

• Newsletter Sign up for email alerts and WIN a helicopter flight

[Click here to find out more!](#)

• News

- Editors Viewpoint
- Letters
- Columnists

• Entertainment

• Jobs

• Cars

• Homes

• Other Titles

• Services

• The digital gateway to Northern Ireland news, sport, business, entertainment and opinion

[Home](#) > [Opinion](#) > [Columnists](#) > [Eric Waugh](#)

Eric Waugh: Why we can never share Omagh relatives' grief

Friday, 15 August 2008

You may think you have been there, but you have not. It has only been a proxy experience. Through the media. You cannot know, really. Unless it has happened to you. You think you know what it was like. What it would have been like if you had been doing your

Print Email

Search

Bookmark & Share

Digg It

del.icio.us

Facebook

shopping that Saturday afternoon on the fated street of the Tyrone town.



What are these?

But you do not. I do not. Because we were not there and we have not suffered their loss —which, for each, is an unhealed wound, nagging like an ailing hip bone, always there, with every step; or an errant tooth adding its burden of pain to the common or garden cares of every day. But it is worse, because it is something imprinted on the mind by that day of terror, when nappies from a pharmacy were used vainly to stanch the blood of the innocents, young and old, which ran in the the gutters; when the dead were washed in the stream of burst water mains; when a little girl came crying for her mother, trailing her broken leg behind. It was a day which inflicted wounds upon those who lived which can never be erased. For a decade now. But in reality a life sentence — imposed, not by a judge or jury, but by the murderous, bungling hand of the hating fanatic.



The agony of that fateful August 10 years ago, lives on for the families of the Omagh victims



A life sentence — plucked from the rending, tearing death of one's dearest. But for you, unless of course you are one of the cowering elect thrust into this personal apocalypse, those who perished do not live on as they do for those who bore them and raised them, or who were their devoted mates through life. Who loved them. With the sacrificial love enriched with the knitted intimacy of the years. It is only they who stroke off the other years. The years that were denied.

He would have been 20 this year, they think. On his birthday. Or they reflect that she would have been 65. Most likely they do not mention it; and if they do, it is only in the company of those closest, who share their loss. Almost a secret now; for, with passing time, those friends who remember grow fewer. But no one says very much. It is a difficult morsel of feeling to put into words. There were 30 children who lost their mothers. Perhaps a bunch of those white chrysanthemums will be left instead.

These are the eternally deprived: lonely guardians of the phantom existence of those so wickedly cut off. Yet I know people — probably you do too — who raise the back of their hand to their mouth and mutter behind it that they are sick of Omagh. Sick of the litigation. Sick of the patent failure of any court to convict and be done with it.

Sick of the rows over the memorial, about what should — and should not — appear on the memorial stone; about who was going to which commemorative service and who was staying away. In a way the rows encapsulate the dilemma of a community denied a common destination. It is a community whose inter-relationships are a furtive, self-conscious thing; whose slight exchanges are combed with a gimlet eye in search of opportunity to take offence. So the deliberation over how to remember the dead and the wounded became, from time to time, a quarrelsome and petty affair.

Ten years on, the will to make the strange Stormont structure work remains a fitful flame. It would be healthier, of course, if the Government was united and dissent was to be organised and voiced by an opposition: but, uniquely in this democracy, there is no opposition. Even the Alliance Party, which strives to fill the gap, was the target of an attempted seduction. It was thought that asking them to nominate a Minister of Justice would be a neat way out of a dilemma.

But they were right to refuse and increased their stature by so doing. There are already too many snouts over-feeding in the trough. The result is an administration of very mongrel breed, bereft of any political philosophy whatsoever. If the Executive knew its own mind, it would not be so chary of meeting. Are they left? Or right? Or centrist? No one can say. It is a matter only of orange and green. Until we shove that to the margin, of course, we go nowhere.

But today we remember Omagh, where those of all loyalties and of none met their end. The bombers killed GAA men and unionists, unborn twins, a musician, day tripping kids from the Republic and students from Spain and mums shopping for school uniforms. Surgeons rushed from over the border, for a shattered limb



©belfasttelegraph.co.uk Legal
Terms & Policies | Contact Us |
Sitemap | RSS Feeds | Group
Websites | Daily Newsletter

WANT TO
ADVERTISE
HERE?

Belfast
Telegraph

wears no flag.

Post a comment

Limit: 500 characters

[View all comments](#) that have been posted about this article

* Name (only this field displayed)

* Email

* Town/City

* Country/State

Offensive or abusive comments will be removed and your IP address logged and may be used to prevent further submissions. In submitting a comment to the site, you agree to be bound by BelfastTelegraph.co.uk's [Terms of Use](#)

* Required field

Remember Me