

# EAMON'S GHOSTS

Protestant terrorists killed Eamon Devlin's parents and critically injured his sister during the troubles in Northern Ireland. Now the UNISON member, a warehouse supervisor in Bradford, draws attention to mounting evidence of collusion between British forces, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and loyalist murderers. In an exclusive interview **Peter Carroll** hears how Eamon has coped with the tragedy and the authorities' failure to disclose vital documents

Photo: Robert Boardman

It was around 1 am on May 7, 1974 when Eamon Devlin and his two brothers were told by their uncle and aunt to wake up and get dressed.

While they were sleeping in their home in the countryside outside Dungannon, County Tyrone, Protestant terrorists had shot both of their parents dead, and pumped 12 bullets into their sister Patricia.

The murders happened in front of the family home.

That night, as usual, Gertrude Devlin had driven her Austin 1100 a couple of miles to nearby Coalisland to pick up her husband James from the family-owned bar he ran.

Gertrude's 17-year-old daughter Patricia went along to keep her company. They stopped to get fish and chips for James's supper.

When they reached the single-track lane connecting the roadway to their home, the Ulster Volunteer Force terrorists struck.

A man in combat gear stepped out of a hedge and raised his hand. He was carrying a long barrelled gun and Patricia thought he was a soldier.

But when he was two yards from the car he opened fire. Patricia heard her parents say they had been hit, her mother screaming 'I am dead'.

A second gunman then opened fire with a .445 handgun from inside a field of barley opposite the house.

Patricia had used her arms and legs to shield herself and played dead until the shooting stopped but her parents were beyond help, having been shot multiple times in the chest and

abdomen.

Eamon is now 55 and is a warehouse supervisor and UNISON member at Incommunities housing association in Bradford.

But the memories of that night, and the days and weeks that followed, are still vivid.

"I was woken up by Uncle Edward and Aunty Celia (along with brothers Colm and John) and told to get dressed.

"In the living room there were three men. One was Austen Curry, an elected member for the SDLP (Social and Democratic Labour Party) in the Northern Ireland Assembly and a family friend.

"We followed them down the drive to a car and there were lots of Royal Ulster Constabulary police outside.

"We drove to Aunt

Sinead's house, daddy's older sister and the matriarch of the family.

"The house was full of people and that night they told us what had happened. Huge tears. Buckets of tears.

"The next day I was in shock. We didn't go to school and the next few days were a blur. Then we went to Uncle Edward and Aunt Theresa's house in Dungannon.

"She had a part-time cleaner and I remember one morning she said to us 'do you want tea in your sugar' instead of 'do you want sugar in your tea?'".

It was the first time the boys had smiled, let alone laughed, for days, but there was more trauma and heartache to come.

The funeral procession from the morgue to St Patrick's Church took place at night, and in the darkness

hundreds of devastated mourners and well-wishers lined the streets.

## WOUNDS

The requiem mass next day was conducted by Cardinal Conway, Primate of all Ireland, in front of 2,000 mourners. Journalists and TV crews were everywhere.

Patricia watched the funeral cortege from her hospital bedroom window where she would spend the next two months, including her 18th birthday, recovering from her multiple bullet wounds.

Eamon said: "It was such a big deal, there were so many people there, so many priests there. I was bawling my eyes out. I just remember crying buckets."

More than 120 people were killed in the mid-1970s by the Protestant Loyalist

was the driver of the killers' car – but the two gunmen have never been prosecuted.

Eamon and members of other similarly bereaved families are now fighting for the truth to be revealed about why their loved ones were murdered, and who knew they were going to be.

But the process is slow as the families' lawyers have to battle through meetings with the Police Ombudsman in Belfast to get to the documented facts.

"It's moving forward but every time you go to court there are failures to declare evidence from the authorities and we have to go back again", said Eamon.

"They are playing the long game, like they did with the Hillsborough inquiry, blaming lack of resources for not carrying out their statutory duties.

"They stall, stall, stall because people die off and that's one less person to worry about. But we will carry on. We don't want retribution, we just want to be told the truth about this."

Eamon and his siblings have all successfully held down good jobs and lived happy lives in the 43 years since they lost their parents.

Their lives and education were massively disrupted, but they fought through in spite of it.

Eamon decided he would do an Open University Degree in Social Sciences when he was in his forties "just to see if I could study at that level". He could, and, if he wants to, he can now put BSc after his name.

The old family home is now largely demolished but with the remaining stones, the community built a shrine to Our Lady in honour of James and Gertrude in the graveyard at St Malachy's church where they are buried.

## FAMILY

There was a bit of youthful wildness when Eamon and his brothers and sister briefly moved in together in Coalisland in their teens.

Eamon took to the high life. He learned how to play snooker by playing all day in the club that former world champion Dennis Taylor started his career.

But it was a brief episode and hardly surprising when you consider he was essentially unsupervised.

For all the love and care given to the children by their extended family, Eamon says, it was not a normal life.

"You know, go to school, come home, get changed, eat, homework, play, bed.

"It was an absence of family life. You know, nobody to ask what sort of a day you had at school or if you needed any help. I had no-one to ask advice from and I became my own parent."

Eamon's childhood home was near an orchard, open

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fields and a beautiful lake. The family lived an idyllic country life.

Now he lives in Bradford but is a regular visitor, in rain or shine, to the reservoir Ogden Water just outside the city.

Eamon said: "It's different from East Tyrone but it does remind me of home. No traffic, sometimes no people, no atmospheric pollution.

"It's visual and sensory oxygen - the birds and just the beauty of it.

"There are benches with plaques to people who are dead but who found joy here. I like that their memory is still there."

So we took Eamon up to Ogden Water for photographs on a dull and cold Spring afternoon.

"I love it here," he said when we were leaving, and then smiled. "It brings back happy memories, I suppose that's it." ■

## BattleForTruth

Anne Cadwallader's book 'Lethal Allies' which reveals compelling evidence of collusion between Protestant terrorists and the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment is published by Mercier Press. It can be ordered on-line or from bookshops. Proceeds will support the legal battle for the truth.

Ulster Volunteer Force gang that operated in the rural Counties of Tyrone, Armagh and Dundalk.

The journalist and campaigner Anne Cadwallader (please see panel on next page) has conducted a long and thorough investigation into the events of the period when James and Gertrude Devlin were murdered.

And her book, 'Lethal Allies' investigates, in forensic detail, evidence that the illegal UVF organisation carried out their murders in collusion with agents of the British state.

Evidence of collusion between the army, the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Ulster Volunteer Force and the intelligence services is compelling.

Only one man has been convicted of the murder – he ▶

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