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*Perhaps Tim's death was destiny ..a chance for us to make a difference*

On the eve of the 15th anniversary of the IRA bombing of Warrington, the parents of murdered Tim Parry explain how they continue to fight conflict in his name



Colin and Wendy Parry (Pic:DM)

It's a family tradition that Colin and Wendy Parry would give anything to break. Tomorrow they will lay flowers on their son's grave for the 15th time.

Even after so many years, the annual ritual never gets any easier.

Tim should have been 27 now, but his life was ended violently at the age of just 12 when he was killed in the IRA bombings in Warrington – 15 years ago today.

That day Tim had gone shopping with a friend to buy a pair of Everton football shorts.

He was caught by the second of two IRA bombs that also claimed the life of three-year-old Johnathan Ball and injured 56 others.

"It feels like a lifetime since we saw Tim," says Wendy. "Other days it seems like two minutes ago and I go back to that morning.

"I was drying my hair and Tim sat on my bed next to me. He had £11 to buy some Neville Southall shorts, but they were £19 and he asked me for more money."

The couple heard about the explosions from a neighbour but calmly reasoned that the odds of Tim being injured were "infinitesimal".

But they discovered later that when he heard the first blast he ran out of a sports shop and straight into the path of the second bomb as it exploded in a metal litter bin.

The next time Wendy, now 50, and Colin, 61, saw their middle child he was on a life support machine, his body pock-marked with shrapnel and his head swathed in bandages.

"A surgeon asked us if we recognised a watch with a canvas strap and a St Christopher chain," says Colin. "Then I noticed the surgeon had blood on his overshoes. He said he'd been operating on Tim for three hours and explained he might not survive the night."

Tim had appalling head injuries, and the family had to wait until the next day to see him. "I stared at him, incredulous at seeing my handsome, charming boy buried under bloodstained bandages," says Colin. "I spoke to him where his ears should be. I begged him to fight for his life."

At one stage it seemed Tim might pull through. But when, after five days, a basic brain test showed he was not reacting at all, his life-support machine was switched off.

"I lay on the bed and squeezed and kissed him while he died," says Colin, his voice cracking.

"I'm sorry. We remember him every day but we don't talk about him as much as I would like to. You can't force it."

At his funeral, watched by the world's media, Colin made a remarkable speech: "If my son becomes a symbol of peace and gives everyone a new sense of hope after such a tragedy, then that will be Tim's unique achievement."

Those words sparked a campaign that saw the creation of The Tim Parry and Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace in Warrington in 2000. Their efforts have even been credited with contributing to the IRA ceasefire.

"There are still days when I think 'what if'," says Colin. "What if Tim hadn't gone shopping that day? When the bin exploded it hit him in the face. What if he'd been six inches to the left or six inches the right?"

"Perhaps the only answer is that his death was destiny. It gave a vocal Scouser like me the means to make a difference," he smiles wryly.

The Peace Centre helps young people deal with conflict. Wendy is a full-time fundraiser and Colin is chairman. So far it's helped 20,000 young people through school programmes, international exchanges and community projects. Wendy pours her grief into it and in Colin's words it's "the glue that binds us together."

Wendy still gets thrown off-balance by random reminders of her son. "When Pop Idol was on TV, Tim's sister Abbi said if he was alive he'd have queued for hours. She was right. He was full of life, the outgoing one, always doing something – Sea Scouts, guitar lessons, football, golf and squash."

She adds: "Guilt is another issue. Colin and I have had some fabulous holidays with friends. For years I felt guilt-ridden, thinking: 'Tim's never going to be able to do this.' If I saw Colin laugh I'd think 'how could you?' and I'm sure he felt the same about me."

"But now we are doing everything we can to keep Tim's memory alive."

Tim's brother Dom, 28, is dad to six-month-old Olivia while Abbi, 26, has 17-month-old Evie. The whole family still goes out for a meal on Tim's birthday, when they toast him and talk about old times.

"We have all found our own ways of coping," says Wendy. "Abbi would cry when she saw his face on TV. Dom didn't show his feelings so openly. He had some counselling, as did Colin."

From the start Colin found comfort in speaking out. "He felt he had to do something to promote peace," says Wendy.

After the blasts the couple visited a "peace farm" in Coleraine, Northern Ireland, where young Catholics and Protestants live and work in harmony.

It inspired Wendy to suggest their own living memorial to Tim and Johnathan. They started with a charity running exchanges between young people in Dublin and Belfast. By 2000 they'd opened the Peace Centre.

Last October the couple met Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams, who apologised to them for the IRA attacks on Warrington.

"It was another milestone. I found it really hard," says Wendy. "But anything that raises awareness is worth doing."

Recently the foundation has offered support to the family of Rhys Jones, the 11-year-old shot in Liverpool, and to a school in Leeds where one of the 7/7 bombers was a former pupil.

They are hoping to help Garry Newlove's widow Helen in her anti-violence campaign.

"It feels like Britain is kind of unravelling," says Colin. "Young people are leaving home with no support or guidance and having their own kids when they are still kids themselves," he says.

Wendy adds: "We don't have Tim any more, but we are still doing our very best for him." Colin nods.

"Our son has not died in vain."

**AS TOLD TO RACHEL MURPHY**