

Peter Heathwood



I remember how I felt attending my first meeting. I was very apprehensive and nervous, half-expecting massive shouting matches, but it wasn't like that at all. I was impressed with the composure and dignity of everyone present, indeed even at that first meeting I made acquaintances from the opposite community to mine, as many might see it, who I can now call friends.

In Edinburgh the real work began, as individuals began to tell their stories, truly some of the saddest sessions I have ever listened to, but throughout it the individuals showed true strength, and it struck me that no matter who was telling their ordeal, catholic or protestant, unionist or nationalist, loyalist or republican, what came through to me was their humanity, and I believe that the inner strength of the victims and survivors in this Forum will come through again to produce solutions and services based on the needs of us all for the future.

I feel confident that we can achieve success in the coming months, perhaps we might even de-politicise the 'Victims / Survivors' issue, and everyone could see us, the injured, as wounded and bereaved human beings without any other labels or baggage. Now that would really be a step forward, and then we wouldn't have to worry about our children and grandchildren, which after all is the main reason for healing the past, so they don't have to face the horror of violence in the future.

Jude Whyte



I don't quite know how that wonderful woman Bertha got my phone number but she did. It took all of a microsecond to say yes to her question, "Will you serve on the Pilot Victims Forum?" [it's the way she asks]. Seemed strange to me being asked to take part in a Forum which might address the issues of support, truth, justice and services for those left behind in the wake of the Conflict that took nearly 4000 lives and resulted in the complete fracture and break down of a society.

The inaugural meeting was a strange affair, some big hitters, some not so big, but for me those maimed seemed to leave an impression that lingers even as I write this small piece. To Edinburgh, Ballymena, Newry, Derry..oops Stroke City, Cookstown, Armagh and God knows where in the New Year, lots of talk and a little ... err how shall I put this lively debate. Things for me have changed a lot. Imagine living your life and not really knowing the Other Side, all of us white English speaking Christians who may as well have lived on Mars and Jupiter for the last 40 years,. Who was right? Who was wrong? Who knows? The dead cannot speak but if they could they would say "Never again". The work is hard, emotional and at times very touching - Brendan has his bells, Bertha her smile and see me? I think I might end up realizing that my side might, just might, have to step up to the mark as well as the bad nasty British.

Used to think they were all wrong, we were all right. Hmmm ... now perhaps pigs do fly, miracles do happen. Eames/Bradley might survive Cameron ... for heaven's sake, I had a drink with Willie Frazer. My old friend Ervine [RIP] God I miss you sometimes Davey, once you told me our job was to bring Peace and Justice ,the Jury is still out, with a long road ahead.

Frances Nolan



When I was invited to sit on the Forum, my initial reaction was one of apprehension. Apprehension about what I could positively contribute and more importantly, who else was going to be there. Each of us, whether we accept it or not, has been shaped by our past. I was about to have to enter into dialogue with some who held a very different view to me on those past events. Therein was my challenge.

In my opinion, the group wholly represents the wider society of Northern Ireland and it's attitude to dealing with the past. Some are still very much experiencing a deep-seated hurt, some are still not ready to engage differences, others display increasing understanding on every occasion we meet and a few have overcome the negative influence of the past to create a better future.

What is most evident though, despite moral, political and interpretative differences, is a display of common humanity towards each other. That may create a degree of falseness around some dialogue. However it does, at this early stage, facilitate discussion in a relatively safe arena, and that in itself must be laying a strong foundation for understanding and reconciliation.

If you would like to request a copy of the Commission's Newsletter in text format, please contact the Commission using the details provided.

Upcoming CVSNI Events

February 2010

- Launch of the new CVSNI Website

March/April 2010

- Publication of revised CVSNI Corporate Plan

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Welcome to 2010! And welcome to the latest Newsletter from CVSNI, which we are dedicating to a celebration of the establishment of the victims and survivors Forum.

Setting up a Forum was one of the six statutory duties placed on the Commission, and late last year, we got it going in a pilot format. It meets regularly, discussing the issues they, and we, think are important, and we plan to keep that going until June this year, when we pause to reflect, learn the lessons, fix the design flaws, and move on.

But as we stand, we take some satisfaction in assembling a group that included 28 people, who between them, have 678 years experience of what it is like to be a victim or survivor of the conflict which began here just over 40 years ago. To be fair, that satisfaction is tempered by the obvious gaps; we began without the sort of representation we would have liked from young people, from areas like north Belfast, and from groups like the Army. But there have been changes in that regard already. Overleaf, you can read about our Forum members, and hear what some of them think of the experience.

2009 also saw the publication by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of a ten year strategy for victims and survivors.

We welcome that, because it shows that the devolved administration recognises two key points: firstly, victims and survivors have needs that will be around for a long time to come; secondly, that we could do better in terms of meeting those needs.

Looking forward to 2010, OFMDFM are to introduce a new Service, with the aim of delivering on victims and survivors' needs better than ever before. Of course, that is a fantastic aspiration, but this Commission believes the devil is in the detail, and we expect to spend a lot of our time this year arguing the case. And that begins with listening, because if we do not listen, we will not understand, and if we do not understand, we cannot be sure we are reacting effectively.

To help make that happen, to keep you informed of how we intend to do it, and to give some means of measuring how well we are doing, we will soon publish our Corporate Plan, which will tell you about our priorities for the rest of the time Bertha, Brendan, Patricia and I serve as Commissioners for Victims and Survivors.

Michael Nesbitt
Current Chair of the Commission for Victims and Survivors

CVSNI Website Re-launch

After a year with a skeletal presence on the internet, CVSNI is re-launching its website. It has always been our intention to make www.cvsni.org a must have in the "Favorites" of anyone interested in studying victims and survivors online.

On the new site, you will find more detailed information about the Commission, our daily work and our strategic vision. But you should also see developing a One Stop Information Shop, where people can access news about all the groups and service providers who are dedicated to meeting the needs of victims and survivors – who they are, where they are based, what they offer, how far they reach out geographically.

The third thing we want to do online is acknowledge what happened during the Conflict, on a daily basis. Not just the important acknowledgement of those who lost their lives on a given date down the years of the Troubles. We also want to remember the many, many people who were injured and who feel they are seldom mentioned and often ignored. We may never know just how many people were injured, physically, mentally, or both; estimates range from 40,000 upwards. What seems sure is that the conflict impacted on all of us of a certain age.

If we are all agreed that "it must never happen again", then it is important we do not lose sight of what "it" was, and measure "it" in terms of its terrible human cost.

So, we would like to include reports of the events, violent and non-violent. As the website develops, so will our online library, and more importantly, with your help, the collection of your recollections.

The new website will go "live" in early February.

Introducing the Pilot Forum Members



Alan Brecknell. My father Trevor was shot dead in a south Armagh pub just before Christmas 1975, he was on his way home from visiting my mother in hospital who had just given birth to my sister.



Reatha Hassan OBE. I experienced a number of traumatic incidents during my years of service in the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment where I had first hand experience with injured and bereaved families.



Michael McKinney's brother, William, was shot dead in Derry/Londonderry on Bloody Sunday in 1972.



Alex Bunting lost a leg and sustained injuries to his other leg in a booby trap bomb attack on his taxi in Belfast in 1991.



Peter Heathwood. I was shot during a gun attack on my family home in 1979 and left paralysed and in a wheelchair, my father Herbert died of a heart attack at the scene.



Shirley McMichael's husband, John, died from injuries received in a booby trap bomb attack at his home in Lisburn in 1987.



Jean Caldwell's husband, Cecil, died in an explosion at Teebane in 1992.



Nigel Lutton's father, Frederick, was a former RUC Reservist who was murdered by IRA terrorists near the Moy in 1979.



Paul McIlwaine's son, David, died with another young man, Andrew Robb, from injuries sustained in a double murder carried out by the UVF.



Phyllis Carrothers is the widow of RUC Reservist Douglas, who was murdered by the IRA in an under car booby trap bomb at their home in Lisbellaw in 1991.



Alan Madill. I am an ex member of the RUC who was subject to terrorist attacks on several occasions. My father was seriously injured whilst also serving.



Jennifer McNern lost both legs in an explosion at the Abercorn Restaurant in Belfast in 1972.



Michael Culbert experienced a number of traumatic incidents in Belfast.



Alan McBride. I lost my wife Sharon, and my father-in-law John Frizzell in an explosion on the Shankill Rd in 1993.



Cathy Nelis experienced a number of traumatic incidents in Derry/Londonderry.



Anna Dixon. During the Enniskillen bomb in 1987, whilst I miraculously escaped, my husband, Jim, sustained multiple injuries and I now care for him full time.



Catherine McCartney's brother, Robert, was murdered by the IRA in January 2005.



Frances Nolan. I was exposed to a number of traumatic incidents during my years of service in the Police. A close relative, who was a serving police officer, was murdered as he left his place of worship.



Willie Frazer's father, James, was a UDR soldier who died in a gun attack in 1975 at Ballymoyer near Whitecross. He also lost two uncles in the UDR in 1975 and 1980.



Raymond McCord's son Raymond Jnr. was murdered in November 1997.



Jeff Smith was paralysed by a bomb explosion in Co. Fermanagh in 1985 while serving as an RUC officer.



Mary Gregory's husband, Malachy, was shot dead at his workplace in Belfast in 1977.



Gerry McErlane's two brothers, John and Thomas, were shot dead in Mount Vernon in 1975 by members of the UVF.



Jude Whyte is a Lecturer in Higher Education. His mother Peggy was murdered in a Bomb Blast in her home in April 1984.



Michael Grimes lost his wife, daughter and grand-daughter, in the Omagh bombing in 1998.



William McKee experienced trauma during his time as a Governor in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.



Mark Thompson's brother, Peter, was shot dead in Belfast in January 1990.

Forum Announcement

Anna McShane stood down from the Pilot Forum in December, for personal reasons. In a separate development, the Forum was joined by Charlie Bennett, a retired member of The Ulster Defence Regiment and The Royal Irish Regiment who works in support of the Regimental Aftercare Service.

Associate Members of the Pilot Forum

The Pilot Forum has nine associate members, who sit not because they are victims and survivors, but because they bring specialist knowledge and experience to the table.

- The nine are:
- Aidan McCann**
Official with the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety.
 - Derick Wilson**
Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Ulster
 - Sheelagh Sheerin**
Represents NI's four Trauma Advisory Panels
 - Peter McBride**
Director, Northern Ireland Association of Mental Health
 - Oscar Daly**
Consultant Psychiatrist, Lagan Valley Hospital
 - Seán Coll**
Community Victim Support Officer, Western Health and Social Care Trust
 - Brighde Vallely**
Co-ordinator, The Mastery Foundation in Ireland
 - Russell McCaughey**
official with the Department of Social Development
 - Micháela Mackin**
Director, Funding and Development (Victims and Survivors), Northern Ireland Community Relations Council

Forum Information

During 2009 the Pilot Forum held 9 meetings in total, with 8 meetings taking place throughout Northern Ireland. Before commencement, a preparation residential took place in Edinburgh.