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son never returned

By David Young
Monday, 11 August 2008

Bernie Doherty can still see her eight-year-old son Oran waving goodbye as he set off for his grand adventure on the morning of the Omagh bomb.

She had expected him back home to Bunrana, Co Donegal, later that evening, bursting

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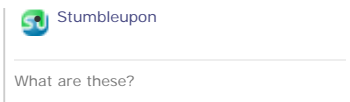
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with stories about his first ever trip away with the local youth group. He never arrived.



The next time she saw him was lying dead in a temporary morgue.

Oran was one of three children from Buncrana who died at Omagh. Twelve-year-olds James Barker and Sean McLoughlin also lost their lives. They had been on a day-trip with a group of Spanish students who had been attending a summer programme in the Donegal town. Two Spaniards, one leader and one student, were also killed in the bomb.

The outing was to the Ulster American Folk Park outside Omagh but the leaders had agreed to let the children finish off the day with a look round the town.

"I wasn't so happy about him going because he was only eight," recalls Bernie.

"I watched him until he went out of sight over the hill.

"Four local boys and one of the Spanish students, five of them going down the road and that was it, the last I saw him alive."

Bernie was in her living room at around 3.30 that afternoon when suddenly two of Oran's cousins came charging up the garden path.

"I just knew they were there to tell me something about the trip, I just knew," she says.

As word of the bomb spread the desperate quest for information began. But with phonelines in Omagh deluged it was virtually impossible to find anything out.

After a couple of hours, Oran's father Mickey decided to drive to Omagh with families of other missing children to search for themselves.

"At midnight my husband called home," says Bernie.

"He was up at the leisure centre and said every now and again people were called to come up. That there was a list of missing people and gradually it was getting smaller as people were getting found but there was still no word about Oran and Sean.

"Mickey just said, 'Don't worry I'll bring the wee man home, I'll find him'."

Bernie stayed at her sister's house that night. But she didn't sleep. She just waited. Waited for the phone to ring.

"At 7am I saw people hugging each other at the McLoughlins' house.

"Someone came up and said, 'Wee Sean's dead'. At that exact minute the phone rang. It was Mickey. He said, 'Have you heard the news?' I said, 'Yes, wee Sean's dead', and he said, 'Yes and Oran's dead too'.

"I just fired the phone to the ground."

Since the bomb, the people of Buncrana gather every August 15 to hold a mass for those who died at Omagh. Bernie lays flowers at Oran's grave once a week.



Bernie Doherty, from Buncrana, Co Donegal, with a picture of her son Oran, who died in the Omagh blast aged eight.



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