

SILENT VOICES

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Preface

Silent Voices is a collection of personal stories. The contributors are people who have in some way been affected by Partition or the 'Troubles' in Ireland or by conflict elsewhere in the world. All have a specific Sligo connection although the stories are not all set in Sligo. The stories reflect the people who told them and it is their own voice and words that you read in this book. The stories were told to an interviewer and later edited by that interviewer in collaboration with the storyteller. What you read here is the final distillation from that process.

This collection does not set out to represent a definitive view of any event, person or place. It simply tells you, the reader, how the events recounted impacted on the storyteller. Some things you read may make you feel uncomfortable; some may make you feel sad. Others may cause you to laugh or smile or bring to mind friends lost, wisdom gained, times past. For some readers the events in the stories will be part of history, and maybe for many of us little bits of history will emerge through these pages that are made new by being told from a different perspective.

Storytelling is about individual truth telling. It is not about setting any record straight and does not presume that there is a 'true story'. There are many true stories and for every story here there are dozens more untold stories that make us who we are in Sligo in 2011.

Storytelling is a way to make sense of things that have been outside our understanding, or beyond us. Telling is cathartic, it brings closure to the storyteller and many of the contributors reported strong feelings of relief associated with speaking their own truth to another person whose only job was to listen and record what was being said. It takes courage to tell our stories, especially if they are

hard to hear. As you make your way through this book remember that the contributors are just ordinary people trying to live their lives as best they can.

All contributions are anonymous, except where the substance of the contribution demands otherwise. The experiences recounted touch on universal themes associated with the impacts of conflict. Many names, places and other identifying references have been changed in the stories. Images used have been mainly chosen by the contributors.

Nothing is sanitised or tweaked to make it acceptable to any group or viewpoint and it may well be that you will read something in these pages that will make you think again about something and cause you to look at people and events in a different way. If that is so, the collection has done its work.

“ Republicans
have feelings
– We are flesh
and blood ”



V

Republicans have feelings – We are flesh and blood

I probably would have known from the time he joined the IRA that he was involved, it mightn't have been said but I would have known. Because we were close as a family we knew what each of us was doing... I suppose the first word I would think of would be 'scared'. We were a Republican family with strong Republican ideals and we wouldn't be afraid to let our Republicanism be known. We were proud of it. But when it comes to your children, you are protective, you are scared for them if you think they are going to be in a situation where they will be in danger.

I accepted it as, 'Joe is growing into a young man' and he would make his own decisions. On the one hand I would be very proud of his ideals and how he felt, on the other hand, I would be very protective towards him as his mother.

You had the hunger strikes, the different people being killed, the volunteers dying, he would have been at the funerals of volunteers who had been killed, who had been shot; all that made a big impression on him and, no, I wouldn't have been surprised that he had joined. I would have tried to get across the dangers of the situation that he might find himself in. I suppose, working as a Republican in Sinn Féin or as a political activist is one thing, the other road was something that scared me for him. I did talk to him about it but he was old enough to make up his own mind.

Before Joe was killed I knew where he was living and that he had moved there because of his Republican activities, but I suppose you don't let yourself think of what might happen. It's something that happens to somebody else. I think maybe that's the protective thing we put up for ourselves. You get on with your everyday life. I went

to work. I did the washing and cooking, and whatever else, same as I normally would. I suppose in the back of your mind it's there; but you just hope that everything is going to be fine and nobody is going to get hurt. Even the day he died I heard news headlines about the incident before I left for work and for some reason I didn't even connect the two things. That was the area where Joe was... I remember that day I had bought knitting wool, I thought I will knit him a sweater for his birthday, I was going to do him a grey one and Chris a red one. I came home and later on I heard he was dead.

The difference between my son being shot and dying as a Volunteer and maybe if my son got killed in a car crash was that I didn't know how people were going to react. There was a lot of animosity and dislike of Republicans and all sorts of anti-Republican feeling out there. When my son died I knew that there would probably be some negative reaction and there was.

I was finishing work at three o'clock and I did hear headlines on the radio at work before I left. It never entered my head that Joe could be involved. I did some shopping and I came home, did the usual things. I was doing some ironing; I can remember the ironing board sitting with a white jumper on it and I can still remember the lamb chops on the grill that were there 24 hours later. Two of our own people came to the door and when I saw them, I knew, but I just couldn't believe it and everything got all confused then.

I know Chris informed other people that needed to be told. People were coming and going and I wanted to know where Joe was and where his comrades were. We were told he was taken to Enniskillen and we would have to go and identify him. My brother, who has since died, said that he would identify him, he didn't want me going down there, or Sean going down there. He went down with another man and when the two of them got there the police wouldn't let the other man in. They only let my brother in which was probably just to make it hard for him I imagine, but he was a strong man. He went in and Joe was in a body bag. One of the reasons they didn't want me or Sean to go down was in case he had been shot in the face, but he wasn't.

On Thursday, there were so many people in the house; even the Free State police came to see us, the Garda Síochána. They wanted to know what kind of funeral it was going to be. A Republican funeral was obviously going to be a problem for them. But we were having a Republican funeral and that was whether they liked it or not.

I remember seeing this man, I don't know what he was, he had a lot of braid and a fancy hat on him on the bottom step of my stairs and I just lost it and told him to get out. We were lucky that we had good friends. A very good friend of mine came from Dublin and she said to me – 'don't answer the phone, don't speak to the press' – because I would be vulnerable.

On Thursday evening we went down to Enniskillen to bring Joe home. There were so many people and people were so good – a huge number of Republicans came. Up until then – something in your head doesn't let you believe it, really believe it. On the Thursday when we went down to bring him home it was, I don't know what word to use, but I was looking forward to bringing him home. It sounds ridiculous but it was nearly a kind of excitement. Several of us went down in cars, in the hearse, and whatever. I remember when we walked in, there is this great big room and there is this coffin in the middle of the room with Joe in it, and policemen in every corner with guns. The feeling of hostility in the room was palpable. I guess that's what would make a Republican death different to others.

Somebody said some prayers. Several cars had come with us but when we brought Joe outside, the soldiers and police managed to break up all the cars coming up and they got in between everybody. When we came up as far as the border at Belcoo and Blacklion, Republicans wanted to carry Joe across the border and they stopped there. I could see the young British soldiers out there and they were laughing. I said to one young soldier 'if you were shot and you were lying in that coffin how would you like it if somebody was laughing at your mother or making smart remarks to your mother?' I said, 'it's really no different'.

Anyway, we brought Joe home. He was at home for Thursday night. Volunteers and Republicans did a guard of honour all through the day and night. I did find a great comfort when Republicans came and you knew you were among friends, people who understood and people that cared. There was no hostility and it was a comforting feeling. Some people in particular, and I won't mention names, looked after us and cared for us. It was such a long few days in a lot of ways. On Saturday it was the funeral and it took ages, it was hours. Police everywhere, but that didn't bother me really, we were used to them over the years anyway.

Joe died on the Wednesday and the odd thing about it is that even though you are in the middle of it you are kind of unaware of a lot of it. I remember going out the back, we had a big long garden down the back and I thought I needed some fresh air, and there were men above in trees...I couldn't tell whether they were photographers or plainclothes detectives. I don't know. At this stage I came back in, I couldn't be bothered. The evening that we brought Joe to the church there were about three or four women who stayed back in the house, family and friends who were just tidying up and doing bits in the house, they were scared because there were so many policemen outside. There was a big cordon, so somebody had to go and get them to move back from the house because they were frightening the women. You are in the middle of this big public thing but at the same time you are somewhere inside in your own head as well.

I remember the evening we were bringing Joe to the church, I was right behind the coffin and there were so many people. The guards came in at some sort of angle that I got pushed back and I got this feeling of being separated from Joe. It didn't make sense. But I remember some man picking me up and putting me back right behind Joe – you were always sure you were going to be looked after no matter what happened.

A lot of Republicans from different parts of Ireland came but there was a lot of people from Sligo town and around, outside Sligo town and Leitrim. Even though many people might not have agreed with our politics; they would respect us for the strength of our belief.

We got a lot of letters and cards. There were hundreds and hundreds of them... I remember a letter coming from somebody who explained that he wasn't a Republican and couldn't support Republican politics but he just wanted to sympathise with the loss of a child and something to that effect. It was a very nice letter. There were many others as well and then there were a few nasty ones which were hurtful. We got a lot of letters from Republican prisoners, they were extremely kind, extremely good. They made some pieces for us including a mirror with Joe's photo on it and a celtic cross.

There wasn't much time for privacy if you want to put it that way, that was something you had to do later, do your own little thing, go to the grave, whatever. Having said that, I think the comradeship of family and friends...the Republican comradeship was so important. I find it hard to explain sometimes, but there is that closeness even

with people that you wouldn't know very well, but you know that they are on the same level, that they feel for you, they would do absolutely anything. It was that sharing, that feeling of caring – it was a great comfort that they were there.

My son was buried on Saturday and I went to my place of work on Sunday to arrange some time off for obvious reasons... and I didn't have a job anymore. Sean and Chris were outside in the car and I came back out and I was psychologically a mess. I was scared, such a jumble of emotions. It scared me, not just for myself, but for Chris and Sean. I felt we were going to get an awful lot of negative reaction and at that stage I felt very vulnerable. We came home, I had no job and I remember thinking, Chris was 18 years old – I thought what is he going to face when he goes back to school? He was doing leaving cert that year. What's he going to get from teachers, pupils and so on? I was really scared for him and he had lost his only brother. I hadn't thought about it before then, I hadn't analysed what the reactions might be for him. He did get a lot of bad reaction from some of the students and from some of the teachers but thankfully he is a very strong young man and he weathered the storm. There was one particular teacher that had made comments behind his back to students in school. I wouldn't have learned about it until a good while afterwards. I think that Chris was sort of protecting me from things like that... some of the things that happened he mightn't have said anything to me about.

I got the impression my employer was scared of what just happened. Having said that, he knew my politics, he knew exactly where we were coming from. He more or less said something to the effect, 'I have children, I have two sons to rear'. I said, 'I had two sons last week and have only got one now' or something to that effect. I can't tell you his exact words but it was clear to me that I wasn't welcome to work there anymore.

Previously we got on very well and I enjoyed working there. They were good people to work with and for. They treated me well. We got on well and we often had discussions on politics and various things. We discussed books we had read and shared a drink. He would give me a lift home if I didn't have any mode of transport. At Christmas I was brought into their kitchen for a drink and it was generally a very friendly relaxed place to work. When that all took a complete 360° turn I just couldn't believe that a person I would have had that much

respect for, and had known for so long, could actually treat me like that. So, it didn't do my ability to trust people much good.

I think one of the things that upset me as time went on – I heard from people – and this is only hearsay – that he more or less said that I had left of my own accord, that I wasn't able to work. Anybody who said that to me I told them the story, the truth. I told them I didn't walk out of my job because I wouldn't be able to work just after my son died.

Maybe when he sat down and thought about it, the whole thing might have scared him. I mean the funeral was huge, with huge amounts of guards and forces and thousands of Republicans and all the rest of it. I think maybe that scared him, but for me, it absolutely floored me, coming from him of all people, I really hadn't bargained on it. It really doesn't do your confidence any good.

A lot of people were really kind and supportive of us but there was an element of the other as well, I did meet people I knew on the street who actually walked past me and didn't speak to me. At the end of the day they weren't close friends or anything, they were just acquaintances but it was hurtful. It was just something else you had to deal with which was inclined to make me distrustful of speaking about Joe. Without realising it, I put barriers up, and that can be isolating to a degree.

There wouldn't have been an awful lot of people that would do that, there would only be a few, but it only takes one to make you feel bad. I remember in particular one day I was just walking down the street in Sligo town and I met this man who I would have known very well and I said hello to him and his name. I know that he heard me and he just walked straight past me like I didn't exist. He didn't look at me or anything. I was upset and I thought; is that how we are going to be treated? On the one hand I thought well, I'm a Republican, I'm proud of it and if folks don't want to talk to me, then fair enough. And then when you'd be feeling a little bit more vulnerable, it was upsetting. Sometimes we are not as strong as we like to pretend we are. And then I worried that Chris was probably getting the same. And Sean... but I think he would have been stronger in that respect than I would have been... though I shouldn't say that because I don't know. A lot of the time he was suffering and maybe I wasn't aware of it, it's not always easy to talk and people have different levels of grief.

A few years later when I looked back I realise I wasn't really there for Chris. He had lost his only brother. I don't know if this is relevant to other people who lose children but you end up with everybody doing their own grieving at different times and different places and at different speeds. When I look back, in the early years I think that Sean was suffering and Chris was suffering and I don't know where I was, I certainly wasn't there for Chris. For a while after Joe died, even if Chris went out into town, I watched for him to come back, it was a totally unreasonable sort of feeling but I was scared until he walked back in the door.

Joe died in February and I think the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis was soon afterwards and I remember thinking I'm not going to go up there, I just can't go up there, I'm just not able. I was persuaded to go anyway and the three of us went and there was such a welcome for us when we went into the hall. Up on the walls they had pictures of the Volunteers that had died during the year and Joe's picture was there. We were made to feel very special. There is a very good friend of mine in Dublin and sometimes a lot of the women from the Ard Fheis get together in the evening at her house and the men might go off and do their own thing. I remember that evening I was there and there were maybe six or eight other women, cooking and having a drink and this one evening I will never forget because I felt so at home and so comfortable there and I knew that no matter how I was, good or bad, it was fine and it wasn't everywhere I could feel like that. We had a few drinks and we had a laugh and the next thing of course I descended into tears, but that was fine, and they held me and looked after me. Those are the things that actually help you survive, and I won't mention any names, but that woman, if she reads this will know who she is.

I wasn't in an area like West Belfast where there is a large Republican community, where other families would have lived through the same experience as us so I was always wary of who might have been supportive and who wouldn't – and on my guard in a way. Anyway, I sometimes felt that to keep going on and on about Joe's death was a self-indulgent thing to do. I used think I haven't a monopoly on this, there's a lot of families, we have to get on with it. That's a bit ridiculous too because it's not that simple, it doesn't work like that.

People in town, especially mothers, or people that would have lost children of their own through totally different circumstances

would come and talk to me. I remember one woman coming to me and she asked me how I was and how I was keeping and was I coping and all that. She had lost a son or daughter, I can't remember which, 30 years earlier, which was quite a long time and when she saw me that was all fresh for her again.

Probably one feeling stands out – an awful fear. Sometimes you just wake up and you have that feeling of desolation like someone is turning a knife in your gut. You go out and the world is happening as it normally does and that just doesn't seem right somehow. I remember one day when the sun was shining and I thought I wish it wasn't. The happy things become the sad things, like the birthdays and the Christmases and that type of thing.

I remember feeling I was afraid but I didn't know why. I tried to analyse it. Maybe partly I was afraid that something might happen to Chris, there was that fear in me for a while and I tried very hard not to let him see it because I didn't think it was fair to him. He had enough to deal with without me fussing around. I suppose fear that something would happen to him – you feel vulnerable. There used to be four plates on the table and now only three. Fear that something would happen, that someone else is going to die.

I did voice my fears that Chris might follow a similar path to someone in the Republican movement and they told me that 'no, that wouldn't happen.' If a family loses a member they would be careful or watchful that the same thing mightn't happen to another family member.

I don't know if any of the media coverage was really sympathetic apart from the Phoblacht. When I look back on it, I was kept away from the television, I wasn't aware of it at the time but I didn't see any reports until long afterwards. I was also kept away from the papers and I said to somebody 'don't do this to me, I need to see it all, I need to see the good bits and the bad bits – you mean well but I don't want to be protected, I want to see it'.

It was of course hurtful when you read in the paper that your son is described as a 'murderer' or something to that effect, when you know that he was growing up to be a fine young man with values, a sense of decency and respect for people. Nobody likes war, nobody wants war and if there is another option to solve a problem then that's fine. But the way things were at that stage there wasn't another option to try

and lift the oppression. To me, 'murderer' is a horrible thing to call somebody who sets out to do what they see as 100% right.

I have no strong feelings about the man who shot my son. As far as I'm concerned, Joe was a soldier and the man who killed him was a soldier. He was part of the reason that Joe was a Volunteer in the first place. It was the uniform. It would be like any war where one soldier kills another soldier on the other side. It's not the person.

He was part of the oppression. He is an individual and a human being of course – but I don't think of him in those terms. I think of him as just being the oppressor and he was part of the British regime. You can only have feelings about someone if you personalise him, but he was part of the oppressing army. I never gave him an awful lot of thought to be honest, that's not meant to sound callous or anything, it's just I feel that I have enough to deal with.

When Joe was killed I wouldn't have known the other three men who were there with him. Subsequently they were arrested and they were in custody and awaiting trial. One of the things I felt I needed to do was let them know that they should not feel somehow responsible for Joe's death. They would have been in jail at the time. The last thing I wanted was them to feel guilty or to be afraid that I would, or we would, feel that they were in any way responsible for his death. We managed to get that message across to them even though they were in custody. I wrote letters to them and they wrote back and we kept in contact so that they knew we were okay with them and that we cared about them as comrades. I just had the feeling that maybe somehow they might feel bad that Joe was killed when he was with them and I didn't want them to feel like that.

When they came out of jail we had contact with them and they came to see us. It was very difficult for them as well, I mean, extremely difficult, to come and talk to me, Sean and Chris about Joe's death. It gave me a clearer picture of what happened. I needed to know all the details. I needed to know everything. I needed to know where he was shot, how many times he was shot, where the bullets went in, what happened – I needed to know all those things. Sean didn't particularly need to know all those things and that's fine, but I did. I made the journey that I wanted to. I went to where Joe died. Otherwise you have a strange picture in your head of the way things happened and the picture is usually wrong and I just wanted to go and clarify it. It's hurtful and it's painful but you just go through it.

You change without realising you're changing. You find that you don't talk easily unless you know somebody really well. I would certainly be aware if I'm talking to somebody that I don't know well of everything I say. And that can be tiresome. You get into conversation with somebody socially, knowing that they might not know anything about you and they say, 'have you got children?' And I would say I had two sons but one of them was killed. I would leave the conversation at that unless they pursue it and if they pursue it then I would tell them exactly what happened. Sometimes that's okay and sometimes that makes people feel very uncomfortable. Not so much now, but back when the war was still on and before the Peace Process when it wasn't very popular to be a Republican at times. But I would never not explain if somebody asked me how Joe died. I explain that he was a Volunteer in the IRA and that he got shot in an ambush in County Fermanagh. Sometimes people would be sympathetic. Depending on the feedback I get, I would talk about it if I thought that the feedback was genuine and they asked me questions but sometimes I found that that was the end of the conversation, they would just move on, they wouldn't know what to do with me then.

If they had a problem with it, then they had to deal with it you know, I had enough to deal with. I would never initiate a conversation or bring it up or intentionally want to make anybody feel uncomfortable, I would never ever do that. I respect people's beliefs. I always felt that one of the things that help people to get along if they have a difference of opinion, is to actually try and understand where the other person is coming from, maybe then the void will get smaller.

I think maybe one of the reasons that I wouldn't have talked that much about Joe's death to a lot of people, or that I would be distrusting, would be that there would be a feeling amongst certain people that because of our Republican beliefs and our Republican work that Republicans to some degree bring these tragedies upon themselves and I suppose I can understand that thinking too.

For a long number of years, maybe not so much recently, but in the past, Republicans were perceived by some people as unfeeling, as some kind of monsters or people who were war hungry. Republicans have feelings; we are flesh and blood the same as everybody else. I don't think any Republican would have chosen war if they felt that there was another option, another way, to get the oppression lifted off our people. We paid a very high price, we have our losses and

our grief... I can only talk as a mother who had a son killed in the Troubles. I do think of all the other mothers, especially the mothers of the hunger strikers who died and how they had courage and bravery. I don't know how they did it; but to respect what their sons were doing and were able to carry it through. That must have been horrific. My son died quickly and I hope without too much pain, but to watch him dying for months on end, I wouldn't even be able to comprehend it. I think of all the mothers and how strong they've been and how brave they've been.

It was nice, if nice is the right word, if someone asked you how Joe died and you told them and they reacted well. There is a void where Joe should be that can never be filled. My belief in my sons and my love for my sons came first and how people felt about it, that's up to them. That's who we are, that's who they are, that's who Joe was, and that's our life. To that extent I would never make any apology – I wish Joe hadn't died but I would never make any apologies for our Republican beliefs.

Joe was an uncomplicated person, he was fun-loving, he had a big smile and the most perfect set of teeth you have ever seen and he had kind of ginger blond hair. He loved football, he liked a drink, he loved the girls, he loved to read, he read incessantly, all sorts of books. Yes, that was Joe, he had loads of friends, enjoyed the craic, got told off by me occasionally when I didn't agree with what I thought he might be doing. Some of his friends, after he died, couldn't believe that that was part of the Joe that they knew.

People say that if things don't kill you they make you stronger. In some ways I was vulnerable but in other ways I would have been quite strong and the fact that Joe had actually died for what we all believed in – certainly in some ways – there was a strength from it.

I think people understand my experience as a mother who has lost a son. Sometimes grieving parents will talk to me knowing I understand their suffering. Perhaps the only positive thing that comes out of losing a child or going through that kind of pain is that you understand another person's pain and they know that.

Initially there was a little bit of 'how can you possibly go on being a Republican and working within that community and working with Sinn Féin, seeing that you've lost your son because he was a Republican?'. And it was very, very hard to get the message across that the fact that he's died for what we all believe in makes an

even stronger reason for carrying on the work. Many people don't understand what makes us who we are. There is no personal gain to be had in being a Republican. Quite the reverse. Up until the Peace Process, there was fear, jail, isolation and maybe death. And in the case of death, the suffering is ongoing. I think it's hard for people to grasp that sense of a strong belief in something that's right. You have to be inside the Republican movement or have a good grasp of Republican feelings to understand. It's a thing that comes from your heart. But when you're faced with a tragedy, like we were, you have the warmth and comradeship of the Republican community. That is something we would have that other people mightn't have.

I would again like to mention Sean and Chris – I'm getting the opportunity to speak as a mother but Sean is Joe's father and Chris is his brother and they have suffered too and I'd like to say 'thank you' to both of them for the support that I got over the years. Sometimes people are at different stages in their grief and maybe it's not that easy to talk about. Sometimes it's just too painful for people that are close in these situations... but we're still here.

When you lose a child it's an ongoing process, your life changes. Something inside you dies a little bit and I'm sure that goes for Sean and Chris as well, but we're strong, we will survive and I hope we will go on surviving and I really appreciate this opportunity to talk. One of the reasons I am doing this is that I'd like people to understand that Republicans are flesh and blood, that we bleed and that we suffer and I'd like to dispel this idea that we are cold or un-feeling.

I'm not sure if it's at all useful but I'd like to mention the other mothers (not leaving out the fathers, sons or daughters) that have lived their lives in a lot harder situations than I have – in places in the North of Ireland where their whole lives have been taken up with struggle – trying to survive and keep their families together, with members dying, or in jails and all the rest of it. It's not been easy but hopefully one day soon Ireland will be united, then all the suffering will not have been in vain.

British army, of the soldiers. We were always going over and back and I didn't have any fear. I suppose because we had people in the RUC, my cousins' husband and my wife's cousin as well, that if we were picked up, we would have someone to use as a reference. And my wife on the other hand would always have been a little bit less comfortable in the North than I would have been. She was fearful of the soldiers and the army and the RUC.

People did talk to us about incidents in the North, not a lot, but they would a bit, when atrocities would happen. If we take the time of Bloody Sunday, the man that was working with me at that time, he took the Nationalist side as it were in that and was a bit hostile towards me for a little while. It wore off and we remained good friends afterwards and it's understandable, you know. But people's attitudes towards us as a community never changed.

I suppose everything is advancing in some way or another all the time and trying to look back at the past is negative. You have to move with the way things are evolving. There are far more important and difficult things than your religion and the politics of the country. Economic survival is far more important than any of those things I think. I've seen down through the years so many people showing a degree of bitterness and resentment and they have never sought or made many advances of their own. It eats away at you. Life is short and I would think the best approach is to try not to create unhappiness for yourself.

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'Silent Voices' is powerful, original, deeply moving - at times searingly so - and gives invaluable insight into what was suffered by real people on this island, and why, over recent decades. This book is also a timely warning against attitudes which would have us bound by the past, rather than bow to it. It is a reminder that, while we cannot change that past, "we have chosen to change the future," as President McAleese has said.

*Patsy McGarry,
Religious Affairs Correspondent, The Irish Times*

Perception and reality are inseparable themes in these stories of courage, betrayal, resilience, perception and pain. Landscape writer Rebecca Solnit once noted that if a border is natural, it must have no history. The experience of reading 'Silent Voices' bears testimony to that.

*Lorna Siggins,
Western Correspondent, The Irish Times*

These are stories of ordinary men, women and children who were caught on the wrong side of the line: the Border in the case of the Protestant community; the uniform for the Catholic in the UDR; ethnicity for Travellers and refugees; the perimeter fence for the prisoner. The official record appears superficial and contrived when set alongside these riveting personal stories of loss, displacement, hurt, misunderstanding and endurance.

Paddy Logue, Irish Peace Centre

Secrets, subterfuge and sometimes shocking, these stories reveal a Sligo I barely recognise, but the voices from the grass roots cannot be discounted. The truth in these accounts is unsettling, but rightly so.

Mary Branley