where we observe the law more than we do at the moment. It drives me round the bend. I don't talk about it. I don't raise it, but then you see, it's all back to masonry. We are not allowed to discuss religion or politics in masonry, because they are two things that good friends can fall out about. 50 years I've been in masonry, and through the years you become your own person and let them become their own person. As long as we can live in peace with one another, we don't have to bring politics into our lives.

Whether we talk about it or not, tell stories or not, I think it will take a long, long time to change attitudes in Sligo with Protestant, Catholic, Quaker or whatever. I would say that it's probably very, very slowly coming closer together, but on the other hand, scratch the surface and you will see things that frighten you. I played golf with a man for years, and I was down at the golf club one night, sitting here and he was sitting over there with his back to me and something came up on the radio or the television, 'God', he says, Protestants aren't really Christians'. You know? And he was almost a good friend of mine…Why do they think that, just below the surface? And can they ever get away from thinking like that? If that remark is told to a child, the child remembers it.

Other attitudes need to change too. If I go back, my father used to tell me that back in the old days the Roman church told its people that it was not a sin to evade tax, because the tax was an English tax, and I think that an attitude that the evasion of tax is not a criminal or civil offence is still prevalent. My uncle, who was an accountant told me 'the first thing you do is to pay your tax, that's an obligation, because there's only two things you can do if you try to hide money from the taxman and that's eat it or wear it', and he said, 'if you do anything else with it they will find it'. I think the Protestants in general, would

be more law-abiding that way, because that's the standards that we grew up with. But the deep-seated anti-establishment attitude of the Catholic Church, it takes a long time for that to go away.

I was tempted to vote for Sinn Féin in the last election. What I think about the bail out and the economic situation now in 2011 is that it might actually work if Ireland were to default. I was talking to somebody the other day about it, and I was saying, the Irish land commission bought this land from the landlords in 1870 – this land outside my window here. It was paid back to the land commission over 90 years at seven pounds a half year, £14 a year. Now £14 a year in 1870 was a lot of money, a lot of money. My uncle Dan had to pay to buy back his land from the land commission who bought it from the landlords. It was paid back over a period of 90 years. We should buy out those bailouts over 90 years because when our grandsons are paying it, it will be chickenfeed for them, and default is next door to that.

It's strange to think that as a Protestant Republican I could be voting Sinn Féin next time around. It's possible, if there were men I could respect coming forward. There were a lot of them I wasn't able to respect in Sinn Féin. They were quite prepared to use the gun, they were quite prepared to hide the people who use the gun, and I couldn't respect them for that, but if I could see men going forward that I could respect, I could easily have voted for them. Because I think we have been led down the garden path: the country is awash with people who have made millions, are still making millions, and are still where they shouldn't be, earning 500,000 a year and they were the ones in charge back then when we got into trouble, bankers and businessmen you know? It frightens me. But the whole country frightens me. I can't see any way out. I can't see how it's going to change in the next 10 or 20 years.

What I value in particular from the Protestant tradition is honesty and openness. I feel that honesty and openness are an integral part of our bringing up. Admit something if you are wrong. My mother always used to say, 'a liar must have a great memory, because if you tell a lie today, you must remember you told it and tell it to the next person and tell it to the next person and eventually it hangs you'. So if we had more honesty and openness and admitting your wrongs in public life we wouldn't be in the state we're in maybe. That's not to say that a lot of Protestants might not be dishonest, you know, but in general it's the

standard: 'I buy from you because I trust you, what you are telling me is the truth' you know?

I'll tell you what has changed, a lot of the Protestant generation has faded out, like, three quarters of the Protestant chaps are gone in Sligo now that were there when I was growing up. Their offspring have vanished, emigrated, went further afield. I probably would have emigrated too. I had a job, in fact I had four jobs when I left school, but I couldn't leave – I was the only boy to look after the shop that was 150 years old at the time. I couldn't leave the tradition. What was said was 'you can go but I don't know what your poor Dad is going to do without you'

So I made the commitment, I couldn't go, I did the best I could for it. People have said to me 'I'm sure you missed the shop when you left it' I said, 'I didn't, I was glad to get out, I was never a shopkeeper as such, I was never totally committed, and that's probably why I didn't make a million!

I would have done something different if I'd had the chance. My first ambition would have been to be an airline pilot, going back into the 40s, which was unusual at that time and the second was the police, and the third was a teacher. A shopkeeper was last on the list, but it was something that basically I had to do, that I couldn't depart and leave the family in the lurch.

Most of us lads in the family had a spirit of adventure, because I have no relations on my fathers side in Ireland except one, in spite of the family being here for five or six generations. Nobody in Connaught can say today that they are a relation of mine, they all had to emigrate. One stayed at home to look after the shop, the rest vanished. It's very difficult to know what to say to the next generation. I don't think there will be a place for my grandson in the business. I don't know what he's going to do, but it doesn't worry me, because you can't live in the past. You have to move with the times. If you don't move with the times you get lost.

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks must go above all to the storytellers for their courage and generosity in sharing their personal experiences with us through this publication.

Thanks to Mary Daly, Joni Crone and Marie Crawley, who gathered and edited the stories, for the sensitivity, care and professionalism that they brought to this project.

To the many people who gave of their time to review this publication, thank you for your insight. Thanks also to Tommie Gorman, RTE, for launching this publication.

Special thanks to those who helped steer and guide this project – Bernadette Maughan, Chris MacManus, Marion Brogan, Noel Regan and Sue Hegarty. Thanks also to Peter McKee from Borderlines for sharing his project experience.

Thanks to the Sligo Peace & Reconciliation Partnership Committee who commissioned this project and to the project promoter Sligo County Council In particular, thanks to the assistance provided by Sligo County Library Service and Community & Enterprise Office staff

Thanks also to Jeff Kay of JDK Design for his expertise in designing and printing this publication.

This publication forms part of the work of the Sligo Peace & Reconciliation Action Plan (Phase I) and has been possible thanks to the support of the EU's Peace III Programme.

European Union
European Regional Development Fund
Investing in your future

sligo.ie

The Project has been supported by EU's PEACE III Programme managed for the Special EU Programmes Body by Sligo County Council on behalf of Sligo Peace & Reconciliation Partnership Committee (a sub-committee of the Sligo CDB)

'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