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Interviewing Gordon Wilson was nearest I'd ever get to being in presence of a saint

Sunday, 5 October 2008

If i had a penny for every time I was asked, 'What was your favourite interview?' I would be a rich man.

It's a question almost impossible to answer. I have a different response every time I'm asked.

The most inspiring and caring man I

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ever met came from
Co Fermanagh.

What are these?

His name was Gordon Wilson.

Gordon was the father of Marie Wilson, one of 11 people killed in the Enniskillen Remembrance Day bombing by the Provisional IRA.

Marie was a young nurse who died, buried in the rubble with her father, who held her hand and spoke with her during her last moments of consciousness.

I genuinely thought he was the nearest I would ever get to being in the presence of a saint.

Gordon's description of that ghastly deed in November 1987 echoed to the far corners of the world.

He spoke of the last words between himself and his dying daughter in a famous BBC interview:

"She held my hand tightly and gripped me as hard as she could.

"She said, 'Daddy, I love you very much'.

"Those were her exact words to me and those were the last words I ever heard her say.

"But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge.

"Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life.

"She was a great wee lassie. She loved her profession.

"She was a pet. She's dead. She's in heaven and we shall meet again.

"I will pray for these men tonight and every night."

These words may be among the

most-remembered from the decades of conflict in Northern Ireland, uttered by an ordinary, but yet extraordinary man — a man who until that fateful day had quietly run a family drapery business in Enniskillen.

Although a resident of Northern Ireland and a Protestant, Gordon was invited to become a member of Seanad Eireann, the Irish Senate, in 1993.

On many occasions Gordon met with members of Sinn Fein.

He also met once with representatives of the Provisional IRA, seeking the reasons for the Remembrance Day bombing, but failed to get a satisfactory answer.

Sadly, Gordon died of a heart-attack in 1995, aged 67, some months after his son David had been killed in a road accident.

During my first ever visit to Cape Town, I interviewed another remarkable man who, though small in stature, is head and shoulders above most of humanity.

Only very occasionally do you meet someone in whose presence you sense greatness.

Yet this happened to me on meeting Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town and former Nobel Peace prizewinner.

I sat in almost dumb admiration of the man who had seen, had endured and had triumphed over so much in apartheid South Africa.



Irish Senator who's daughter Marie was a victim of the Enniskillen Remembrance Day explosion in 1987.

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I naturally talked to him about Northern Ireland and its problems and I remember him vividly saying to me, "We have lived through our nightmare. You will too."

I interviewed him on subsequent occasions, most notably when I returned to South Africa in 2005 to make a programme about the Niall Mellon Township Trust, a unique Irish charity dedicated to providing homes to the impoverished communities in the townships of Cape Town.

Both Archbishop Tutu and Nelson Mandela have given their backing to this wonderful charity, which continues to grow from strength to strength.

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Remember Me

 Love is a more powerful weapon than hate and evil. I believe Gordon Wilson new and lived this truth. All the excesses of mans evil are no match for the victory there is in the power of love and truth, and this power is found only in God and in those, like Gordon, who followed him.

Posted by Fermanagh migrant | 05.10.08, 21:59 GMT

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