





ADVERTISEMENT

Belfast Telegraph - IPR Website of the Year

Search Site

Advanced Search

- [Loadzajobs.co.uk](#)
- [Propertynews.com](#)
- [Belfast Telegraph TV](#)

Belfast Telegraph

- Home
- News
- Breaking News
- Northwest Edition
- Business
- Business Telegraph
- Sport
- **Features**
 - **Daily Features**
 - Health & Beauty
 - Food & Drink
 - Motoring
- Columnists
- Entertainment
- Homefinder
- Family Notices
- Weather
- Archive
- Calendar 2007
- Telegraph Travel

Inside Belfast

- Jobs
- Training
- Dating
- Gaming
- Reader Offers
- Diners' Club

Services

- RSS
- Media Kit

Other Titles

- Sunday Life
- Ireland's Saturday Night

[Home](#) > [Features](#) > [Daily Features](#)

Daily Features

The Victims: What they really think

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

Kevin Skelton (52) lost his wife of nearly 20 years, Philomena (49), in the Omagh bomb on August 15, 1998. He tells Gráinne McCarry about the challenges of bringing up their children, Paula (27), Ray (25), Tracey (24) and Shauna (22) by himself, the struggle for compensation - and how he believes his late wife would have approved of his new marriage to Maria (40), with whom he has a daughter, four-month-old Gabriella

My life changed forever the day the Omagh bomb went off. Thankfully, a new chapter has begun with my remarriage, but the day the pain of Omagh leaves me will be the day I am carried to my coffin.

Just over seven years after I lost my wife, I married again, on October 12, 2005. In a way, it was through my first wife Mena that I met my new wife, Maria. Mena was involved with a charity called The North West Romanian Relief Fund, which reached out to poor families.

Maria's daughter Andreea stayed with us for two weeks in the summer of 1997. Her sister, Nicoletta, stayed with another family. Both children were in an orphanage. Mena and I had talked about the possibility of bringing Andreea and Nicoletta over here to live permanently.

After Mena died, I went out to Romania to visit Andreea, and that's when I met her mother. I think Mena had something to do with bringing us together. I was finding it hard to cope with life - the children were all growing up and branching off on their own lives. I felt I didn't really have a purpose anymore and was feeling very sorry for myself. Now I have Maria and our new baby, Gabriella.

Although I'm very happy, memories of that day in Omagh will always be there. I remember every single thing about it - how could I forget? Myself, Mena and our three daughters had gone into the town from our home in Drumquin to shop. I had been pricing flights to Romania because Mena and I had made plans to visit Andreea.






Browsing

Mena was trying to get bits and pieces of school uniform in the SD Kells shop for Shauna and Tracey, and I was browsing in the shop next door. Paula was further up the town.

There had been a bomb scare earlier on in the day - that's why we had moved on to where we were. Then the bomb went off and the shop's front window was sucked out. I went outside and saw all the shops along the street cave in one by one as the bomb's vacuum spread. They folded like cards ... it was like something out of a movie.

I climbed in through the window of Kells to see if I could find Mena, Shauna and Tracey. I found Mena lying face down in the rubble inside the front door. She was already dead. I thought my whole family were. I found Tracey half an hour later, on her knees beside her mammy. She had been knocked out, but when she came round she went searching for everyone.

It was another two hours before I found Shauna. Someone had helped her out the back of the shop. She was then taken to Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry with very bad facial injuries and then transferred to the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald. I don't know how Paula survived the impact of the bomb. I don't know why

-  Email Article
-  Print Version
-  Search
-  +Most Emailed
-  +Most Read

Related Articles


- [Day five: The Victims](#)
- [Day four: The Victims](#)
- [Day three: The Victims](#)
- [Day two: The Victims](#)
- [Day one: The Victims](#)


“ Victims are treated like second class citizens, while the people who carry out these crimes are protected and looked after ”


Advertiser Links


- **Meet Local Musicians - BandMix.Co.Uk**
UK musician classifieds. Brand new. Meet local bands and mus...
[bandmix.co.uk](#)
- **Music**
Get the free music toolbar and have access to thousands of t...
[try.starware.com](#)
- **Celebrity Music News**
Get the latest news of music stars, celebrity singers and th...
[www.hellomagazine.com](#)

Don't miss . . .

Masons hit by bugging
 Cops launch probe after recording received in post

BitTorrent goes legit
 Company launches Hollywood approved store

Goodfella
 Scorsese: the consistent and passionate auteur

48 Hours In: Barcelona
 Find out what you're missing in this vibrant Catalan capital

ADVERTISEMENTS

Business TELEGRAPH
in association with





Online Cinema Listings
Click here

ADVERTISEMENTS

some lived and others didn't. I had only three scratches on my forehead. Paula and Tracey didn't have any physical injuries, but the mental scarring will always be there.

After Shauna was released from hospital, she received a bit of counselling. I left it up to each of them to decide if they wanted any or not. The counsellors came to visit me and it was obvious they had not been trained to deal with an atrocity like this. They didn't have a clue what they were talking about.

It was very difficult to get on with things because there was no help. The place was swarming with social workers, but as soon as the funeral was over, the house emptied.

My mother, Maggie, was my rock. Nobody else came near me to see how I was coping with the children. We were all left to row our own boats - it was either sink or swim and I nearly sank ... I worked as a lorry driver and was a referee at hurling, gaelic football and soccer matches. I was used to getting phone calls at the weekend a few hours before a match, asking me to referee.

Different

All that was over. I had to be there to put the dinner on the table. The odd time I went to a match, but it just wasn't the same. People treated me differently. Referees are used to being called names and shouted at, but everyone was so polite. The bomb changed everything - even wee things like that.

For the first few months after the explosion, it seemed as if we were riding on the crest of a wave. Bill Clinton came over, and Tony Blair and the late Mo Mowlam met with the families. They really did put on a show promising us the sun, the moon and the stars. I believed them - I certainly don't anymore.

The Chief Constable of the RUC, Ronnie Flanagan, said that no stone would be left unturned in catching the people who had carried this out and Tony Blair told us that anyone who committed a crime after the Good Friday Agreement would not get away with it.

Crimes

But all of our politicians have sold us down the river. There were no political points to be scored from a bomb that killed Spanish, Irish, Mormon, Catholic and Protestant. Victims are treated like second class citizens, while the people who carry out these crimes are protected and looked after by the Government. The bigger a scoundrel you are, the better you are treated.

I met the Interim Victims' Commissioner Bertha McDougall. I had problems with her, because I thought she was going to fight for the rights of all innocent victims - not create a two-tiered system for RUC victims and UDR victims. Their families are no different from anybody else's. Then, there are the murders like that of Pat Finucane and Rosemary Nelson, which were high profile as both had a background in working for human rights. They did not deserve to die either. Each life is as important as the next one. To try and categorise victims is completely and utterly wrong.

The Omagh bomb shattered my whole family dynamic. I got £52 a week sick pay for six months from my employer. I don't know how I would have got by without the generosity of my family and good people from around the world. I'm not ashamed to say I received donations from as far away as Canada and Australia.

When I tried to get the finances sorted out I was left to feel like I was defrauding the system. I was told that if I claimed compensation, I couldn't claim benefits. I was told I wasn't getting compensation, then I got a cheque for £7,500. I have since received a further amount of money but my son Ray, who lost his mother, was entitled to absolutely nothing because he wasn't in town that day.

Paula was due to go off to do her teacher training at Stranmillis College in Belfast. She was going to take a year out, but I insisted she go on as planned. It's what her mother would have wanted. Shauna is now training to be a teacher and graduates this year. Tracey is married and working in an office, and Ray is a joiner. I'm proud of all of them and always will be.

A memorial is to be erected in memory of the people who lost their lives and no one can agree on the words 'dissident Republicans' being written on the memorial. Why not let it be known that it was dissident Republicans that did this? But Omagh is a Republican town and not everyone wants it highlighted that the bombing was carried out by the Real IRA.

Some people say 'Why would God let such an atrocity happen?'. But God didn't plant the bomb, God didn't kill all those innocent people. He created human beings and gave them their own free will. It's up to the individual what way they use that free will.

Continuing Mena's charity work after she had gone gave the family something to focus on. Since the bomb, we have fundraised to build an orphanage in Fagaras in Romania. The first phase opened in August 2004 and we're hoping that the second phase will open next year.

Our new baby, Gabriella, is a great wee girl. I had never seen a child being born before. She's a spoilt wee girl as well. I think she looks like her mammy, but others say she looks like me. Maria's other daughters, Andreea (18) is in Northern Ireland, training to be a beauty therapist and hairdresser, while Nicoletta (20) has returned to Romania. They have another little sister, six-year-old Iulia, who attends St Conon's Primary School in Omagh.

I have a new start now, and a new family. I'm certain Mena made all of this happen and is looking down on me today. We will never forget that day in Omagh ... but life has to go on.

More articles in Daily Features

- [Violence, race hate, crazy parking: how Ulster crime compares to US](#)
- [Why it's a dog's life, really](#)
- [Rivers deep](#)
- [The miaow generation](#)
- [£16,000 recovered, £12,000 to go: one woman's fight with the banks](#)

Boarding
Now

easyJet.com

ADVERTISEMENTS