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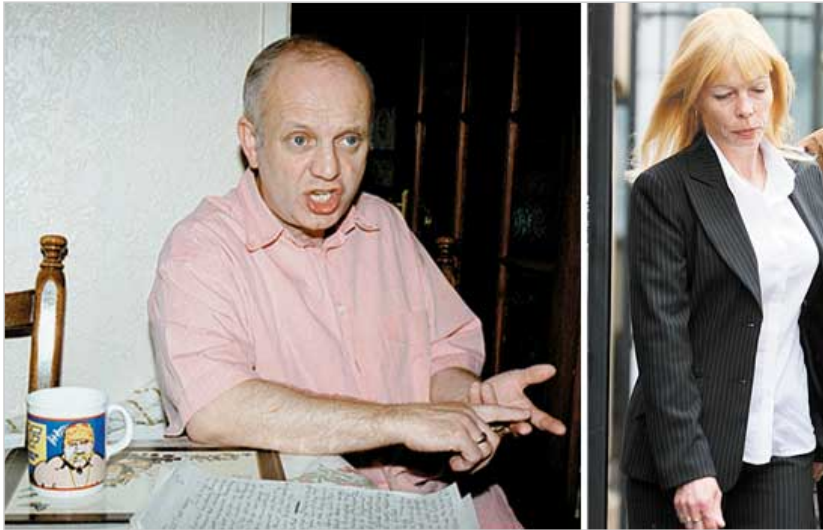


NEWS >

Collins widow no closer to finding out who killer was

By Liz Trainor

28/01/09



SADDENED: Eamonn Collins speaking to The Irish News in his Newry home shortly before he was murdered 10 years

ago. Right, Bernie Collins

THE widow of former IRA man Eamon Collins has said she is no closer to finding out who was responsible for his murder 10 years ago.

Mother-of-four Bernie Collins said she is saddened that the “psychopaths” who killed her husband are still walking the streets a decade on and warned they could kill again.

She also hit out at police investigators who, at an inquest in 2007,

promised to review the murder but 15 months on still have not contacted her.

Mr Collins (44) was stabbed to death near his home on the republican Barcroft estate in Newry on January 27 1999 in one of the most savage attacks of the Troubles.

Once a member of the IRA, he had become one of the organisation’s most prominent critics.

In 1985, while facing five murder charges, he agreed during police questioning to give evidence against alleged associates in court.

More than 40 suspects were arrested but most were released after Collins had a change of heart.

He was charged with 50 paramilitary offences but walked free from court after a judge dismissed his alleged

CONCERN.

He left his home town of Newry but returned during an IRA amnesty.

However, he rose to further prominence when he detailed his past in a book Killing Rage.

After months of constant intimidation he finally met a violent death.

The 44-year-old was stabbed repeatedly in the face, head and back, the blade of the knife piercing one of his eyes.

When police found Mr Collins's body they initially thought he had been hit by a car.

At his inquest the coroner said the slaying was "one of the most ghastly, brutal murders" he had ever experienced. No-one has ever been convicted of his killing.

Speaking on the tenth anniversary of the murder, Mrs Collins said she still lived in hope that his killers would be brought to justice but held out no hope that those responsible had any shred of remorse.

She was also critical of the police inquiry and promises by the Retrospective Murder Review Unit (RMSU) which has not contacted her, despite pledging to re-open the case 15 months ago.

"The inquest itself was a long time coming," she said.

"It took eight years for that to happen and in the court that day somebody made an approach to me from the unit and said they would investigate the murder. But I am no further on as to what they are doing.

"It is disappointing that they have not made any effort to contact me to say where they are with the case.

"I thought the inquest would bring some closure but I have been left with more questions unanswered.

"I would just like to know the sequence of it all, to give me some

closure."

The couple had run the gauntlet of a campaign of intimidation in Newry which Mrs Collins said she tried to shield her young family from.

Their home was torched before the murder and sinister graffiti began to appear around the estate with increasing frequency, branding him a 'tout'.

"The night before he was killed I was out with the paintbrush cleaning up some graffiti that had appeared because I didn't want the kids to see it on their way to school the following morning," she said.

Recalling the morning of the killing, Mrs Collins said: "I had got up to get the children to school and came into

the kitchen and found the back door open and the two dogs on their leashes.

“I thought that bit was odd and thought maybe Eamon had gone to visit his mother.

“But in the whole mix of getting the kids out I didn’t dwell on it too much. It was just as we were leaving the house and I saw a road block up the street that I got a sinking feeling in my stomach.”

Mrs Collins said she knew a trial would not bring her husband back, nor would a conviction change anything, except in terms of justice.

“But it would give me some closure if I know what happened him that day and how it took place,” she said.

“Had they come to the back door? Did he go away with them? Was there more than one? Did he get a telephone call? I would just like to know how it happened.

“It is sad to think that someone who could do this is out there living in the community.

“What they did was psychopathic, even sociopathic. It was exceptionally vicious. The fear is that they would have the propensity to do something like that again.”

Mrs Collins said that despite the horror of losing her husband in such a brutal manner she had learned to let go and move on although she thinks about him every day.

“Last week would have been our twenty-seventh wedding anniversary,” she said.

The murder meant she was forced to raise her four children alone without their father but she says she is extremely proud of her family.

Tiarnach (25) is a student in Essex, Lorcan (24) is a joiner living at home, while daughters Sorcha (21) and

19-year-old Aoife are both students in Edinburgh.

“They have been remarkably shielded from what happened and have never really asked about the detail, thank God,” Mrs Collins said.

“If you continue to live in the

past it’s like living in a cocoon or limbo. Life is too short. You have to move on.”


A spokesman for the RMSU last night said: “The group was set up by the PSNI to review unsolved murders between 1998 and 2004 and includes Mr Collins’ investigation. Specially trained family liaison officers aim to keep the families of victims up to date with developments.

“The police service does not underestimate the responsibility we have to the families of victims.

“These liaison officers provide the link between them and the police investigation. These officers are always available for families to raise any issues or concerns they have.”

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