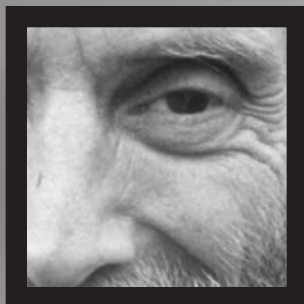
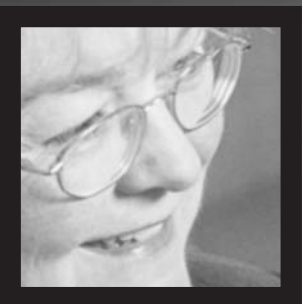
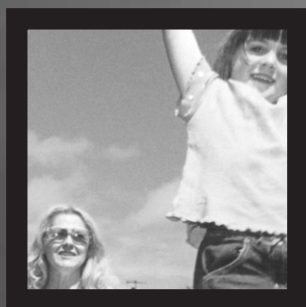


reaching out



joining in

stories from the **edge**



written by **Martin O'Hagan**

getting involved



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Martin O'Hagan

1950 - 2001

This book is a tribute to the memory of Martin O'Hagan.

Martin was a trade union activist, journalist, and talented writer. He worked on this book with us as a volunteer for 12 months and finished his final chapter on Thursday 27th of September, the day before he was killed. We are immensely proud to have worked with Martin and are indebted to him for his time and commitment. Without him this book would never have been published.

Volunteer Development Agency

reaching out

joining in

stories from the **edge**

written by **Martin O'Hagan**

getting involved

“ **Enhance** recognition of the immense world-wide contribution of volunteer service ”

A key aim of the United Nations International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001 is to enhance recognition of the immense world-wide contribution of volunteer service to social cohesion and economic advance. This book recognises with insight and empathy the work of a range of men and women volunteers, several themselves from vulnerable groups, who have pioneered new ventures in areas such as community solidarity, disability, health provision, HIV/AIDS, cross-cultural understanding, integration of minorities and animal welfare. That they should have done so against the background of the last three decades in Northern Ireland makes their achievement all the more remarkable. Compassion, courage and tenacity are in evidence on every page, as are the deserved rewards of eventual public appreciation and heightened personal self-esteem. I warmly commend the volunteers involved, all those who worked with them, and the Northern Ireland Volunteer Development Agency for this fine book. It will surely rank high in the many accomplishments of IYV 2001 around the world.

That, since writing it, the book's author, Martin O'Hagan, should tragically have forfeited his own life as yet another victim of senseless conflict serves only to remind us, whatever their achievement, how much more work there remains for volunteers to do.

Sharon Capeling-Alakija

Executive Co-ordinator

United Nations Volunteers

“Volunteering is very much part of our social fabric”

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e know much from research studies about the extent and nature of volunteering in Northern Ireland. We know that volunteering is very much part of our social fabric. We know that it is the "social glue" that holds our communities together. Facts and figures, important though they are, cannot fully describe the huge diversity of the work of volunteers, the benefits that individual volunteers derive from their activities and the great impact that those activities make. That is why the Volunteer Development Agency decided to commission 'Stories From The Edge'. The book adds a human touch to what we know about volunteering, as individual volunteers tell in their own words, with passion and insight, just what volunteering has meant to them. The accounts bring home very clearly that everyone has something to give, regardless of their age, gender, race, background etc.

On behalf of the Northern Ireland Committee for the International Year of Volunteers I am delighted to endorse the book. Its publication helps in a major way to recognise volunteering, which is one of the aims of the International Year. I congratulate the Volunteer Development Agency for taking the initiative to produce the book and in particular Lisa McElherron, whose commitment and perseverance has made it possible. I would also acknowledge the financial support of the Northern Bank for this publication.

I would pay particular tribute to the contribution that Martin O'Hagan made to the book. I hope that it will be a testimony to his dedication and his memory.

Finally, I warmly thank the volunteers for their willingness to tell their stories. I hope that the book will be widely read. When we take it off our shelves and read it after the International Year is over, we will be reminded time and time again that volunteering in Northern Ireland is alive and well.

Professor Jimmy Kearney (1943 - 2004)

Centre for Voluntary Action Studies

University of Ulster

Chairman, Northern Ireland Committee for the International Year of Volunteers 2001

Volunteer Development Agency

“ Journalism is all
about people ”

A Foreword by Martin O'Hagan

It was just a few paragraphs. Local chairman John Ley of the Belfast and District Branch of the National Union of Journalists dropped me an e-mail. He wrote that the Volunteer Development Agency - which I had never heard of - was looking for volunteer journalists. With his usual impeccable manners John requested that the small editorial could be included in the November 2000 edition of the 'NUJge', the local union's in-house newsheet. It was clear John desperately wanted to have it carried for he suggested I could edit the column down to one paragraph. Journalists detest having their copy edited.

Volunteer jurnos were to be tasked to research and write about at least 12 people who have made an impact helping others. A book would be the highlight of the 2001 International Year of the Volunteer. A tongue in cheek observation is that the notion of volunteer journalists is a contradiction. The majority of reporters are hard working scribblers who are often under paid. The prospect of getting any freelance writers to give up precious time is practically a non starter. Most staff journalists are only too glad to get home in the evenings instead of starting another job. As secretary of the local union branch I felt someone had to come forward. The difficulty was - no one did and so I got the job by default.

I have always found writing an arduous labour. The great British journalist Ian Cameron once spoke about the terror of the blank page poised contemptuously in a typewriter. Anyone who has ever sat looking at a blank computer screen, with a mocking cursor, knows exactly that feeling of isolation and even desperation. Oddly the only help needed in such fright cases is to get the fingers moving. Then something almost miraculously happens when letters line up making words, phrases and finally sentences. More astonishingly they mean something. The dread feeling is once again a distant memory.

Initially I felt there was nothing to be said about volunteers. For the past thirty years the notion of volunteer is irretrievably and irrefutably linked to the mirror concepts of Ulster Volunteer and Irish Volunteer. The dark shannigans of the Northern conflict had fascinated large sections of the public across the United Kingdom and Ireland. Reporters had been to the fore trying to ferret out Machiavellian details of the woolly masked gunmen. The jurno's self image was that of the hard nose no nonsense cynic. How could a book of perceived mediocre and mundane details categorising do gooders be considered

on the same level as the coverage of stories from the edge? How could I warm to the subject? Or even make it interesting on the criterion that I was set. I had my doubts. But it was precisely those doubts that forced me to ring the Volunteer Development Agency.

I was asked to come to an interview. Unprepared I went along and found myself surrounded by young enthusiastic women and one man. In an era of equality the perceived reverse inequity did not go unmentioned. I was shuttled into a weird room that had a full length glass panel and didn't confer much privacy. I was conscious of those proverbial 'eyes in the sky' of newspaper cartoon legend. It is no wonder that Agency staff nicknamed it 'the fish bowl.' The interview was informal. I faced two women, who I thought, appeared anxious that I was suitable material. For my part I was somewhat defensively indifferent, believing somewhat arrogantly that I knew more about writing than they did. I patronisingly, nevertheless spoke on about my lack of understanding of the subject, but that like any good newspaper reporter I would soon learn and report the facts. I believe I mentioned somewhere in the script that classical Greek word 'dialectical' which is a great 'get out term' to drop when you aren't sure what the hell you're talking about. It came as jolt when I was dismissed with what appeared to me as a callous and compassionless rebuff 'We'll be in touch.' How could these two mere women deal so highhandedly with me? I was stung. Immediately the defenses went up and I internally dismissed them with something of the same perceived indifference they had sent me packing. I put it all behind me and got on with my real work. A week later I was phoned and asked for a meeting to discuss how we should go about the task. My first thought was one of horror. 'God what have I let myself in for?' People who volunteer aren't the most exciting I was sure.

My impatient, intolerant and disparaging attitude surprised me. Normally I'm prepared to listen; well for a while at least. Always at the back of my mind was the acid drip notion of do gooders. My cynicism raced. We live in a bourgeois society, the lack of free lunches is an approximation used to highlight the 'grab all' society. The Hobbesian blood red nature concept of dog eat dog was all around. Everyone has an angle. Margaret Thatcher had went a step further and declared there was no such thing as society, just greedy individuals gutting one another. I remember I was horrified at the pontificating of that Oxford chemistry graduate to whom people were the wriggling things viewed under her political microscope.

Now I seem to be judging in a similar vein. I had considered the concept of volunteer as an universal i.e. something very abstract. In reality I was now dealing with real individuals and not some Thatcherite hypothetical. I momentarily felt ashamed for that lapse of correct thinking. Perhaps more seriously I had forgotten what journalism was all about ...namely people. But what did I know about people who volunteered? It reminded me of a story told by television presenter Eamon Holmes. He began work in Belfast journalism as a farming correspondent. He knew nothing about farming. Immediately the young and desperate Eamon rang his tutor at Belfast's College of Further Education. The lady, who ran the course at the time, listened sympathetically, and unambiguously answered her own question, "Eamon what is the first rule of journalism?find out!"

“**what** did I know
about people
who volunteer?”

Remembering this sideline I went along to meet with Lisa from the Volunteer Development Agency in the John Hewitt bar on Belfast's Donegall Street. I wasn't sure how I could have contributed to the discussion. I suggested a Lurgan man who pricked my conscience. I would write a piece on Hugh Campbell. In one sense I was settling scores with a man who for 30 years had traipsed through rain, snow and those gorgeous summers evenings collecting for the Freecrow Community Association. I always felt that Hugh Campbell should be recognised publicly for his community work. For the last three decades he had overcome that 'why bother' feeling, the insidiousness that prefers the comfort of an evening before the television rather than getting up and going out. I'd once even written to John Major asking him to consider Hugh in some honour scheme. But my letter must have fallen into an administration black hole.

Lisa had loads of other ideas about what sort of people we should approach. She bounced the idea that we could start by speaking to someone involved in helping ex-prisoners. Before I could speak Lisa brilliantly said we should talk to the Quakers. That was our cue and we rambled off a dozen other ideas, which we thought would make interesting interviews.

I met with Hugh on a wet Saturday afternoon. Outside mirrored exactly how I was feeling. 'Tell me Hugh,' I began, not sure what I was going to ask. Two hours passed and I didn't realise the time. At this first interview old memories were stirred. I moved quickly and contacted the Quakers. Again their stories were fascinating but there was always something missing. The difficulty was that no one had considered putting their work onto some theoretical level. I came across Martie Rafferty by default. She had investigated her relationship to paramilitary prisoners in the context of her faith. I found some of her conclusions fascinating.

I quickly moved to Strabane where I met a quiet spoken Isabel. I was moved by her story. And then there was David, a gay man. He discussed the problems of being a minority. Another minority was angry Michael Mongan who lived on the Travellers' site. His natural suspicion of me as a settled person took time to dissolve but I think I got there in the end. Freda's story was touching. She had spent most of her life looking after her mother. But that came to an end when her mother died leaving Freda with bigger problems. Her strength has led to a new life. Then there was Terry, a conservation volunteer who is the only person I have come across who seriously loves weeds. We met on a cold winter's day in a tiny patch of

ground that doubles as his office. A short time later I went to the middle of the wilds of Fermanagh. Pat Nolan takes care of hundreds of dogs and cats and anything else that has been abandoned.

Ling Sun is from mainland China and has come 1000s of miles to help out in Belfast's Multi Cultural Resource Centre. A tax collector by training, that hasn't stopped Ling from picking up a brush and sweeping the street outside. Gordon Bannister admitted he regularly plays with radio

transmitters. However there is a more serious side to his volunteer work when he is the ears of many sporting events. Betty was the wide eyed Ballymena woman whose spare time is spent collecting for charities and Jerome another person who retired early and now spends his time working for the Credit Union and helping others. Then there were the young people from Warrenpoint who seemed flabbergasted that anyone would be interested in their work.

“the notion of a
volunteer journalist is
a contradiction”

There were many others. A group of young folk from Derry whose heroic volunteer work failed to make the book for a variety of reasons. Others I spoke to on the phone but for one reason or another I was unable to complete the task of putting together their story. But there will be another time.

Finally but certainly not least is the one and only Angela. A tiny woman, Angela told a story that had the potential to send a person into the nearest cupboard for a hanky to dry their tears of grief and joy. Mine were of laughter at her courage. At the courageous way she was able to know the world and to know how the world knew her.

At several points in my journey to complete this book I felt somewhat ashamed at my own unconscious bias towards Angela and the many others I have met. I now think that the notion of 'do gooders' is a false idea born out of prejudice. Prejudice is not something we often acquire consciously, but it is something that must be deliberately rooted out.

I want to thank all those who took the time to sit and talk to me. And I want to also thank my wife Marie and daughters Martina, Cara and Niamh for their patience during those long hours of writing. And of course taking the time to read what I've written. I want to thank the Volunteer Development Agency whose idea made this possible and for giving me the opportunity to meet such decent hardworking people.

Martin O'Hagan

13 August 2001

“I now think that the notion of
do-gooders is a false idea
born out of prejudice”

“ I love people seeing me as a person who **achieves** ”

Angela Hendra

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hen Angela Hendra turned up at a cub scout campsite to teach archery, the youngsters looked aghast. Initially she assumed it was her wheelchair and the fact that she was not able bodied. But the cubs were expecting a man, after all Robin Hood was of the masculine gender even if he did wear tights.

The youngsters on the weekend camping trip soon forgot the gender classification problem when they saw how she could pull back the bowstring sending an arrow flying into the heart of a target. Angela's disability was accepted by the young cub scouts who recognised another human being and not some sort of second class citizen in a chair on wheels. The youngsters saw the person or the soul which is perhaps more important than appearance. Angela was someone who happened to be a wheelchair user who was damned good with a bow and arrow. Angela's inner self or character is the ultimate source of her happiness and true success.

In many ways Angela Hendra is typical of the new stoical outlook in the early days of this third millennium. She recognises what she has control over and what she has no control over. She struggled to bring those uncontrollable things such as, no disabled toilets, lack of access to buildings, outrageous taxi surcharges and many other discriminatory facts of life into her arena of clout. She realises also that there is a need to free herself and other disabled folk from false schemes of life. False life schemes have dogged Angela Hendra all her life.

As a young person, the only girl in the small family of three children, growing up in remote windswept Malin Head in County Donegal, she began to have difficulty in walking. Then at just 12 years of age it was found that a benign growth had paralysed her from her waist down. Yet Angela's life was already being laid out for her by her mother who ominously albeit innocently said, 'When they are all away there will just be you and me Angela'.

Although it is now a vanished ideology, at one time to have a serious disability was seen as some sort of punishment from God. To be disabled was an affliction, which needed to be cured. To be cured presupposes that a disabled person is ill but as Angela points out she has good health. She insists it is the medical model that seeks to categorise her condition and compare it with the ideal. She might be disabled but she is certainly not ill. However, people are alienated by physical disability. It is the basis of discrimination. Angela is quick to point out that her civil rights were violated and continue to be violated.



I love people seeing me as a person who achieves - *Angela Hendra*

In those distant and not so distant days 'the disabled' in Ireland could be sent away to hospital institutions that had their origins in the Poor Law. Those without private means were often shut up in the home until they died – usually prematurely.

Mothers or other family members bore their cross with a dignity. In Angela's case she was packed off to a convent school somewhere in the Irish midlands. The cocky self-assured young person must have resembled a paraplegic Olivia Newton John. She arrived at the convent showing off a lacquered hair do - so popular in the early 1960s, drainpipes and a white leather jacket.

However, Mother Superior and the sisters weren't impressed with the initial contact with this alien from another world who was opening up to the youth revolution in music and style. It was not too long before Angela was shown the door and told never to darken their doorsteps again. This was one set of steps that had been a blessing in disguise!

It was the prospect of being buried before her life had begun that horrified a young Angela. Her mother's words 'You and me Angela...alone' haunted the teenager. In those days the medical facilities, which many now take for granted, were non-existent for a young working class girl from Malin Head. A kindly medical consultant in Derry was so moved by Angela's condition and realising she had great potential moved mountains to get her into the world famous Stoke Mandeville Spinal Injuries Hospital in Buckinghamshire.

Stoke Mandeville was pioneering radical techniques in the rehabilitation of paraplegia. Many of these new techniques were developed as a result of the Second World War when young war casualties were shown that there was life after horrific injury caused during the fighting. When Angela arrived many of those receiving treatment were the young casualties of road accidents.

Angela, a shy retiring youngster of just 14, left her isolated home for the bright lights of the big city. There were no televisions in North Donegal and Angela did not know what to expect. The experience turned out to be traumatic. Angela still remembers seeing her first black person, a ward sister. Today Angela, somewhat still embarrassed by her behaviour, admits "I was frightened and hid under the bedclothes."

Later the sister and Angela were to become the best of friends. The quiet youngster soon realised that she had a future. Doctors and nursing staff insisted that she and other disabled young folk at the hospital had to get on with their lives. When she returned home to Ireland a year later, Angela had metamorphosed into what she now described as a 'cheeky bitch'.

She immediately went about applying her new knowledge. The first to witness the new found aplomb were the nuns at the West Meath convent. Perhaps the most important issue for Angela was that she discovered that others were also in the same situation as herself. Yet society acted as if they did not exist.

Her mother by now had remarried and moved to Derry, which presented the first of many difficulties for the young disabled woman to overcome – 13 steps that lead to their front door. 'Thirteen steps' has now become an analogy for life's many difficulties faced by those with disabilities. She pleaded with her mother to move from the house into one more suited for her needs. In those days such an idea was preposterous. Disabled people were out of sight and out of mind. However for Angela it was limiting her freedom to move and choose.

By the time she was 19, Angela had gone back to school completed part of her education and was applying for jobs. Her social worker managed to find her a job in Tillie and Henderson's shirt factory where generations of Derry women had toiled under

harsh conditions. Towards the end of the 19th Century Eleanor Marx, the daughter of Karl Marx, worked in Tillie and Hendersons for three weeks and described the conditions as 'atrocious.' By the 1960s conditions had improved a lot, due to a constant pressure on the bosses and management by the local trade unions. Angela was offered a post as a stitcher. At the time it was considered progressive because disabled people were not considered good employee material. Angela insisted she was better qualified for other jobs and refused to become a stitcher. The outcry which followed was expected since many unconsciously if not intentionally believed a disabled person should be grateful for any small mercy.

It showed that the young Angela was determined that she wasn't going to be shoved into a corner and forgotten. She applied for a trainee cytoscreener post at Belfast's City Hospital, realising she was not qualified for it. At first, the staff interviewing her were curious at the tenacity of this young disabled person. She got the job and moved lock stock and wheelchairs to Belfast. It was still not enough. Angela may have become part of the 'ordinary' world but those 13 steps still blocked her.

She wanted to travel. There was one door open to her and that was sport. First she tried archery but found it was too costly. Then she tried table tennis and soon rose through the ranks to bring gold for Ireland back from the Paralympics. The world hailed the young woman from Donegal for her achievement. It was the adulation she wanted but she is quick to point out that it was earned. She admits "I hate attention because of my disability but I loved the publicity. I love people seeing me as a person who achieves and not to associate my success with my disability," she said. Perhaps what really galls her is journalists who used cliched lines such as 'wheelchair bound brave Angela.' Other attitudes treat her as a child who has done well and overcome adversity. There is the 'pathetic' point of view that puts disabled people outside the pale of humanity. It is as if to be a human person must concur to some sort of ideal type which has never existed. Angela believes that humanity does not conform to ideal types. It is a bewildered mass that includes everyone. It is this attitude that has sustained Angela and it is this that makes her hate anything 'special'.

Fencing off people into this or that special category alienates further those already isolated. Angela believes disabled people should be integrated with so called able-bodied people. Young people should go to school with disabled fellow students. People should be like the young cub scouts and see the person, wheelchair and all, and realise she is a damn good shot with a bow and arrow.

But there are always those 13 steps. Today they might not be as obvious since equality and human rights legislation now makes it mandatory for all buildings to incorporate ramps and other facilities that empower and allow the disabled to come and go. It was not always like that. Angela still remembers the hurt of being turned away from a cinema because there was no ramp. But the reality was that the proprietors did not want 'my sort messing up their place'.

“the **cocky self-assured**
young person must have
resembled a **paraplegic**
Olivia Newton John”

Last year in a Nottingham restaurant the owner suggested that Angela and a group of other disabled people use the back door. It started a row that reinforced Angela's reputation for standing up for disabled rights. In the early days of her employment at Belfast City Hospital, Angela clashed with one eminent consultant over a parking space. Unlike others she was not overawed by such people who have airs and graces they may not have been entitled to. She admits she has been branded a red and an anarchist.

But getting legislation changed to allow buildings to give access to disabled people has been a fight. Angela is not forgiving. She notes, "The authorities were shamed into making the statute." American veterans seriously injured in Vietnam spear-headed human rights campaigns to give them basic access. Angela acknowledges that those disabled on this side of the Atlantic did not have to campaign as aggressively as Vietnam vets. Nevertheless Angela still faces prejudice, much of which is born out of ignorance and uncertainty.

She is an active volunteer putting forward the concerns of those who like herself have a disability. That can mean collaring one particular bar owner who objected to some young people with cerebral palsy coming into his wine bar because it upset his customers. Angela is proud that she can be their voice. She also works as an advocate who is very capable of articulating an argument on behalf of those who are not just as communicative. One case she recalls was that of a man seriously injured in an

“she **wasn't** going
to be shoved into a
corner and **forgotten**”

accident. He was being divorced by his wife who'd left when the compensation money ran out. Now she wanted a share of his only home that had been specially designed for wheelchair living. This was a clear-cut case according to the man's unimaginative lawyer. The law states that in a divorce case the wife is entitled to half of the property - case closed. That was until Angela put forward the argument that while in most cases this was true, this house and the man's other property had been provided from his

compensation claim. The claim was based on what medical and other physical needs the man had. Angela's point was accepted by the so-called legal eagles including the judge, who left the man with his home intact. Angela's voice for the disabled has also been heard loudly outside the courtroom.

She is a member of a housing association that provides homes for disabled people. She objects to disabled people being corralled and packed into minuscule ghetto areas. She disparagingly described such locales as 'crips corners'. Angela said such corners were a way of isolating people from the mainstream. She argues passionately that disabled people are not some 'special' group but are ordinary human beings with a disability.

Her interest in getting the best for local disabled folk also means she is involved as an advisor to the Eastern Health Board's Planning Team. "It's important our voice, the voice of the disabled, is heard. We know what is best for us - not some planner." Angela speaks compellingly about her role on the Northern Ireland Access Committee. Planners once considered pedestrianising the entire centre of Belfast stopping traffic from entering. She is proud that she was one of those who objected because it meant that the entire city centre would become a no go area for disabled people. The NIAC took the Department of the Environment to task eventually winning their case after a long struggle.

Despite being a Paralympic champion Angela has retired to make way for other young people to get the chance she made for herself. But she is still active on the various disabled sports committees including the Irish Wheelchair Association. "I wanted to see the world and the only way I could was to become a champion table tennis player. I have friends in most major countries. Now I feel that others should have that chance," she said.

Despite legislative advances in recent years the fight is still not over. That's why Angela Hendra is still active with the 'Rights Now' campaign which fights for equal rights for the disabled. With similar passion Angela said, "I hate discrimination, I hate injustice." That is one reason why she gives up her spare time to help others, but Angela is a complicated mix of egoism and altruism. She is egoistic in so far as she is determined not to allow anyone to frown upon or sneer at or tramp over her. She has been criticised for 'having a chip on her shoulder'. There is also an arduous side to this woman who is small in stature but gigantic in spirit. She also admits to getting a 'buzz' out of helping others.

Angela said she is complimented if anyone disabled or able-bodied comes looking help. Her years of battling with able-bodied authorities have honed sharp her negotiating skills. But her altruism is best seen when she said "I know when people are uncomfortable around me." It is a heroic recognition. Able-bodied people often lack the imagination to see beyond the disability as something strange and unfamiliar.

However the disability is really only there because people make the world in their image and fail to take into account the needs of disabled people. Those reading this are probably the converted who do encourage equality but there are still many who don't. There is always the restaurant owner who asked Angela and her friends to use the back door. Or there is also the Belfast businessman who has managed to flaunt the law making it difficult for wheelchair users to get into his business premises. There is also the Belfast publican who frowned on people with cerebral palsy using his wine bar. The owner never realised that behind the jerky appearance there are articulate and piercing intellects.

Angela Hendra never wanted charity or people's pity. She still works at Belfast City Hospital where she has pushed her career to the position she now holds - a responsible job screening for cancer. She is also a tax payer like the rest of us. She is married to another wheelchair user who is also a tax payer. Both are responsible citizens and contribute to their community.

Angela accepts that attitudes are beginning to change and admits she has helped them change. While attitudes are important, it is the law that is more important. Martin Luther King once commented that the Black Civil Rights Movement was not interested in changing men's hearts but it was about changing the law of the land to outlaw discrimination. Looking back now, the discrimination and segregation of the American South is seen to be completely irrational. Angela Hendra is convinced that in the future the denial of civil rights to disabled people will look even more absurd.

“soon rose through the ranks to bring **gold for Ireland** back from the **Paralympics**”



I love collecting. I love meeting people - *Betty Russell*

“ I love collecting. I love
meeting **people** ”

Betty Russell

It was perhaps apt that the sun shone down on the care complex of two dozen neat and tidy bungalows. Several burly builders were reconstructing a doorway and have already provided a ramp. The alterations were intended to facilitate disabled folk. The good weather has lifted their spirits after winter misery that saw temperatures drop to record levels and rainfall levels rise untoward.

The builders nod generously to passersby. Betty's flat was to the rear of the multifold. The male warden knocked gently but firmly on the panel door. There was movement from inside and a shadow was thrown across the frosted glass. The door clicked and opened. Betty was standing with an approving smile. The attendant made his excuses and left. Betty wanted to know all about the interview. Who was it for and why did anyone want to interview her? She listened carefully and smiled as she was asked about the thousands of pounds collected for local charities. There is a 'so what' expression on her

“Betty was
standing with an
approving smile”

face as if volunteering dozens and dozens of hours was an inconsequential matter of fact. Suddenly she was enthusiastic and went into another room to where her 'glory hole' is situated. She returned with a number of framed certificates whipping off the dust layers accumulated over the last few years. One is from St Vincent de Paul and another from the Royal British Legion expressing their thanks for a job well done.

"I've some others," she says in that familiar Ulster Scots tongue that stresses the last syllable of the last word. She was dissuaded from returning to the nether world of under

the stairs. Betty Russell explained she grew up in Broughshane before moving the few miles to Ballymena. There she lived on the Ballykeel estate. Although she loved life living on her own in a small flat, her brother noticed her health was suffering. He arranged for a transfer to alternative accommodation in a care complex. For the last three years Betty lived

in a small ground floor flat surrounded by other elderly folk and watched over by the expert eye of home helps. One of the complex staff joins Betty for the interview. "Tell the man about all the money you have raised for charity," the care worker instructed. Betty became quiet. The care worker said again, "Tell the man about the money for St Vincent de Paul and about the Royal British Legion." Betty makes a sound that is interpreted as a yes. "And tell him about the cardiac unit you help collect for and how Marie Curie wants you back again"

“they **know better** to
walk on by me”

Again Betty emanates that resonance. It was glaringly obvious that Betty had difficulty speaking in front of the care worker. It was a clear case of 'three's a crowd.' The care worker left the room to answer a knock on the door. Betty admits, "I can't talk in front of her," her eyes flap in the direction of ceiling.

The need for finesse and subtlety was now. I explained that the purpose of the interview was to find out about Betty's volunteer work collecting money for charities, it wasn't about the care complex. The mood changed from one of forthright suspicion to an immediate thaw. The care worker rose and said good bye to Betty who was again gently egged on to help. Betty's large eyes followed the care worker out of the room.

There is a difference between childish and childlike even though both words refer to characteristics or qualities of childhood. The first is negative implying undesirable characteristics. After all in Corinthians we are implored to put away childish or childlike things depending on the translation. In the word childlike, innocence and wonder is understood. Betty Russell must be - by any stretch of the imagination - a serial charity worker. At 60 she still has wide wondering eyes. A smile is never far from her face. The childlike qualities she exhibits also include a passion for helping others. So when she told how she wanted to work in a charity shop and help display the second hand goods, no one doubts her. There was an impressive list of local charities, which Betty volunteered to help. Helping would have been out of the question for many others in her position. Betty explained that in the past her weight had caused her problems in her leg joints. As a result she had to move about with a complicated looking apparatus which was a cross between a zimmer frame and a push chair. The wheel frame allowed Betty to move about Ballymena with minimum difficulty. At the front there was a basket that allowed her to put her collection boxes and her variety of stick on labels. "I could put the box here and the poppies there if I collected for the Legion," she said in her by now intimate patois.

Most Saturdays it's not unusual to see her in the town's many shopping malls including the now famous Fairhill Centre. "I love sitting there all day, it gets me out and about and the people are kind," she said. Betty insisted she prefers using sealed boxes and that these boxes are collected regularly. "I just get myself a nice seat and I sit there waiting for people to come up and put their money in the box. I then have the box collected when it's full and begin again," she said. That childlike charm flashes again from her large blue eyes, "They know better to walk on by me for I'd tell the world about them. I'd even approach you," Betty chuckles.

There is no doubt that in the last ten years Betty has raised thousands of pounds for local charities. The two certificates dating back to the late 1980s and early 1990s show that on one she raised £400 and on the other £300. But that is not all. Also dragged from the glory hole were letters from various charity workers tasked with raising funds. They include Help the Aged, The Cedar Foundation and many many others. One lady thanked Betty for work she had already carried out and hoped she would see her again the following month. Not surprisingly Betty Russell didn't discriminate against any group. She would quickly take up a collection for the local Catholic Church. But on the Twelfth morning Betty is seen in the serried ranks collecting for Orange charities, she points out.

It is the collection that's important. "I love collecting. I love meeting people," she repeats, her eyes wandering off to some happy memory, but it was not always so. Betty has had tragedy in her life. She told how a friend John Anderson was killed in a serious accident. John was leaving an Elim Church meeting when he was struck by a car. "I miss him dearly" she added. But the conversation quickly returns to her volunteer work. Betty explained that she regularly scours the newspapers for advertisements looking for charity workers. It was this that first got her interested over a decade ago. She thinks it was for the now closed Waveney Hospital. But it was so long ago it's hard to remember exactly. Betty's volunteer work is about helping people, she explained when quizzed why she did it. Her philosophy is simple and childlike in its innocence. "I don't mind spending all day collecting money. To help people is to be a good Christian?," she almost asks.

Perhaps working the shopping malls for some charity is also Betty's personal statement that she is still independent. Her joints gave her a lot of pain and she is forced to take painkillers. Only her cross between a zimmer frame and a wheel chair allows her to move from one place to another. Betty's fiercely independent spirit wants to return to the sprawling Ballymena estate with its associated problems. Her home of the last three years disbars her from having the necessary housing points. She has contacted her MP. In almost pious tones she tells how 'Mr Paisley' was also unable to help.

For the moment Betty must stay at the care complex where when all is said and done she is happy to stay. But that doesn't mean she doesn't have ambitions. "I'd love to work in a charity shop," she said guilelessly. Her eyes shine. But then strategic planning was recognised, "I'd love to get my picture taken, perhaps if I get my picture taken someone will let me work in a charity shop," she suggests.

“a passion for
helping others”

“ It’s an excuse
to play **radios** ”

Gordon Bannister

Gordon Bannister, holds down a day job but can clock up dozens of hours in the evenings and each weekend as a volunteer. He knows what it is to work unsocial hours. Gordon is an electronic whiz kid who has a job with the BBC. This means that his shift work varies a lot. He admits going into work on a Friday evening can be a real pain. But he is quick to point out the positive, that his working time allows him the space for volunteering. Gordon, with the help of several dozen others is part of a unique organisation who use radios to talk to each other. He admits, “It’s an excuse to play radios.” His enthusiasm is similar to the way youngsters use two cans connected by a piece of cord.

He is the local co-ordinator for Belfast and Down branch of RAYNET which is an acronym for Radio Amateurs Emergency Network. There are four active RAYNET groups in the North with about 60 members. Gordon volunteers as a secondary communications operator. Twenty years ago Gordon was introduced to other hams who were helping first aid people provide emergency cover at sporting and social events. His job is to provide back up in the form of communication to the emergency services at numerous events from car rallying to the gruelling Mourne Mountain Marathon.

Car rallies would be impossible without proper communications. Someone has to count the high powered vehicles out and back in again at the numerous check points. Gordon and RAYNET set up a radio communication network with a controller and others posted to various parts of the rally or motor biking circuit like the North West 200. RAYNET is in constant demand by First Aid groups and sports organisers. They are capable of keeping an electronic eye and ear on events and allow the organisers to decide on the proper course of action if anything should happen.

“it is a **highly skilled role**”



It's an excuse to play radios - *Gordon Bannister*

Gordon's volunteers are the unsung heroes of every sporting event, including the annual push bike event organised by Co-operation Ireland. This event went from Belfast to Dublin but now it goes along the border. RAYNET provided the organisers with regular updates on who, what, when and whatever. Their task is to provide communication coverage at first aid check points so that everyone who leaves comes back. Sometimes there are dark sides to the task. Gordon explains how in recent years they had to tell organisers about a fatal motor bike crash. His mood becomes sombre. Recent motor bike deaths still weigh heavy on him. There was an incident when a relative of one biker pleaded for up-to-date information. Word had already come over the airwaves and Gordon suspected the worst, "It wasn't my task to tell," he said somewhat relieved.

**“huddle in cracks
and crannies on top of
the Mourne lashed
by 100mph winds
and horizontal rain”**

It is a highly skilled role. The communicators must almost learn a new language. "It's the ability to get across necessary information using as few words and yet be crystal clear," he explains. It's never as easy as some would think. Gordon explains that an operator has to know his transceiver (or radio) and the area he is in. For example there are peculiar goings on akin to the 'X files' particularly in the Mourne Mountains where RAYNET have provided back up communications for the local Mourne Rescue team during some sporting events. Like the famous optical illusions at Spelga there are audio illusions, radio waves do not always behave as they should. At Spelga, cars are seen

to roll up hill. In areas where there should be lots of signal for the transmitters strange things do happen. On some occasions the volunteers can't receive someone nearby but will pick up someone a lot further away. Foreign stations from across Europe have been heard. Sunspots can play havoc with communications, disrupting signals in all directions. The weather is a real baddie with rain sometimes blocking signals and lightening sometimes making it a bit hazardous.

By now Gordon Bannister had warmed to the interview. He was more relaxed and talked of those times when his trusty band of radio operators have had to huddle in cracks and crannies on top of the Mourne lashed by 100 mph winds and horizontal rain.

The Mourne provide many challenges for the more hardy. There is the Mourne Seven Sevens, where amateur walkers pit themselves against the seven mountains that are over 700 metres high. It is a task that takes the toughest around five hours to complete. It's a mean feat for anyone but RAYNET is on hand to provide radio cover and there have been many emergency situations when local walkers have gone AWOL, according to Gordon. In one particular case the individual concerned was caught in a patch of bad weather. The weather can change very quickly in the Mourne. The lost walker had the good sense to find himself a sheltered place where he bedded for the night. In the morning communication was

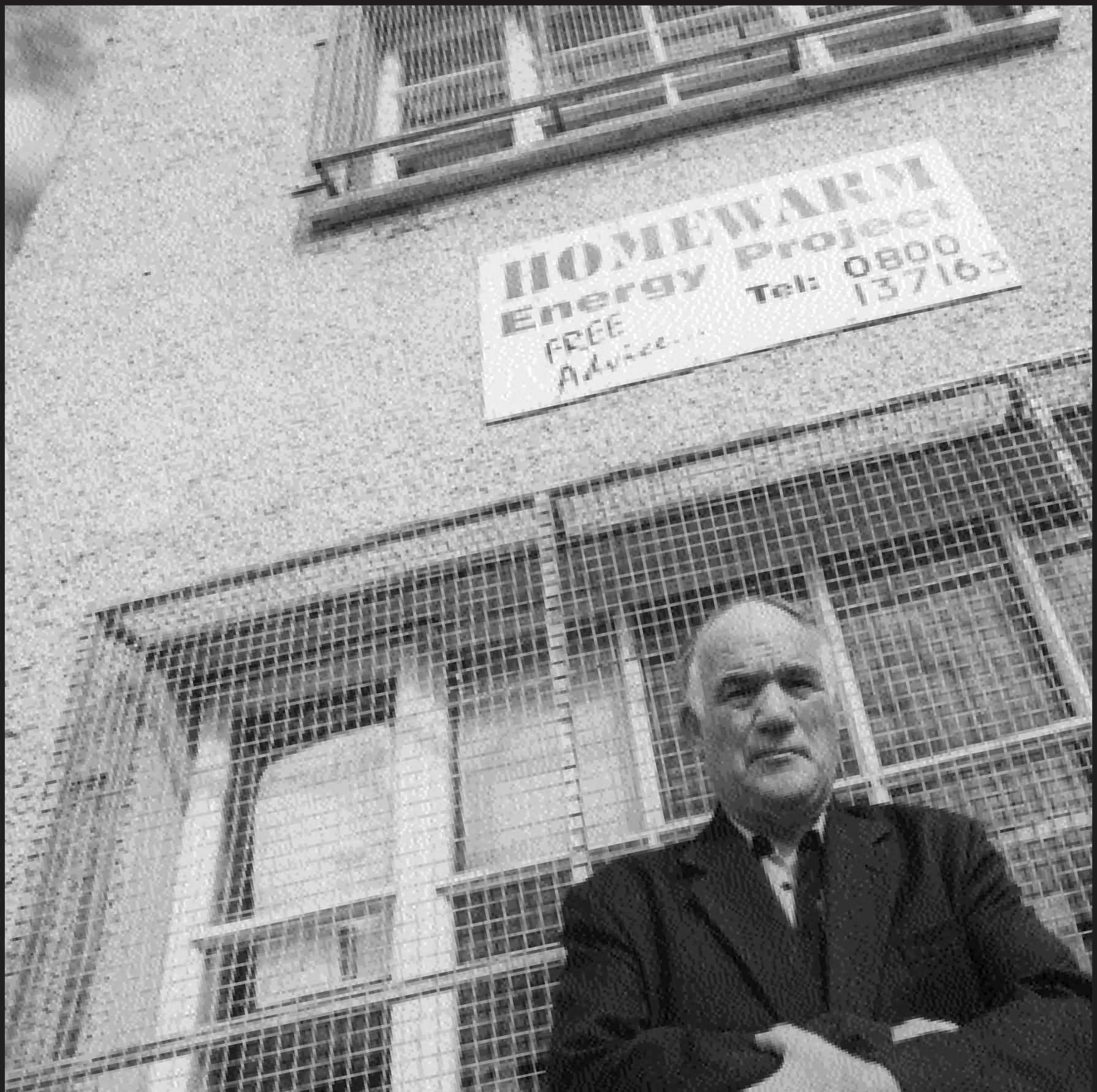
established and the walker was guided down by the Mourne Rescue. Then there are those days when RAYNET teams up with the professionals in simulated rescue operations. These can be as exciting as the real thing. They involve simulated bodies floating in the water, wrecked vessels and all the other paraphernalia of a disaster. The radio operators show the Coast Guard and others how they can be relied on to do a good job. According to Gordon this was proven at Lockerbie when, a decade ago, a Jumbo jet plane carrying hundreds of passengers exploded in mid air. The local RAYNET group provided the badly needed communications back up aiding the police and other emergency services. At Lockerbie, Gordon explains, the amateur communicators were on the ground long after the main rescue services had left.

After 21 years of volunteering, Gordon now admits the ubiquitous mobile phone is making him and his trusty team increasingly obsolete. But why does he insist on doing this type of volunteering? Once again and like so many other volunteers he is stuck. There is the enjoyment factor; the little boy with the tin can and string are to be perceived. It is the same little boy that began building electronic

gizmos at school before going onto university where he majored in the grown up subjects. There is also the chance to practice a very difficult skill of communicating with sufficient brevity and still disclose maximum information necessary. This involves what is known as net discipline. But that still doesn't answer the question. Perhaps it is Gordon's interest in motor bike racing that brings him to every major racing event across the north and into the south with the Monaghan road racing? No, he insists. He never knew what motor bike road racing was about until he began to cover the communications.

Perhaps the answer can be found at various levels. There is a social side, because after two decades Gordon Bannister and his radio enthusiasts have discovered a wide range of friends. Not turning up for an event would let them down. Whatever the answer, the reality is he volunteers to help out at sporting and other events because that's what he does best.

“the **unsung heroes**
of every sporting event”



The payback is that I feel good - *Hugh Campbell*

“the **payback** is
that **I feel good**”

Hugh Campbell

During the darkest days of the early 1970s, Hugh Campbell found himself organiser of a group of vigilantes. Nowadays the word has connotations of an extreme group who seek to hand out their own form of justice. In the Lurgan of the time, vigilante was the convenient name given to a local community watch whose task was to act as an early warning against car bombs and assassins. Hugh’s responsibility was to ensure that his north Lurgan patch of Freecrow was covered 24 hours around the clock. It was not unusual for him to be awakened in the small hours by an agitated sentinel complaining that his relief had not turned up. During the early part of the Troubles, local people, coming to terms with the radical and violent disturbance of every day life, believed gunmen and mobs were on every corner. It didn’t matter that that was not the real situation. What was real was the perception and that is what mattered. It was the best of times and the worst.

Hugh now recalls almost 30 years later those times, much of which has been spent in cold and often than not, uncrowded meeting rooms. His earliest memories are of his mother Sarah, a bubbly woman who has become a community legend. In the days before wall to wall television programming, she would arrange social evenings for the local church and Gaelic Football Club. Sometimes fifty and more people would come together for a social in the local hall. They would pay six pence or a shilling at the door. Tables would be laid out and the fold away chairs opened. Those organising would bring cakes or buttered soda farls freshly baked on the griddle over an open fire. Others donated their coppers which bought the milk and tea. For the next few hours people would sit around chatting. A local musician might turn up and someone would sing an old comeonye as others supped on the mugs of hot steamy tea and ate home-made cake from a plain white plate. Sarah Campbell was an ardent community volunteer. She organised the camogie team for St Peters Gaelic Athletic Club. As a youngster Hugh would see his mother going around the terrace street

“he is fiercely
anti-sectarian”

doors of Freecrow with the obligated half moon patch of scrubbed cleaned flagstone. She was always collecting for this or that charity. Community work was therefore second nature to Hugh Campbell.

His yearlong stint as local vigilante co-ordinator lead him and a few others to setting up a local residents' group that eventually evolved into a community association. He believes that one important spin off from the Troubles was an

increase in awareness of community matters. People normally looked to their so-called betters in the council chamber to deal with civic problems. Now ordinary people were finding that they could take control of their own streets.

**“success breeds
success and as a result
more and more individuals
came out to help”**

Freecrow is one of the older areas of Lurgan which came into being in the 1880s with the expansion of merchandised factory production. Red brick linen factories were built followed later by the red brick houses

for the local weavers. Local landlord William Brownlow in the 1840s had objected to the main rail route to Dublin halting at Lurgan. He feared his idyllic town would become another industrial disaster district similar to those that dotted the Black Country of England's industrial midlands. So the planners pushed on to Portadown where to this day the railway turns sharply south towards the southern capital. Nevertheless by the 1880s Freecrow had become the town's first industrial estate with some six factories employed in linen manufacturing. By the 1970s the factories had closed. The area was already in an advanced stage of blight. Many of the older families had moved away to post war housing estates of Kilwilkie and Shankill. Those who remained were joined by younger couples with their young families. The community association was a necessity whose time had now come. The volunteers immediately pushed for a general clean up and an improved environment. The campaign paid off. Success breeds success and as a result more and more individuals came out to help.

It was not all work and no play. The community association began to organise its own social nights even managing to attract the legendary singer Bridie Gallagher to come out of retirement for a 'one off' show. The Co Donegal chanter was a prototype to Philomena Begley and her generation. Bridie turned up in her 1950s style to sing her heart out for both young and old. Her only reward was her expenses and a bowl of the best Irish stew.

Freecrow had managed to weather the first enforced polarisation of Northern Ireland working class areas into Protestant and Catholic. Its mixed community survived to well into the 1990s before the remaining Protestant families were forced to flee because of either real or imagined danger. Any intimidation of the local Protestants in the community was met with a quick response by Hugh's association. The local Protestant School, which boasted Irish mystic and poet George 'AE' Russell among its early pupils, was often attacked by young bigots. The community association was always first on hand to replace broken glass, repair other damage and reassure its teachers and pupils.

By 1979 Hugh Campbell's volunteer community work had expanded beyond Freecrow. He and others set up Craigavon Area Talking Newspaper, which was delivered to 78 visually impaired folk in the local borough. The Talking Newspaper is still going 21 years later with 40 volunteers giving up their free time each week to read from the local newspapers and operate the cassette recording equipment. According to Hugh, the cassettes are highly structured like any newspaper and give as much information as can be put onto the tapes, even down to the classified adverts. To-day 150 people receive their weekly contact with the world as tapes of both The Lurgan Mail and The Portadown Times are delivered to the door with the regularity of the newspaper itself. The Talking Newspaper has now become crucial because it improves the quality of their lives as well as keeping them in touch.

In the early 1970s the new city of Craigavon was a bustling place with people from across the north coming to settle in the sprawling housing estates. There was also a large Asian population including Vietnam refugees. New arrivals brought with them ideas that led to the setting up numerous tenants committees which met under the umbrella organisation Brownlow Community Council.

Lurgan and Portadown community associations eventually joined up with the Brownlow Council to form the Craigavon Combined Community Association. Hugh was a founder member of the association acting as both chair and secretary. Craigavon Borough Council soon recognised the CCCA providing it with facilities at Pinebank. From the CCCA numerous other small committees sprung up including the Pensioners Club. Hugh always took a personal interest in helping elderly folk. To this day, the club continues to provide a service. Meanwhile there were the regular trips to Bangor as part of the Community Organisations of Northern Ireland (Coni) where volunteers rubbed shoulders and sipped tea with the then Northern Ireland Officer Minister Lord Melchett.

Since the early 1980s Hugh has been on at least four committees at any one time. His evenings are always booked up because he must attend meetings either as chairman or secretary. His volunteer resume stretches from his local community association to volunteer driver for the current Craigavon Council for Voluntary Service. His day time job is that of self employed window cleaner cum house decorator which leaves him time and freedom to work a tight voluntary schedule. In the 30 years he has been helping others he admits it has created problems in his family. "I suppose it's a case of everyone having good shoes except the cobbler's wife. It is good when a husband and wife see things the same, but sometimes it's not to be," he added sadly.

“Hugh was a **founder member** of the association acting as both **chair and secretary**”

Hugh has always steered clear of party politics believing he can achieve more working in the community. He is fiercely anti sectarian. In the early 1990s murder and attempted murder were common place in north Armagh. Hugh teamed up with

Wilson Freeburn, another local volunteer worker, to set up the Inter Friendship Group. He explains, "It was time that the ordinary people had their say and told the gun men to get off our backs."

The genesis of the Inter Friendship Group had been shown several years earlier when local community workers had encouraged both Catholic and Protestant clerics to cross the sectarian divide. Three Protestant ministers in what was an historic first, walked up the centre isle of St Peters Catholic Church. Catholic priests in turn attended the Church of Ireland in the centre of Lurgan. It was ironic that no cameras or news reporters were there to record the unique event. "Until then we could not get the clergy men to say the Our Father together without changing the end," Hugh remarks with his bland sense of humour, "They just wanted to stand in their wee corners without ever meeting. It was only when the local community volunteers encouraged a hands across the sectarian divide that they came together. From this beginning, concerned lay people felt it was time for the Inter Friendship Group." Prayer and protest meetings were held denouncing the sectarian slaughter in Lurgan and Portadown.

“volunteers come and go
but **Hugh Campbell** has
stood solid for almost
three decades”

It was a particularly black period, which saw the UVF kill children in a mobile shop. The Provisional IRA murdered two police men and gunned down two civilians who were wild fowl shooting on the southern shores of Lough Neagh. All of the murders were personally felt by every individual who realised the futility of the killing. Large crowds gathered in the early autumn drizzle to hear lay people and clergy call for an end to the senseless slaughter. Hugh was never much of a public speaker but his

medium build and flat cap could always be seen standing in the background. At the time, the Inter Friendship Group had caught the mood of the people. Hugh is adamant that this mood was reflected in the ranks of the politicians and paramilitaries. Something was stirring in the undergrowth. A new mood of reconciliation between the warring factions or maybe a realisation that it was time for a change.

The first IRA ceasefire, followed closely by the moving apology and further ceasefire call by the loyalists, seemed to offer hope, but that was soon dispersed with the London dockland bombing. The Ulster public was on an emotion roller coaster. Then Lurgan was again in the headlines when two community police officers were shot dead in the town centre. The Inter Friendship Group organised a petition calling for an end to violence. Hugh with others stood on Lurgan Main Street in the bright June sunshine as crowds lined up to express their horror by signing a petition.

Of course there was always those who hung about the street corners grumbling at the courage of the Inter Friendship Group. However, the slaughter didn't stop and 18 year old Bernadette Martin was murdered as she slept in her boyfriend's house at Aghalee. The Inter Friendship Group took again to the streets protesting at the absurd murder of the young girl. Still the begrudges gathered on the same street corners.

The second ceasefire was called and the Inter Friendship Group continues to meet regular for prayer sessions. "The power of prayer is important," Hugh again explains. It is a theological position. But beneath the religious façade it is clear that faith is not only a means of easing the horribleness of the sectarian murders it is also a cry of protest at the irrationalism of it all.

In his 30 years of volunteer work Hugh Campbell has been recognised twice by the local council and other community groups. He proudly shows off his Tyrone Crystal and a medal given to him by the then Craigavon mayor Sammy Gardiner. Yet any observer would be forgiven for thinking that it is little to show for those selfless years. His home, where he lives alone, is spartan containing just basic furniture and a television set. Hugh is modest when he is asked to explain why he puts up with it all. "I like helping people and the payback is that I feel good."

It is typical of so many volunteers that they have not sat down to reason why they give up their time to help. In a society that often engenders the selfish gene and other manifestations of rabid and often vicious individualism, lone figures traipsing the streets or sitting in small rooms planning community events are often ridiculed. The more cynical look for a hidden agenda of self interest. The 'I'm alright' syndrome can not conceive its opposite in a world of self interest. Yet it exists. There rarely is a hidden agenda. Certainly people like Hugh Campbell find it difficult to articulate what drives him as a volunteer. Unseen forces in the id bubble up a strange brew of christianity and common decency. Or maybe it is his christianity which provides him with the concepts that helps him understand why he acts as a social being.

"I think people appreciate what I do; at least some have told me that. I don't expect much from life and my habits are simple. I like nothing better than to go into Cafolla's café, get a cup of tea and do the crossword," he said.

But he admits there are those days that he wants to walk away from it all, "I sometimes feel as if I'm hitting my head against the wall and the future is just not there anymore and then something happens and I get a boost, it's nothing drastic but it is the lift I need to start again," he said.

Volunteers come and go but Hugh Campbell has stood solid for almost three decades. He admits at times he is the only member left on the committee of the local association. Then suddenly people come from all directions only to fade away again. In September last year he held a Freecrow 2000 exhibition. He dug deeply into his personal yesteryear photograph collection and his bound folder of World War One and Two postcards and letters, and put together Freecrow Down The Years. The modest presentation was held in the local church hall attracting a fair proportion of folk coming out of St Peters Church from Sunday Mass. Standing at the back was ubiquitous Hugh Campbell discussing who was who in those ancient faded pictures, many of which had frayed and worn out edges. On nearby table were small desk top computer produced publications and Hugh's latest book of poetry 'Scarecrow and Friends'. Most people would not have bothered, but Hugh Campbell did.

“ Never do anyone a bad
turn and **help people**
where you can ”

“**V**

Freda Lynch

olunteering is not a source of cheap labour”, insists Patricia Smyth, the Voluntary Services Manager at the Green Park Healthcare Trust. Her job is to encourage people to become involved in volunteering work. This sounds like a contradiction. Nevertheless her volunteers complement the roles of paid staff. But what does that mean?

Almost 100 volunteers are involved with the Trust at its Musgrave Park Hospital and do everything from welcoming and directing new patients and visitors, to pushing wheelchairs, visiting patients and even taking the shop trolley from bed to bed. They offer their service without any cash payoff. The volunteers are an essential part of hospital life. Patricia Smyth said, “It’s about active citizenship and at Musgrave Park Hospital our volunteers are very active and very valuable to the Trust.” She is clearly proud of her coterie of non-paid helpers who give up their time to help others and she is proud of her achievements in increasing the number of volunteers and developing new roles. Patricia was one of the first to gain a place on the pilot scheme for the Effective Management of Volunteers Training Programme, accredited by the University of Ulster and carried out by the Volunteer Development Agency. She further went on to pilot a computerised Volunteer Audit System for the National Institute of Volunteering Research in London. The scheme allows Patricia to produce statistics, which contribute to research into volunteering.

Patricia is sensitive to hospital staff already laden with a heavy workload. Some see the volunteer as an extra responsibility of supervision and even training. Her job is to increase awareness of the valuable work volunteers do. She draws on her public relations experience and disseminates as much information about volunteers and the tasks they perform as possible, raising awareness of the value of volunteering.

Often there are more volunteers than jobs for them to do and this means coming up with new ideas. No one is turned away from the Musgrave Park Hospital. It means developing roles, which can cause frustration. Patricia’s task is to enhance the

“Freda was finding
her **vocation**”



Never do anyone a bad turn and help people where you can- *Freda Lynch*

quality of life in the hospital without tramping on toes of the hard pressed staff. "I have to sit down and think how I am going to develop more roles, then I go off and contact the relevant people. It is important to keep everyone happy and on the same agenda," she said.

“I like being able to
assist patients when
they arrive, point them in
the right direction and
put their mind at rest”

Patricia is currently looking for any individuals out there in the wide world who are trained in beauty therapy, aromatherapy or reflexology. Perhaps one of the most distressful sections of Musgrave Park Hospital is the Spinal Ward. Young and old, who have been in all sorts of accidents, lie waiting to get broken lives back together. Each and every one knows that no matter what happens things will never be the same again. Patricia believes there is nothing the patients love better than to experience neck and shoulder massage and aromatherapy. It is not just these patients; we all love to be

pampered. Patricia has sent out an all points bulletin desperately seeking trained volunteers.

Some who found themselves in the Spinal Ward were lucky, if that is the word. They still have locomotion and move about on their own. One case in point is Michael O'Neill, once a burly building site worker whose hands fashioned the finest finished joinery. He could have made anything from wood. He fell a mere 10 feet and found he was partially paralysed. His former life ended that day two years ago. From being a big active man Michael was reduced to a shadow of himself. Then he was admitted to Musgrave's Special Spinal Unit and underwent rehabilitation for his injuries. The treatment gave him back a life. In those wee small hours of the morning when sleep illudes, everyone has experienced a rush of thoughts; some good some not so good. Michael was one person in point who lay in bed at his North Belfast home. His problem was that he was troubled about leaving many fellow patients some of who were paraplegic and tetraplegic. He realised that they were probably also lying awake wondering what the future held. In the cold light of the dawn Michael O'Neill resolved to help his fellow patients by collecting cash and goods. On a voluntary basis he harangued retailers and contractors he had originally worked for. Within a few weeks he'd raised £3,000 worth of electrical equipment including 15 TV sets. He even convinced one retailer to hand over £1,500 worth of computer equipment. He explained later it was his way of giving something back. He knew he was no longer able to volunteer for more manual work but he wasn't helpless. He paid a moving tribute to doctors and staff, "They really showed me what it is to be human and they helped me take control of my life again."

Trust volunteers also show what it is to be a human being. They come from all walks of life and all have their own individual reason. For example Valerie Douglas has been a volunteer for the past eight years. She welcomes patients to the Withers wing with a broad pleasing smile. Her task is to help them overcome tension and anxiety about being in hospital. She is

quick to give assurances to those who are alone or who are worried about an operation. Helping patients gives its own reward according to Valerie, "I like being able to assist patients when they arrive, point them in the right direction and help put their mind at rest".

Another volunteer is Newtownards lady May Smith, who travels to and from Musgrave Park Hospital on average four times a week. Why does she do it? The perennial and enduring question keeps popping up. "I like to keep active and get involved in community activities and a hospital is a community of sorts, besides it's great to be part of a team providing a bit of human solidarity to patients, their families and staff too", the plucky lady said.

Then there are of course the 'Church Wheelers'. A group of 30 whose function is to wheel patients to and from Sunday service at Musgrave Park Hospital. The 'wheelers' are from the four main Church denominations and are always on hand to help during special services such as Harvest Thanksgiving, Good Friday and Christmas carol service. The Church Wheeling majority live locally but one of the architects of the scheme thinks nothing of doing a 40 mile round trip. For these volunteers the act of worship in one of the most beautiful hospital churches in the country makes it worthwhile.

Another impressive volunteer is Freda Lynch, a single woman who had spent a quarter of a century - more than half of her life - looking after her mother. Her story is one of selfless giving. Freda was the youngest of three children and her mother died when she was just a toddler. Her father remarried this time to a Mullingar woman. This was not to be a story of the wicked stepmother. Eileen Lynch raised her step children with love and tenderness and within a short time they became her own.

Her step mother's death was a terrible loss to Freda. From the mid 1970s Freda had given up her job to work full-time as a carer. Freda's father died in the early 1980s. She and her mother moved from Ballymurphy to a double bedroom bungalow in nearby Turflodge. It was good times and bad. Freda remembers the bedroom door of their house being always open. Like any concerned guardian Freda listened for every sound coming from her mother's room. Often during the wee small hours an unusual cough or noise would bring her rushing in to check on Eileen. Even when she was in another part of the house Freda would continue to chatter to her mother. It was her way of always being on hand. But it was not always work. Freda watched TV with her mother in the evening. She would play games. Her mother's favourite was Scrabble. "We spent long hours playing scrabble. Mommy would cheat and we would get a great laugh", she fondly remembers but there were also those bad days. "My mother was always an active person who found that she now had to rely on others. She was so used to doing it for herself. In many ways she had her dignity taken away. She would be in a bad mood but that's to be expected. I loved my mommy", Freda said softly.

“she was **caring** for her friend who also happened to be **her mother**”

Freda Lynch said her step mother had taken on a huge task when she married her father. "There is not many women would have done what she did, she reared us well, she was the only mommy I knew or wanted to know," she said.

Freda's day was taken up between caring for her mother and looking after the home. She never seemed to notice the years passing. Her youth slipping into the black hole of the past. Everyone knows nothing ever escapes from a black hole. It was a world that Freda never considered would end. It had always been and it will always be. In many ways it was a twilight existence but Freda didn't mind. She was caring for her friend who also happened to be her mother.

As Eileen's condition worsened, nurses would visit the home. Freda admired them for their professionalism. Somehow feelings of lost youth and opportunity would bubble up from her subconscious. If only, if only. Eileen's illness got worse, increasingly making the burden almost intolerable. The medical authorities suggested regular stays in the hospital to allow Freda a break. She wasn't interested in her own welfare. She made regular trips to Meadowland wing of Musgrave, the area of the hospital where the elderly are located. Freda found the attention given by doctors and staff was excellent.

Then the inevitable happened. Her mother passed on. Freda was faced with a future with a limited past. It was crisis time.

“she certainly **lifts my day** when she bounces into the office or rings me on the phone”

There was a gap in her life where her mother had been. What was she to do? How could she cope? The 25 years caring had meant no social life. Her circle of friends was limited. She made excuses, "I was never one for going out or that sort of thing." What she hadn't noticed was that her image of herself had also suffered. Low self esteem and depression made her period of mourning for her mother a nightmare. The worst was when she returned to an empty house. The open door to her mother's bedroom beckoned to an empty place in both the house and her heart. In the quiet of the night a distant dog bark or the

wail of a military vehicle brought her rushing into her mother's room. The slatted light from the street lamps beyond the venetian blinds fell on dark spaces illuminating the bed as empty as the shadows. It wasn't a dream. Freda returned to her bed, back to a troubled sleep.

Everyone must mourn. It is the human way of coming to terms with lost mothers and fathers and friends. The heartache finally subsides, only fond memories are left. Freda did not give herself a chance. Instead of directing her grief she now admits she was tormented by guilt. "If only I had done more," she cried. She was becoming ill with loneliness. Something had to be done. Perhaps it was a sign of Freda's untapped potential. She went looking for help and found it.

Half way through 2000 Freda was finally overcoming her loss when she returned to Meadowlands wing as a volunteer. A quiet and unassuming person Freda waited for her orders. More importantly she was now doing what she wanted to do

and was helping to take care of the elderly. Her first task was to help patients complete a patient satisfaction questionnaire in one ward. This proved so successful that the hospital's Director of Patient Services insisted that other wards were canvassed. Freda took charge and helped other volunteers until they were confident and able to work on their own.

Freda was finding her vocation. Her 25 years of caring for her mother was no mean accomplishment. It was experience that couldn't be bought. Patricia Smyth was quick to recognise Freda's competence. She was encouraged to help out on hairdressing day. The vanity of senior citizens does not waste away with age. "They like to look their best," Freda was quick to point out.

She took part in regular outings such as trips to the bowling park and ice bowl. And even a day trip to Belfast's grand and majestic City Hall was a trip not to be missed by the ordinary citizenry. At Christmas 2000 she was invaluable helping the Activity Nurses who arranged special entertainment.

For Freda the almost daily trips to help out at Musgrave Park Hospital also became a personal journey. Her self-confidence quickly improved and her natural, bubbly personality came to the fore. She met new friends and more importantly she is appreciated. "Well that's what they tell me but I'm only doing what I think is ordinary run of the mill stuff. There is nothing unusual in that", she stops, thinks and then faltering adds, "I think!"

In many ways Freda sees her volunteer work as a monument to her mother's memory, "My mother brought us up to respect other people, never do anyone a bad turn and help people where you can." But perhaps the best monument to her mother will be her hopes to study. For Freda the future is bright. She wants to work for qualifications. She hopes shortly to start a Red Cross course in caring.

Freda Lynch is no longer the quiet novice she was on her first day volunteering. Her strength is beginning to show. She is effervescent. According to Patricia Smyth, "She brings brightness and joy to our patients and is an invaluable volunteer. She certainly lifts my day when she bounces into the office or rings me on the phone. I always joke that I will allocate a bed to Freda because she is here nearly every day."

As human beings we are social by nature. We need each other whether we like it or not. Freda's story is about helping each other. Her humanity is not driven by money concerns. But the social nature of her selflessness has paid dividends. She is coping with her grief for her mother's passing. Listening to her stories about her mother is worth a book on its own. She is starting to live a normal life and more importantly that door to her mother's room is now closed.



Something had to be done- *Isabel Moore*

“Something had to
be done”

Isabel Moore

A mind game. Imagine waking up each morning with aching joints. Disabling arthritis causes the suffering. Every finger movement, which most take for granted, is a painful task. Already the right hand is twisting at the finger joints becoming awkward. Now impose on top of that disability osteoporosis, a condition that leads to a weakening of the bones. Imagine that two crushed vertebrae in your back are replaced because of the disease. You are condemned to a lifetime of affliction and your problems still haven't ended. It is just a matter of a few years or even less before you will lose the ability to walk and will spend the remainder of your days in a wheelchair.

For the most able bodied persons it takes little imagination to tell them this is a life sentence with no remission for good behaviour. For Isabel Moore it is a fact of life. Each morning she begins the painful ritual of moving her body one part at a time. Her daily medicine is powerful morphine laced painkillers to relieve the pain from the two crushed discs. And in this day and age of advanced medical technology the doctors frankly admit they can do nothing for her. The future is one complex pain management.

It's no wonder that Isabel Moore often suffers that bible black of all depressions that can sweep over her like some damp fog rolling along the dark waters of Strabane's Mourne River. The very name Strabane conjures up a strange mixture of images. Most people remember the pioneering motor mouth complaining about massive unemployment in the South Derry town. George Cummings' performance provoked much laughter on the first popular 'It will be Alright on the Night' television programme all those years ago. In fact it was also included in the top hundred most memorable television images in the 20th century. The interviewer was unable to slow down George. His staccato burst of hard hitting words about the government and the neglect of the town were sadly lost in gales of laughter. In fact Strabane became a byword for the social misery caused by long dole queues. Official attitudes were dismissive of the problem. Whatever the reason the unemployed became a forgotten underclass.

Mother of six Isabel Moore was so concerned about the cost of such human distress that for almost two decades she has campaigned for a better lifestyle for all. And it hasn't been easy. As she sits, visibly uncomfortable and in pain, Isabel speaks

slowly and softly. "Working as a volunteer helped me cope with being bashful. Like many other women I was used to taking a back seat with the resultant low self esteem," she said. Isabel moved into Springhill Housing Estate in the late 1970s. Her first marriage had collapsed with all the bitter and personal consequence. She explains that women in that situation can go either way. Either into the depth of despair or they can rise above the adversity. It is in the rising that a person not only changes her surroundings and life, she changes herself.

She was the second eldest of a large family of 13 and one of two girls. Her sister Anne Marie was seriously physically disabled. It's a cruel fact that most able-bodied people have an unfortunate aversion to those not the same in body and spirit. Not so Isabel, who dearly loved her sister. Ann Marie was trapped inside an anatomy that did not function properly nevertheless Isabel saw through her crystal clear eyes the struggling intellect and humanity of her soul.

“for almost two decades she
has campaigned for **a better
lifestyle for all**”

When Isabel was a young girl she remembers her mother going into hospital to have the other children and she was called on to act as a surrogate mum to her father, brothers and sister, but those days in the 1950s and early 1960s were not happy times. Of the 13 children only five have survived. One brother

Shaun was tragically drowned in the Mourne along with two friends in June 1965. They were all just 17 years of age. Strabane's close knit community was stunned that such a thing could happen.

Mild and soft spoken Isabel still remembers the tragedy with tears welling up in her eyes. She, after all, had been Shaun's stopgap mummy when his natural mum was away. She also remembers with some regret how she lost out in her education as a result of her family commitments. "Of the four years I was at the secondary school I must have been absent half of that time," she almost whispers afraid her absence would be wrongly constructed as 'mitching'.

In the 1980s Springhill like so many other housing estates across the north suffered from the twin evils of neglect and the Troubles. Isabel's surrogate instincts came to the fore when she saw how young women in particular and children in general were sent into the area and forgotten about. She insisted no one cared and despite being a new estate, Springhill soon became rundown acquiring something of a reputation for hopelessness. She emphasised the example of contaminated flood waters that flowed off a nearby hill. The brown gunk liquid was a deadly cocktail of slurry and agricultural chemicals. Children were suffering from rashes and other illnesses. Something had to be done. Isabel and others organised a public meeting. The local authorities turned up and were sceptical of their commitment. But the Springhill Community Group weren't going to go away. Within a year the DOE had taken steps to pipe in the effluent that was causing so much concern. The community was on a high but in reality Isabel and another person were doing much of the work.

The woman who had lost out so much in her childhood education, was rapidly absorbing the lessons of community work. Her natural intelligence found no difficulty coping. The community organised a toddlers and parents groups and other neighbourhood projects but something was missing, Isabel explains. Then the bigger picture became apparent when Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust worker Monina O'Prey paid a visit to the area. Isabel remembers Monina walking around the area with its high unemployment rate and struggling single parent families. "Monina could see that despite their social exclusion people in this area took pride in themselves and in their homes," she said. NIVT agreed to help the Springhill Community by providing training and much needed cash. The cash was indeed much needed in Strabane because the town was in the shadow of Derry. Although Isabel was still a volunteer she and others soon found themselves working as employers giving much needed work to local men and women.

The mild mannered mother did not receive any fiscal reward for her community work. She met with visiting Americans who further widened her awareness of community work. The Springhill Community produced a development programme which lead to a trip to the United States. At a prestigious gathering in Sioux Falls Isabel learned how the other side did it. Her aspirations now knew no bounds. During a second trip to the USA, Isabel got the idea of a crafts centre, producing bits and bobs. Everyone thought she was mad but her idea was soon up and running. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Isabel was asked to speak. It was the first time this mother of six had ever uttered a word in public. Nothing in her past life had prepared her for this moment. She stood up with a knotted stomach while all eyes became fixed on this small, shy, attractive mum who had never been outside Northern Ireland. The silence was overpowering. Then from somewhere deep inside her psyche she remembers the words coming out. And she spoke in clear precise tones. She said her community was looking for £20,000. The silence continued but now had become more significant. Perhaps it was her inexperience, perhaps her innate charm and pleasant Strabane accent that is as soft as the early autumn rain. Or maybe it was more mundane. Her sales pitch highlighted the links between Strabane and past US president Thomas Woodrow Wilson. The Americans were clearly hooked. Isabel got what she wanted and more. Her success lead to the local Training and Development Agency noticing the plight of Strabane and coming forward with other offers.

Today the Springhill Park Community and Development Association employs a Development Worker plus various others who have been given back the esteem, so cruelly destroyed by Strabane's forgotten unemployment. The group has managed to secure a community centre that brings together those young mums who were once isolated in their homes. Isabel's pride and joy is the play park that now exists in Springhill. "It was the first play area in Strabane. It's hard to believe that in this day and age, children do not have a basic play park," she notes.

But all is not right with the hard working volunteer community worker. She admits she felt a sense of guilt while on her second trip to Pennsylvania. Isabel felt that she should have been accompanied by her friends and neighbours from Springhill. It was similar to the guilt she felt when some wise cracking local remarked she is doing well out of the community work. The implication was that she was making money. Isabel believes that the cash incentive destroys volunteer work. It introduces self interest. It is the surrogate mother once more speaking when she claims her work has been for the children. "If and when I am confined to my bed I'll still be doing as much community work as I am able to do," she vows.

“ A new and interesting
adventure ”

Ling Sun

In our modern society the word 'work' is harder to define than most would think. The Concise Oxford Dictionary insists it is "the expenditure of energy, striving, application of effort or exertion to a purpose".

Now try running a marathon, playing a game of football even turning over the garden for the spring planting and then assert there is no exertion or expenditure of energy. Paid employment is a relatively new development in human history and is linked to the commodification of labour and everything else for that matter.

In other words what is produced is simply for sale and the only relationship between people is naked self-interest and the callous 'cash payment'.

Today those lucky enough to have a job, not to mention job security, are under no illusions that they are there for the money but many people also work for little. We just have to think of those working in the home, school children and the retired. Volunteers seem not to fit into any of the above categories. What many do confronts the logic of the age. Yet try

“ **a bridge** to the Northern
Ireland **community** ”

telling one of today's many volunteers that what they do is not work. Nine point nine times out of ten the person making the gibe will be met with a frivolous glance because clearly he or she doesn't know any better. Volunteers do not expect monetary reward. Their relationship is not that of the Marxian

cash payment. Yet they contribute so much to so many people. True to the discipline of the work place volunteers often turn up for their shift on time and in many cases with more enthusiasm than those in paid employment.

Manual workers have always been sceptical about intellectual employees. The former's conception of work is physical and blue collar. In comparison volunteers do not distinguish. Take for example Ling Sun. She was a white collar worker who held



A new and interesting adventure - *Ling Sun*
(At the time of going to print Ling Sun was unavailable for a photograph)

down a responsible job in the Beijing tax office but now wouldn't think twice about picking up a brush and sweeping the front of the Multi Cultural Resource Centre on Belfast's Upper Crescent. Ling Sun was understandably nervous when confronted with a nosy interviewer. She sat uncomfortably in the back office of the Belfast's Multi Cultural Centre. A two bar electric fire was plugged in and the morning chill disappeared. Ling Sun turned the red glowing bars towards the interviewer and away from herself. The selflessness didn't go unnoticed.

“concepts of the **greedy personality** are somehow **alien to her nature**”

Ling was not tall and was very modest in her dress. She does not look old enough to have a 13 year old boy in college. But Ling admits with a uncharacteristic womanly honesty, which would have horrified Oscar Wilde, that she is "nearly 40 years old." It is almost four years since Ling left her home in Beijing, which since 1949 is the capital city of the People's

Republic of China. She came to Northern Ireland to join her husband who is a lecturer at Queens University. In Beijing, Ling Sun was a competent income tax clerk. She remembers how much she enjoyed her duties travelling to work on her bicycle through the crowded streets of the old Imperial capital that still drips with the history of the past 3000 years. Her command of English is remarkable although it is obvious she learned it in a classroom and not as part of the rough and tumble of everyday life.

Ling explains she is not one for staying at home. Carefully picking her words she tells how she became involved in the Multi Cultural Centre to help others. Such altruism immediately causes the egoistically centred westerner to put up the shutters. It is a sad fact of the cynical and skeptical life that perceives that behind every charity there is a con man or in this case a con woman. Ling Sun smiled diffidently. The hard nosed westerner realises that concepts of the greedy personality are somehow alien to her nature.

As an experienced office worker who worked in one of the world's largest capital cities, Ling Sun believes she has a lot to offer. Ling is proud that she can help the Multi Cultural Centre produce the necessary leaflets and brochures for arriving emigrants. She speaks about meeting people from every race and class in the centre. Ling astonishingly explains that one of her many tasks is to teach second and third generation Chinese youngsters Mandarin Chinese.

Ling Sun followed her husband to Northern Ireland in 1997 and now both live in a private house in Lisburn. She has no intention of remaining inside some self imposed Chinese ghetto. Ling insists that her volunteer work helping out in the Multi Cultural Centre is a bridge to the Northern Irish community and to the other communities living here. We tend to think of Asian people as a group. So it is only when Ling says she wishes to meet with Indian and Pakistani people that we realise how big Asia is and how many people with their various cultures live there.

Despite being nearly 40 Ling Sun said she experiences life as a young child. Each day is a new and interesting adventure. She acknowledges life in the west is exciting. Socialising in Beijing was based on the extended families. It is about going to

local tea houses and meeting other people, listening to them and finding out what makes them tick, she explains. It is paradoxically a gentle way of life caused by the often harshness of a country struggling to catch up with the modern west.

However much of that is changing Ling explains. Despite the communist labels, China has embraced capitalism. Young people are no longer taught to hate the west but to imitate it and make money. Ling Sun explains that China's new capitalist economic system has taken over from the utopian schemes of Mao Tse-tung. It was in 1980 that former disgraced leader Deng Xiao-ping became the dominant figure inside the Chinese Communist Party. It was Deng's economic ideas that has led to a huge industrial revolution. From a primitive backward Third World country, China in the last few decades has taken that gigantic leap forward that Mao always called for but never got.

Deng's policy was to open up the country, according to Ling Sun. Despite ordinary perceptions Chinese people move in and out of their country without any problem. Her only regret is that much of old Beijing is being torn down to make way for large skyscrapers to hold the new capitalist corporations however in typical Chinese fashion, there is a pragmatism that won't allow architectural and local historical nostalgia to stand in the way of a better life.

Ling explains that her husband was granted a scholarship to Queens' University to study for his doctorate. His interest is in agriculture and economics. Ling's husband began comparing the agricultural systems of Northern Ireland. The Chinese are unable to view anything in isolation. For example their medicine for thousands of years has always considered the whole body and not just physical problems. It was only a matter of time before a local study was linked to the European countryside. It now embraces the world in line with the global economic system that dominates it.

She greatly admires those Chinese who come from Hong Kong and who make up the vast majority of the local Chinese community, "They are very hard workers who work in the catering business because it is the only place where they can get employment." But Ling Sun is hopeful that sooner rather than later the Chinese will move into the main stream employment. Her determination to get to know the local people is linked to her desire to improve her English. So far it lacks the Northern Irish idiom. She is hopeful this will change. Ultimately she wants to get a job but that's further down the line. At the moment her volunteering gives her all the satisfaction she needs.

“she speaks about meeting
people from **every race**
and class in the Centre”



A place of enormous contradictions - *Martie Rafferty*

“ A place of enormous contradictions ”

Martie Rafferty

Friedrich Nietzsche may have proclaimed that God is dead, but in the 100 years since the philosopher's own premature death in August 1900, many people still look to religion as their ground for morals. It is the religious criteria that provides individuals with the basic rules of how to be good. Christianity with its emphasis on loving your neighbour as thyself and not judging others, does provide some sound sense in a world with absolutes - even to the confirmed atheist!

Those who can remember the dark autumn days of 1971 may also remember flickering black and white images on old television sets of men, women and children huddled in the wind and the rain waiting for their weekly half hour visit to Long Kesh internment camp. Into that dreary and desperate world of prison and prison visitors the Northern Ireland Government under Prime Minister Brian Faulkner, invited the Society of Friends. The Friends were asked to open up a 'neutral' visitor's centre outside the internment camp.

The Society of Friends is a religious body which has no definite creed and no regular ministry. It was founded by George Fox who began preaching in 1647. Later Fox was to write in his Journal that the society was dubbed the Quakers by Justice Bennet of Derby because they 'Tremble at the word of the Lord'. The Society of Friends have always come with preconceived baggage as righteous people who daily lived their faith, and the more liberal wing embraced the opportunity to work with the prisoners, even though some had committed serious albeit politically motivated crimes. Yet preconceptions can be and are often wrong; for the Society of Friends is like any other human collective and does have its incongruities. There were elements that allowed more fundamental aspirations to dictate their attitudes. 'Why should the Society of Friends become embroiled in a nasty little sectarian war between two religious factions?' they reasoned. However the work of prison reformer and Quaker, Elizabeth Fry, who regularly went in and out of the dark satanic dungeons of early Victorian England, left a legacy that no Friend could afford to ignore. So within days of the incarceration of detainees the Society of Friends was handing cups of warm soup and tea to the relatives and children of the first inmates.

In the beginning, the Quaker canteen was the only protection against the elements. Eventually the authorities provided better waiting rooms for visitors. The Society of Friends did not go away and their operation called for more volunteers to

oversee the new crèche and the enlarged canteen facilities. Most of those Quakers who came forward had their own reasons. They made their own way out to the prison in all weathers and were only given their bus or petrol expenses. Despite the complete lack of monetary reward the Quaker volunteers managed for over 20 years to provide a continuous service and have rarely been acknowledged for their selflessness. In a recent edition of the fringe political magazine 'The Other View' the question is ironically asked, "Which organisation spent 25 years in Long Kesh and didn't get an early release nor a large state pension?" Flick over a few pages and the answer is revealed to be The Society of Friends.

Teams of volunteers traipsed out to the Maze Prison for years to stand behind a small counter serving those who more often than not had travelled miles for a weekly half hour visit. Many had travelled for several hours in a variety of mini buses and coaches driven by volunteer drivers from different organisations.

It becomes clear that if even if many of the volunteers had never become Quakers they would still have volunteered to help others. Their Christian beliefs correspond to a classical socialist attitude, which requires the individual to help those less fortunate. But why volunteer to work at the Maze, which was once considered the toughest prison in Western Europe housing some of the most ruthless killers and bombers? The volunteers find it hard to give a definitive answer. "Is it something human beings do or ought to do? Is it that their Christian beliefs were incensed at how the families of prisoners

were also made to suffer by the authorities? Possibly," they admit. It is the Quaker that believes there is a piece of God in everyone. Their task was not to judge, but many did believe that the families of prisoners were innocent.

“I was so moved
by the appeal that
I volunteered”

The inability to point to any one particular cause suggests that maybe it is the totality of reasons both conscious and unconscious. Whatever their reasons many Quakers immediately volunteered for the Quaker Service Committee. For many years they prepared and served up food to the visitors. It was not haute cuisine but it was hot and filling. Like

the outside world the makeshift portacabins of the visiting area were also strictly segregated but the volunteers recall that they found prison visitors generally congenial and well mannered to each other and also to the Quaker canteen and crèche staff.

There is the opinion that a lot of young men became involved out of peer pressure and that their strong ideological beliefs came later. In this way the volunteers who were mostly women, felt able to empathise with the mothers and wives of the young men locked up in the Maze and acknowledge that their own children could have also been fodder for the paramilitaries.

Most volunteers remember their time in the Maze as rather uneventful with few incidents if any. There are fond memories of the chats and craic with the volunteer drivers who drove relatives to the Maze.

Images and impressions of Long Kesh still remain vivid among those hardworking Quakers volunteers. The ominous and anonymous look out posts, the high steel fencing topped by deadly razor wire and the loud clump click of a hundred locks on a hundred gates still haunt the prisoners, prisoner's relatives and the Quaker volunteers.

Martie Rafferty was one of those whom believed that 'the problems of Caesar were Caesar's' and should not be allowed to enter the rarefied heights of personal spiritual quest. Yet for Martie, volunteering at Long Kesh became a spiritual journey that has effected her entire life. At a Quaker meeting she heard a profound plea for help at the Quaker centre at the Maze. "I was so moved by the appeal that I volunteered," she said.

With pounding heart she approached the closed, dark and forbidding world of the HMP Maze unaware of what to expect. Today Martie still remembers the haunting faces of those coming for a visit. Queues stretched all the way to the back door especially on 'Derry Day'. The day when busload after busload of hungry relatives came from the northwest.

"Some came to us in tears, worried, angry, hurt; sometimes fragile and we shared in a lot of the personal pain," she said. Still, for every down side there was an alternative and she also remembers sharing in the laughter, friendship and hope. As a young Martie Rafferty dealing with families of

“some came to us in tears,
worried, angry, hurt; sometimes
fragile and **we shared in a lot
of the personal pain**”

prisoners, she was taught about endurance, personal loyalty and the raw courage of relatives.

Looking back over the decades she recalls her first visit inside the prison to meet a prisoner group. Her stomach in knots and head throbbing she was now coming face to face with her nightmare. How should she react? What should she say? Why was she doing this? Here in front of her was not some herd of monsters but human beings. The contrast was stark. All her apprehension and fear evaporated. She found to her amazement that she came to know, respect and more importantly value as friends, some of the individuals she met.

Martie is of the opinion that the Maze can really only be understood at a deep level by those who in some way directly shared the experience. In the early days of the Nissan huts, which then give way to the H Blocks, life inside was harsh and the draconian rules strictly adhered to by the prison regime. Martie's experience of the Maze was that of a place of enormous contradictions that deepened her own spirituality. It was a place of great pain, frustration and restriction but this was matched by the human laughter, friendship, courage and growth.

Perhaps what has become clear during the research of this article is that understanding has still to be found. Perhaps it's because Northern Ireland is still a very divided society that any comprehension of the problem of the Long Kesh experience can only be partial. And perhaps it's also the reason why so many of the Quaker volunteers have yet to unravel why they did what they did.

“A Traveller on the inside talking about **Travellers**”

Michael Mongan

M

ichael Mongan is an angry man. It's not the anger associated with tantrums and blazing rows. His is much more discriminating. It is quiet, impenitent and sombre rage of the dispossessed. The 40 something Traveller stands overlooking the waste ground that is his camp site and his home. There is rubbish slung here and there. Lying about are wrecked trailers, burnt out cars abandoned by crazy joy riders and other dumped paraphernalia.

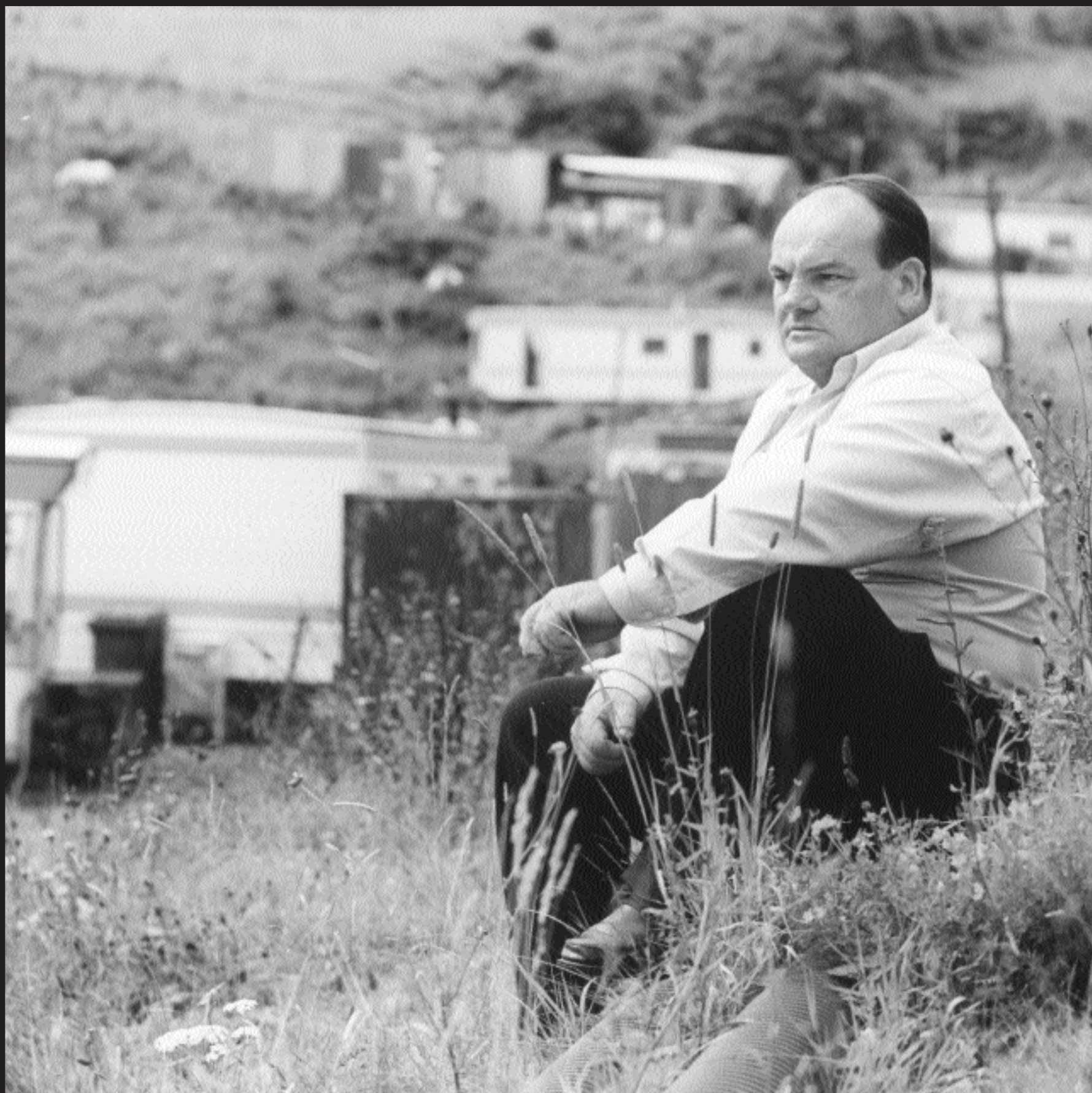
Many people, passing the site on the Monagh bypass road in West Belfast, only see gypsies, loafers and thieves. They are almost sub human beings who must be avoided at any cost. 'Haven't they only themselves to blame for their plight?', the well-off representatives of the settled population conjecture and take comfort.

Most people in West Belfast are quick to point out how Catholics and nationalists allegedly suffered at the hands of an Unionist ascendancy. Many older folk will tell how the insulting signs in English guest houses read 'No Blacks, No Irish and

No Dogs.' There is an affinity with the Black South Africans who suffered under apartheid. The Soweto Township, with its' crippling poverty and social chaos, is seen as a bastion where the seeds of freedom have grown strong. No one seems to notice the South African genre of shantytowns in Glen Road and on the Monagh by-pass with their large Traveller population of extended families.

“Ignorance of **Traveller
society** is overbearing”

Our own racial minority, for Travellers have had to define themselves as a racial minority, are stereotyped. Any good dictionary will tell that to stereotype in a social sense is to conceive of an entire people in terms of a simplified and standardised image.



A Traveller on the inside talking about Travellers - *Michael Mongan*

Those who have never met with a Traveller and his or her family must, if they are honest, admit to stereotyping. Those who have met with Travellers through social and community work will not admit stereotyping. Nevertheless, speak to Michael Mongan, an articulate self educated man, and he will tell a different story. According to Michael the "good meaning folk with their fancy suits" inevitably adopt a patronising attitude towards our own indigenous 'third world' community. In the last decade across the north the authorities have built a half dozen Travellers halting sites, spent a cool £14 million pounds and rarely listened to the Travelling community. Where Michael lives he points out that several years ago the authorities prepared a new halting site. Workmen dug a hole and had to fill it in again. The site would have been on the side of Black Mountain and located directly under dangerous high tension electric cables.

“He tells **horror stories**
of being told to get out
of licensed premises”

Michael admits that only now have more enlightened people come to realise that the people who know best about the Travellers – and you’ve guessed – are Travellers themselves. It was the shock realisation that, after six years in a local school his son was still illiterate, that lead Michael Mongan to become involved in voluntary community work among his family and friends on the Monagh by-pass site. Until now the vast majority of Traveller children

received very little education. There is discernible anger in this mild mannered man. The authorities and the settled people have managed to keep Travellers isolated for the past 40 years. "They have dug a big pit and want to hide us in that hole," he said. He tells horror stories of being told to get out of licensed premises. He describes the 'long walk' from the bar back to the front door. The hurt and humiliation is manifest in his expression of the word 'hypocrites'. "A lot of people victimise themselves and call out for equality and then sit while we have to walk that long walk," Michael spits.

In contrast, many years ago Travellers were a vital part of the farming year, providing much needed labour and skills. That has changed with the decrease of farming population and change in farming methods. No one now requires the Travellers trades of tin smith, farm hand and horse trainer. The younger generations are caught in limbo between the old ways and traditions and an uncertain future. They are forced to make ends meet whatever way they can. Some take to the tarmac or the scrap metal trade. Some even make it to the big time, but they are the exceptions to the rule that the vast majority live in poverty. Some families live close to the absolute poverty line and suffer hunger pangs going to bed at night.

Along with the stereotyping there is also mythology. Travellers were thought of as being folk dislocated by the Great Famine of the 1840s. However Michael Mongan claims records going back to the early 1500s show that Travellers offered a valuable service to all sorts of people including the standing armies that roamed Britain and Ireland and even Continental Europe. Brian Boromher (anglicised to Brian Boru) fought and defeated an alliance of Irish and Danes at the 11th Century Battle of Clontarf. History records that his army was made up of an Irish Confederation. As well as Irish and Danish troops, Brian's army also contained a large contingent of Gaelic and non Gaelic-speaking warriors from south west Ireland. This

section of Ireland's population may have been the ancestors of the modern Travelling people. The group seemed to have had its own language and independence with its own chieftains and tribal structure. Like the northern Aboriginal people of Australia, they were the local inhabitants before the coming of the Celtic and finally Gaelic warriors and adventurers.

Some academics argue that echoes of this group can be found in the Shelta which is the anglicised version of Sheldru. According to Michael Mongan, many of the younger generations of Travellers have lost the tongue. However, in the 1930s Irish archaeologist R.A.S. MacAllister compiled a Sheldru vocabulary and grammar.

It was MacAllister who suggested that the Traveller language is not merely a few centuries old but its origins is several thousand years old and represents the last remnant of a pre Celtic language. In his book 'The Secret Languages of Ireland' he outlines five kinds of jargons in use in Ireland at one time or another. Ogham used for inscriptions in pre Christian and early Christian Ireland; Hosperic, a kind of a secret scholars' language used in the Middle Ages and based on Irish and of course Sheldru. The connections between these languages, according to MacAllister, suggests some underlying Aboriginal language spoken by the outcast and vagabond population long after Gaelic had become the language of the general population. Today, a few words of Sheldru have found their way into English. The Travellers who brought the language to English speaking parts of Ireland and England may not have moved in so called respectable circles. The language did have an effect among the lower classes and was returned to Ireland often as a slang. 'Stretch' in Sheldru means a year and so does a stretch in prison. The word 'gammon' seems to have passed into general English usage as a word for deceitful talk. Of course there is also 'game' for lame as in game leg. Both words seem to come from the Sheldru 'g'ami' meaning bad. G'ami is certainly common in rural areas of the north and may be the basis of the slang word 'jammy'. The Sheldru for bread is 'pek' and most people from before the television age will recognise the word in the phrase, "Give's a pek to eat."

To be Irish, using the simplest criterion, means being born on the island of Ireland or born to Irish parents. However, let us produce another benchmark and suggest the length of time a person and his ancestors have lived on the island. Then on that criterion Travellers have more right than most to call themselves Irish. However, Michael Mongan believes that Travellers have had to accept their physical and psychological isolation from the main Irish population. They are now defined as a racial minority in Ireland. As such they now come under the terms of the 1997 Race Relations Act. He insists he is psychologically and physically Irish but accepts that all his life he has been conscious that settled people have looked down on him as a person who is less than Irish.

“the **last remnant** of
of pre-Celtic language”

Michael Mongan firmly believes that a hallmark of the racism is the stereotyping of Travellers. Astonishingly he believes that even people with best of intentions have been guilty of this. He compares them with African missionaries of the 19th Century who went to Africa with the best intentions to 'civilise' the natives. His life experience has been shaped by distrust of the settled population. He is not untypical as most community volunteers within the settled population will tell a similar

story of how hard it is to build confidence. Michael points out that over the last Christmas period nine people were stabbed to death in Belfast. The media interest in the slaughter rarely went beyond reportage. In a society often accused of being unruffled by promiscuous violence such alleged insensitivity was not missed by Michael Mongan. He is adamant that if a Traveller was involved in any of the attacks there would be a huge cry for justice and for law and order.

He said ignorance of Traveller society is overbearing. "They see one Traveller driving a jeep and believe all Travellers have expensive jeeps. A young Traveller gets involved in a drunken brawl and without warning all Travellers are drunken street fighters." The reality is that Traveller population and society is broad and diverse. It has its class structure that mirrors bourgeois society with a few on top and the majority a brave few rungs lower down the social ladder.

The Travellers' traditional sites are mostly gone. Travellers are forced to camp on waste ground. The Monagh by-pass site was illegally set up after the Travellers were forced to leave Poleglass and the Markets at the behest of "a well to do SDLP man looking for votes," Michael claims. He remembers the 'granny protest' of women, children and dozens of babies in prams. It got nasty and dangerous. The Travellers had no choice but to move on. Then there were the petrol bombing incidents in Craigavon and other areas which almost cost the lives of Traveller women and children. Ironically there were no demonstrations lead in protest to the murder bids.

“other little boys and girls
who will not **know him as**
a gypsy child but as
Stephen **their friend**”

During the 1970s and 1980s councils employed the 'boulder policy' blocking access to camping sites. On Industrial Development Board land at Silverwood in Craigavon workmen transported in tons of earth to raise three foot embankments just to keep a few families off idle land. In the last few years thanks to the work of Traveller support groups the Councils have realised that Travellers are not going away. Many have begun to

deliver portaloos. However, as Michael Mongan points out few people across Northern Ireland in the year 2001 have outside toilets.

His own portcabin is set among two others which form his extended family. Michael is angry that settled people think they are dirty. "Most have never seen the inside of our caravans, they have only seen the squalor we are forced to live in," he adds. The dirt of the Monagh by-pass site accumulates because settled people often fly tip dirt during the night. "If we lived in some of the big estates the council would be sending around street cleaners and collect the bins. But we don't live there and are left to fend for ourselves," he said.

The stereotyping of Travellers has taken a dangerous twist just after Christmas 2000. Armed maniacs drew up along side the site and discharged a handgun. The police arrived and took away the flattened slugs. The murder bid was not reported

on the news bulletins. Most weekends the drunken gangs return and throw empty drink bottles at those portacabins and caravans close to the road, breaking their windows. Michael believes it's only a matter of time before someone is killed. His tale of terror and intimidation has uncanny parallel with racist deep South in 1950s America. He quickly points out other historically matching situations such as the European treatment of the American Indians and the Australian Aboriginal people.

As he speaks his two young children come out to play on the cold January morning. Stephen is the youngest. A gentle, shy child who plays lovingly with his pet pup. The older boy can't get his tiny quad bike to work. Michael breaks off from the interview to help the youngster. It is clear that he is a caring, patient father. It is also clear he would not have been a caring father if his father had treated him any differently. He starts up the small engine. Stephen gets on behind his brother holding tightly as the small two stroke engine 'puts puts' slowly over the brown and frozen earth. Michael resumes and the lessons of the African/American struggle for equality is not lost on him. He paraphrases assassinated Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King and pointed out that his young children are going to school. Some have even gone to pre school playgroups which is a first for the Travelling community. "Stephen will grow up with other little boys and girls who will not know him as the gypsy child but as Stephen their friend," he said.

He believes his community work is beginning to pay off. Other younger Travellers are now pushing for education, which is opening many doors. Over 90 per cent of those who went to school left again without the basic three R's. During his time as a volunteer Michael Mongan went to night school and eventually got himself a job working for the community. He believes he is the first Traveller to get a settled full-time job. "It is better to have a Traveller on the inside talking about Travellers than a settled person talking about Travellers. I can tell what life is really like because I am living here. I know what people here are talking about and thinking. What they want and don't want," he adds.

Michael is determined that the Travellers' future will be in the hands of those who achieve a decent education. He is determined to change his third world. He sees the future in those young men now receiving a second level and hopefully a third level education.

More importantly they are studying the law and the new laws forbid discrimination on religious political or racial grounds. Michael Mongan is glad to be in the front line he claims. The settled people will find out that the Travellers are not 'barbarians.' Under the New European Human Rights Laws recently adapted by the British Government settled folk and the authorities will soon get their wake up call. "It's just a matter of time before a Traveller is ordered out of some public utility and he or she will take a human rights case. The day that happens the gates will fly open and we will not be treated as Third World people anymore," he adds.

He is no romantic with ideas of the 'freeborn man of the Travelling people' made so popular in the 1970s Irish folk hit. Yes there were good times on the road but there were mostly bad, harsh and cold. "All those romantic stories about life on the road are a load of bull shit," he said. He believes it is important to keep alive the Traveller traditions and allow them the option of moving about the countryside. "But they want to be settled in one place with good accommodation to live in which everyone is entitled to, and they can make up their minds afterwards if they want to go off for a while," he said. It is that part of the Traveller tradition he wants to keep alive, "But the future is now important for the young ones. Jobs and education, that is the way forward".



Play is also learning - Austin Coll and Joyce Lardie

“ Play is also **learning** ”

Austin Coll and Joyce Lardie

Joyce Lardy and Austin Coll are employees of Northern Bank. Joyce is manager in the Larne Branch and Austin works in Belfasts' Victoria Street. Joyce and Austin also have something else in common. They have both volunteered to take part in the Northern Bank Time 2 Count programme. The programme, developed in partnership with Belfast Education and Library Board and Business in the Community has been running for over a year at the time of writing, and has already won a prestigious award for outstanding community involvement. Time 2 Count is designed to help youngsters in primary schools with numeracy skills. What makes Time 2 Count different is that it manages to incorporate play into the weekly numeracy session. It is only during the last part of the 20th century that social scientists realised that play is an important part of growing up. Until then play was pigeon holed as some sort of aberration from the main business of education.

It is now realised that play is also education by other means. Linking numeracy with play ensured that the Time 2 Count programme was a worthy winner of the Belfast Telegraph Business Award for Outstanding Community Involvement. It also gives the Northern Bank's volunteers the chance to work with eight year olds, and for a while, pass on some of their numeracy skill by playing the numbers game. The twenty strong group of Northern Bank volunteers are drawn from branches and departments in the city. The Northern Bank and its sister operation National Irish Bank in the Irish Republic have forged partnerships with national organisations.

The Northern Bank has linked up with the Volunteer Development Agency to promote volunteering in the community. The Time 2 Count programme was developed in response to Math's Year 2000. The programme is just one of the first of several schemes to support and endorse volunteering in the North. It is hoped that it will help contribute directly to improving numeracy levels. In the past the Northern Bank has long been a supporter of the local community through a range of sponsorships. The Time 2 Count programme has already had £6,000 committed to the development of the initial pilot scheme. A further commitment of a cool £25,000 per annum is planned for the next three years. So far allowing staff to take part in the programme has now reached and passed 1000 hours during the first academic year ending in June 2000.

Picking up its first ever award for its outstanding contribution to the community the Northern Bank has been greatly encouraged in its corporate social responsibility, according to the group's Chief Executive Don Price. He had a few special words for Joyce, Austin and their other 18 colleagues who give up their time and energy to helping others. "If we keep up this

momentum throughout the second half of the year we will have a result to be very proud of." But the Chief Executive also recognised those other colleagues who facilitated the volunteers absences from work. "Without this energy and dedication and commitment the programme would not have achieved so much in its first year."

“play is an **important**
part of growing up”

Belfast Education and Library Board certainly recognises the usefulness of the scheme and has given permission for an initial 20 Northern Bank volunteers to spend an hour each week helping youngsters. Eight schools were picked for the initial scheme involving 40 key stage two children. So far the Northern Bank has operated in the greater Belfast area but it hopes to extend the project countrywide soon.

In a story about Time 2 Count in the Northern Banks' in house magazine 'Cheque In' there is a picture of Austin and Joyce. The photographer managed, in the way that only good photographers can do, to capture the youthful inquisitiveness of the four girls and a little boy. One child gently strokes her hair while looking intensely at Austin Coll. The little boy is too interested in the numbers game lying on the table to be bothered joining the others. Three eight year old girls lean over with the same intensity as Joyce's image explains another number game.

For Austin Coll this is all a new experience. He is quick to explain that teaching the young boys and girls of Cliftonville Primary is enjoyable. That shouldn't come as a surprise since his mother is already a schoolteacher and the apple rarely falls far from the tree. Austin, from east Belfast, could have been a teacher but instead he decided to follow his own path. For the past three years he has worked with the Northern Bank. He believes that a path less trodden does make a difference. For a 20 year old he exhibits remarkable common sense and confidence. He is quick to give out sound advice about always keeping bank accounts in good shape. The discussion is reluctantly brought back to his volunteer activity and the same gusto is also evident. He explains how his role had lead to great friendships with the school kids. "I do this for an hour a week and I admit I now look forward to meeting the children. We have a good relationship but its not the teacher / pupil relation but more like good friends. At Christmas for example we exchanged gifts," he said by way of clarification. He waxes about the youngsters. "The kids are fantastic, we get on with them and more important they are really comfortable with us. In the short time I have been volunteering I have noticed a sharp increase in their ability to do mental arithmetic, to recognise concepts and relations,"he said. Austin thinks that the sharp rise in the school kids learning curve is because of the recognition that play is also learning. More important he thinks that the personal relationship between himself and the children has been significant.

Larne outlet manager Joyce Lardie is in no doubt that the interpersonal relationship between herself and children are very important. Joyce is no stranger to such relationships since she is a mother of two girls. Joyce is very much the professional.

She has worked in the bank for the last two decades. Well almost two decades and admits that for a brief period she did work in the Housing Executive. But her heart was always in the world of banking.

The fact of holding down a steady job for so long does play on Joyce's social conscience, she points out. She recognises that not everyone has been as fortunate as she has. She also realises that steady employment has meant a quality of life that others are denied. More importantly her two girls have enjoyed many things that other youngsters have been denied. Volunteering is one way that the busy mother and career woman has of giving something back to the community, she explains. Yes, she admits there is also an element of her mothering instinct. It is hard to marry the image of a caring mum with her function as a bank manager. But Joyce has no such problems. She is responsible for managing money that belongs to others and this, in another sense, is a form of caring. Once a week she takes a break from her busy schedule of meetings and meetings to make time for the kids of the Cliftonville Primary. Joyce admits in her candid manner that she feels she should be doing more.

When asked where her morals come from Joyce is very much a secular person. She believes that helping others is what she does best. Either as a bank manager handling personal loans or helping Belfast kids realise they have a mathematical potential, Joyce Lardie knows this is the right thing to do. "I don't think I am a do gooder nor am I some sort of Edna Birch, the sanctimonious soap character from ITV's *Emmerdale*," she insists.

Her faith in what she believes to be right defies tomes of philosophical debate on ethics. But the simplicity of her rational speaks volumes of the social nature of humankind. It is the ability to help others that defines that same nature. Ironically such an interpretation would probably amuse her. In Joyce's world, life doesn't need to be so convoluted. Again she relaxes twiddling her thumbs contentedly,

"What we are doing is no different from some people who support their favourite charity. It is well known that people in this part of the world are very generous and freely give to all sorts of needy causes without insisting on some obscure explanation. Well what I do is an extension of that activity. I try to help young children improve their numeracy skills," she said.

Like her colleague Austin Coll, Joyce is very enthusiastic about how well the youngsters in her group are improving. One of the number lessons is a form of Monopoly she explains. It involves moving counters around the board, which represents a theme park. She also helps the youngster grasp their times tables, an activity that went out of fashion and which is now coming back. Joyce is also passionate about encouraging the children to learn how to reason mathematically. For bank workers this may come as second nature, but Joyce believes that such a mental faculty - like education itself - is very easily carried.

“the **interpersonal relationship** between herself and children is **very important**”

“ A people and a nation can be judged by the way it treats its **animal population** ”

Pat Nolan

Pat Nolan is a small build of a man. He is dressed up against the cold. With his shaggy beard and weather beaten countenance he looks like Ian Anderson, the lead singer of the 1970s rock group Jethro Tull. The swirling music of Anderson and the Jethro Tull band seems to convey the noisy and rowdy god, Pan, smashed on the wine provided by fellow deity Bacchus. The appeal of ancient deities is not to the other world but this world with all its carnal and physical reality. There is no suggestion that Pat Nolan is some sort of pagan throwback. On the contrary he is very much concerned with the here and now. If he has anything in common with our pagan ancestors it is his respect for nature and for nature's other creatures. For him the god Pan, represented with his upper part of a man and the body and legs of a goat, is not some grotesque hybrid but a logical analogy of the closeness between human animals and non-human animals. Our brothers and sisters are not confined to our species but to all species to which we are aligned by evolution. In this sense we are all evolutionary comrades in the struggle of life.

“his **respect for nature** and for nature's other creatures”

Pat Nolan is daily confronted with the struggle to make ends meet at Bright Eyes Animal Sanctuary somewhere outside Ballinamallard in County Fermanagh. The name of the tidy village means the Ford of the Horsemen. One time in the distant



A people and a nation can be judged by the way it treats its animal population - *Pat Nolan*

Celtic past, men travelling north with their shaggy nags must have crossed the tributary that flows through the village on its way to the mighty Erne water system. "Head out the road to Trillick and look for the Mood Furniture sign," was Pat's prosaic, sketchy instructions. "Turn right at Moods and go up the lane and you can't miss us," he says with a one sided

“excited pooch of every
shape and size notify all
and sundry **a stranger
has arrived**”

familiarity. However it was easier than originally thought. The bright morning frost made travelling quickly potentially suicidal. The unkept hedgerow and scabby landscape gives way to a two storey house surrounded by a high fence. The unmistakable yelp, growl and bark of dogs is deafening. Excited pooch of every shape and size notify all and sundry a stranger has arrived.

Pat comes to the rescue, the dogs become more excited at the pack leader's appearance.

It is clear there is work going on around the house recently bought by him and his merry band of supporters. The new wood work of the make shift office is a herald of better times. Pat is not so sure. It's all money and raising it takes up a lot of time and energy. He is disparaging of the recent run of real time TV programmes showing animals in pristine conditions that would be applauded by most people in need of medical help. "That's all right for fancy television shows but its not the reality," he is quick to point out.

The dogs start the holler once more. A young girl in her late teens or early twenties arrives. She is the first volunteer shift of the day and will spend the next few hours washing out the recently built dog kennels with a power hose. She dresses in the standard apron and welly boots and gets on with her work .

The kennels cost a cool £25,000 to build, Pat proudly proclaims but adds the customary downer that there are still problems with the roof. Sure enough in the first slammer there is the steady drip, drip of water. The tour continues. The smell wouldn't be found in a Parisian perfume house but then cats and dogs don't use deodorants. The whiff coexists with an unbelievable cacophony that makes it really difficult to hear. The concrete walls don't allow the pandemonium to escape. There are three dogs to each kennel. They bark and jump excitedly on the iron gates. There are no condemned prisoners in this lock down, Pat quickly points out. "Unlike other organisations," he says, he refuses to put down unwanted pets.

Pat Nolan is inflexible. He is prepared to keep an animal until it dies of old age. However Pat has no intention of keeping a wanton shelter and all the animals have been carefully neutered by the local vets. The problem is, there are too many animals and not enough people to look after them. Pat is angry. He rationalises that humans should never have domesticated cats, dogs, horses and so on in the first place. Some people only want an animal if it is useful. The same people are driven by greed and profit, he believes. In a lone compound there is a Chinese Chow Chow. A beautiful creature with large almond shaped eyes, Pat has had the dog for the six years. "It was used as a breeding machine," he complains.

"Now that it is past its best it is cast onto the doggy scrap heap. That's exploitation of the worse kind," he lambastes. He explains that Chow Chow pups can fetch up to £600 each.

"Farmers are the worst offenders," he claims. The farm lobby claims that farmers are the best conservationists. He stresses this is a myth. To them animals are only things to be exploited in the Cartesian scheme of things without consideration for how they feel. "Yes", he repeats, "they feel just like humans. But what chance do animals have when even the good book doesn't give them a decent press." Pat is quick to point out. Indeed biblical scholars and archaeologist, ecologists and ethicists have recently become interested in the extent to which the biblical view of animals has influenced the relationship of modern civilisation with nature. For Pat Nolan it is too late in the day for such pundits. The damage has already been done to the animal kingdom by greedy humans, seeking increased profits. He believes the Bible has provided people with justification for exploiting animals either as factory farmed chickens or dancing bears in a circus. He argues that until recent times non-human animals were given a very low status. In the first part of Genesis, God gives humans dominion over the animals. In the Hebrew Bible this power over so called dumb creatures is moderated by a slight act of kindness which insists that oxen should be rested on the Sabbath. The Christian scriptures are devoid of a similar consideration for animals. In terms of metaphor and imagery the dog and certain birds are seen to have negative connotations. St Paul is condemned for re-interpreting the Hebrew injunction of resting oxen insisting that the command is only for the benefit of humans. St. Augustine who came to Christianity in his early 40s, argued that Jesus caused the Gadarene swine to drown in order to demonstrate that animals had no rights. Even so great a Father of the Church as St. Aquinas denied that we had any duty of charity to animals. In the medieval times it was not unusual for animals to stand trial for a variety of offences.

The father of modern philosophy, Rene Descartes went even further than his Christian antecedents and considered that animals were machines like clocks. Descartes, who was subsequently to plague humanity with his Cartesian dualism, said that animals move and emitted sounds but had no feelings. This attitude appeared to be common amongst the Europeans. But the philosophical low point of views on animals began to change back when Emanuel Kant, like Aristotle, 500 years before Christ, reasoned that what separated humanity and the kingdom of the beasts was in fact reason. There was an implied acceptance that animals feel. It was the British Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham who was the first major figure in Western ethics to suggest that animals and their interests should be considered as part of human ethical thinking. Few took him seriously in the late 18th Century. It was a classic case of an idea whose time had not come. A few decades later Darwin was the first to publish results of research that inferred that human beings far from being created in God's image were in fact descended from other primates. He

“until recent times non human animals were given **a very low status**”

was lampooned by the popular press of his day, which carried crude cartoons of Darwin with our chimpanzee cousins and other primates. Despite the cartoonists intentions they were depicting the reality more than they thought. Human beings alleged dominion over the animal kingdom was now seriously being questioned albeit on a small scale.

The debate over the moral status of animals rumbled on below the veneer of the commonplace until the 1970s when a spate of books and articles led to the debate resurfacing with a vengeance. Australian philosopher Peter Singer compared speciesism with racism, sexism and other 'isms that discriminated between human animals. Singer in one fell swoop, overturned 2000 years of negative attitudes towards non-human animals. He argued that there was no good reason for refusing to extend the basic principle of equality to other animals. Singer objected to factory farming and animal experimentation and urged that there were nutritionally adequate alternatives to eating meat. Subsequently vegetarianism was the only ethically acceptable diet. In the case of animal experimentation Singer uses an old ploy once used by Dean Swift when he satirically suggested that the children of the starving Irish should be fattened up and used as human food. This time Singer insists that humans should ask if whether the same experiment, such as forcing dogs to smoke 60 cigarettes a day, should be carried out on orphan children. He said that the young children would be at the same mental

level as adult chimpanzees. If the answer is yes, then and only then can the experimenters say they are not 'speciesist' and prejudiced against giving the interests of non-human animals a similar weight to the interests of humans. Now try experimenting on orphaned children. Pat Nolan is quick to point out that this would be child abuse of the worst sort.

“Pat Nolan doesn't give his beloved cats and dogs away to any Tom, Dick or Sheila”

Other philosophers such as Tom Regan argue that all animals, or at least mammals above a certain age, are 'subjects of life' and therefore have basic rights. Eating animals or experimenting on them is violating those rights. Such arguments have given rise to heated and emotional debates but often these break out of the academic cloisters and cause mayhem on the streets. Anarchist and animal rights groups target companies involved in animal experiments. Some more violent animal rights groups have blown up and destroyed laboratories. Pat Nolan wants no part of such behaviour.

In the 20th Century animal rights philosophy has had a unique position in that it has caused social movements. It was around the late 1970s, when the animal rights movements were inching forward, that a stray kitten was brought to Pat Nolan's door. He had been a local factory worker. He says he still remembers the animal's small face and big eyes. The helplessness of the fellow creature moved something inside Pat. That one stray stayed and was soon joined by others as Pat's reputation spread throughout Enniskillen and surrounding villages that make up the sprawl of County Fermanagh. He now has over 100 cats and dogs abandoned by their owners. This, Pat Nolan believes is animal abuse at one end of a

continuum. The other end is the ugly physical cruelty so often inflicted on dumb animals by humans who should know better. He is quick to draw a parallel between child and animals abusers. He denies that he is 'over the top.' He emphasises that when serial murders were children they began their dance of death killing animals. However he accepts that children who mistreat animals don't always turn out to be serial killers or just plain ordinary killers of any sort.

He wants all his animals rehoused in good homes. At the moment there are lots of cats and dogs, but in the past there have been donkeys and horses. It annoys him that people use Bright Eyes as a dumping ground for unwanted pets. In contrast Pat has lots of praise for a local firm of vets, "They seem to know instinctively how they should and should not deal with animals, unlike some other vets I have known."

Money problems are always lurking just below the surface. He shows a derelict caravan that was once donated. It is now converted into a cats home. "Those two are a bit wild," he says pointing to two particularly hairy feline specimens. Unlike the dogs, the cats are definitely one size depending on their age. Four perfectly white cats of the same size and presumably the same age leap onto the old couch and walk back and forward pressing against the window pane. They aren't wild but very much domesticated. Pat Nolan is clearly fond of them and utters an approving moan. The white brothers and sisters are joined by a beautiful grey tabby with large bright green eyes. The sanctuary could have been named after Tabby. Pat, this time, runs his finger along the glass pane, "He's auld fashioned," he says. The cats are for a good home if anyone wished to call at the Bright Eyes Sanctuary but adoption must go through certain preliminaries. Pat Nolan doesn't give his beloved cats and dogs away to any Tom, Dick or Sheila. He is careful to check would be pet owners and will quickly veto anyone he is suspicious of. "What is the point of getting an animal neutered, made healthy, given the necessary injections only to be sent away to a bad home?" he asks.

Pat Nolan's philosophy is simple and has parallels within human society. But he is unapologetic. "A people and a nation can be judged by the way it treats its animal population." He is determined also to lead by example and proudly proclaims he is a vegan so he does not eat a product that is made from animals and that includes dairy products. The only food that passes his lips are grain, nuts vegetables and fruit. He is dismissive of the standard arguments that if we are all animals why should we not have a place in the pecking order. He falls back on the old Aristotelian argument that what separates us from the animal kingdom is reason. In other words, Pat says, we should know better. Humans are nature aware of itself. Awareness is the key to not treating animals as if they were unfeeling and unthinking machines. Children should be taught to treat animals with respect just as they should be taught to treat fellow human beings with respect. This is Pat Nolan's doctrine of life in a few short phrases. It is this that he has devoted his life to and that's why he is a volunteer.



One man's weed is another man's wild flower - *Terry Harvey*

“ One man’s weed is
another man’s **wild**
flower ”

Terry Harvey

The Chinese have a proverb, 'Plant a tree and die.' If nothing else that proverb recognises that often the results of a herculean and heroic undertaking are not seen in one lifetime. Now try planting almost three million trees and it will be the children of today's children that will appreciate this regeneration. Former Gloucester farm boy Terry Harvey knows all about the wild side of the rustic life. He grows weeds not for living, but as a full-time pastime. He is not mad but he specifies that having a few nuts and bolts loose could be an advantage. He often puts in a ten hour day, seven days a week tending his beloved weeds in an ancient and rapidly becoming derelict glass house to the rear of Belvoir Park Hospital in South Belfast. The hospital was once an isolated fever hospital. Somehow the solitude and seclusion agrees with Terry's unusual job. "One man's weed is another's wild flower," he says in that strange composite accent which to the ear of an Englishman is clear evidence that Terry has gone native; while to a local listener there is no doubting he's from across the water.

“the weed has always
got **bad press**”

The weed has always got bad press, Terry emphasises with the passion of convert. The word derived from the Old English word 'weod,' and is defined in Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary as "valueless and useless plant." Hence we get the prejudiced definition to 'weed out' those unsavoury characters or things. Such sentiments are dismissed by Terry who is quick to point out the necessity of wild flowers and trees to the entire human race both now and in the future. "Trees in particular are essential for regulating oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere but they also do many other tasks," he said.

He asserts that trees are a big psychological and physiological benefit to people. They are necessary for checking and cloaking loud sound and noises, act as a bind for soil and even for collecting carelessly discarded litter. Of course there is also the

aesthetic value in that they can turn desolate land and industrial scapes into something much more pleasing to the beholder. Wholesale use of trees indigenous to the Northern countryside is useless unless a superstructure of the local wild flowers is also included in any project.

“trees are a big
psychological and
physiological **benefit**
to people”

Once Ireland north and south was covered with large and dense woodlands. A large forest stretched from Downpatrick in County Down west of Strangford north along the eastern side of Lough Neagh, almost to the site of modern Ballymena. Native species' including the Irish oak, birch, willow, alder, and the common ash grew with abandonment at one with nature. The woodlands and meadows were carpeted by a profusion of wild flowers and other fauna and

flora especially configured for the differentiating Northern Irish landscape. The country was by no means an Eden harping back to some prehistoric golden age with all its imagined harmony. It would have been a trying place for those early ancestors who toiled and competed with other species to dominate the landscape.

Well, humankind won and, as they say, the rest is no longer prehistory. Waves of settlers realised that our forests and woodlands were a major resource. The wood helped to build castles and keeps and other accommodation. Oak especially made the best wood for ships and boats built either by the local fishermen on the shores of Lough Neagh, the invading Vikings or pursers of the Royal Navy. The industrial revolution and the accompanying rise in population increased the need for agricultural land to supply markets both at home and abroad. The native trees further dwindled. The wild flowers stripped of their balanced environment retreated in great numbers. This decimation resulted in the harrowing statistics produced in the early 1980s that Northern Ireland had only a meagre two per cent of tree covering left. In contrast with other parts of our continent the Northern Irish landscape was the poor man of Europe.

The shock stats provoked pique and outrage among a small group of environmentalists who banded together under the title Conservation Volunteers. Lead by the legendary environmentalist John McClean, the volunteers, concerned ordinary folk from every class and creed headed for the countryside to replenish depleted tree stock and its accompanying fauna and flora. Their

efforts have caused a huge rise in the tree population and an even larger rise in public consciousness that saw the beauty in, and the need for, trees. From a miserable two per cent in the early 1980s this has risen to an astonishing six per cent. It involved a backbreaking campaign to plant a massive one million trees. Number one million is planted at the Belfast International Airport.

Then the volunteers began the Millennium tree campaign involving the wholesale planting of a further 1.6 million trees across the north. Exactly where the Millennium tree is at present, the Conservation Volunteers aren't so sure. However it won't be hard to find out and then, like the airport tree, a plaque will be put up. Terry Harvey has been one of the most enthusiastic conservationists. He is now middle aged and married to a local woman but becomes as excitable as a young boy talking about his work. Terry joined the Conservation Volunteers as an ACE worker. Such workers received wages marginally higher than the weekly Giro cheques sent from the local DHSS but the scheme allowed local community environmental or any other sort of group to afford paid workers for the first time. When his ACE year finished in the early 1990s Terry had no intention of sitting around the house watching the grass grow under his feet. He continued volunteering as a Conservation Volunteer. Seven years ago he was asked if he could grow wild flowers and other so called weeds. He said yes not realising he knew nothing about particular requirements of wild flowers. It was a matter of trial and error, study and discussion with everyone from farmers to university academics.

His knowledge grew so that now he is considered something of an expert in that particular field ... pardoning the pun! In fact he is regularly consulted by academics and is often tasked with sowing wild flowers on some of the most difficult sites that are a legacy to a thoughtless industrial past, such as old quarries. He is currently studying a limestone pit near the Dupont factory in Derry and has discovered that certain species of wild grass and other so called weeds can break down chemical composition of the inert limestone waste possibly turning the no man's land into a more fertile spot.

Terry like many in the farming community was always aware of the countryside, its plants and animals and the need to conserve. He insists he was never on the conservationist fringe which hugged trees but the remark isn't meant to be an indictment of that more eccentric if esoteric minority. There is room for everyone inside conservationism because the movement is not about nature as such but about people and about educating people to respect their environment.

His experience has taught him about the need to 'time' plants so that the offspring of various insect species don't hatch with nothing to eat. Plant flowering must be synchronised to mark the birth of insect larvae with its favourite food. "There is no

“he is considered
something of an expert
in that particular field”

point having the cuckoo plant flower in July because there will be no Orange Tip butterflies around to feed off its nectar and perpetuate both the plant and its own brood," Terry said.

Modern farming methods and the pressure from markets and supermarkets have unwittingly conspired in the destruction of many native species of insect and plants. Terry is determined to build up a gene bank to conserve the plants. Already at his base at the rear of Belvoir Park Hospital two glass houses are filled with ... weeds growing happily away. Terry's loyal team of five other volunteers potter about among the hundreds of trays of 1000s of young plants. Each tray is carefully

marked and handled as if they were extremely rare shop plants. The idea of making money from weeds is a possibility, Terry said, but he doubts he is a millionaire in the waiting. The young weeds are sold onto schools and other institutions interested in perpetuating the native plants. Terry's volunteers have produced a modest catalogue with the help of relatively cheap computer technology. It reads as a 'what's what' of the country's many wild flower species.

**“nature is smarter
than most people think”**

The plants grow from locally collected seed such is the tight relationship between the plant soil and insect life. Seeds collected in other parts of Britain or Ireland might not complement the unique conditions in north east Ireland and vice versa. There is no point in picking and mixing this or that plant. There is a choice of mixes for either woodland Spring or Summer meadow, wetland or even a coastal mix. For example woodland mix is composed of Foxgloves, greater Stitchwort Dog, violets, primroses and so on. Exactly what someone would expect to find in that environment. It is only after many years that Terry Harvey has come to finally appreciate nature's configuration of the countryside. "Nature is smarter than most people think," he keeps repeating as he shows off his weed nursery.

Then comes the question that all volunteers are asked, 'Why do you do it?' Terry thinks for a minute. "Why not?" he answers the question with a question. He believes he and the other Conservation Volunteers have helped change people's attitudes towards their environment in the last two decades. Despite the passing of time his enthusiasm is still very real, according to Terry who shoots off a list of some of the many bright young volunteers who have worked and continue to work changing the environment and the people who live in it.

Their efforts to show the benefit of trees have been recognised by the Industrial Development Board. In the past the IDB created featureless industrial parks which resembled deserts with warehouses sat here and there or concrete jungles with sharp angles that jar the perception. Now that policy has changed and existing trees are kept where possible, and new trees planted. He is currently working with top Ulster firm Shorts who now want to plant several hundred trees in the jumbo grounds surrounding the east Belfast plant.

It's not just local companies, Conservation Volunteers have also targeted the schools and find that there they get their most passionate and animated helpers and it's not just the kids who love digging around in the dirt. Conservation Volunteers encourages the mums, dads and grandparents to go to the green gym. Digging, planting and other forms of outside spade work are good exercise. No one knows better than Terry Harvey who suffers from breathing problems and believes it's the outdoor exercise that is keeping him in shipshape condition.

Again he emphasises the need for people to add quality to their town and city lives. "There is no point worrying about nature if there is not a knock on effect for people and this is what the Conservation Volunteers is about ... people," he again insists.

“ We are getting something out of this, and it is **very rewarding** helping others

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Peter Hughes, Orla Ruddy and Claire Sarsfield

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he rain drizzled in from Carlingford Lough. 'A typical Irish summer day?' The few tourists around Warrenpoint were questioning the elements. They were told it was not out of place. I was here to meet members of the VOLuntary Youth Committee (VOYCE). VOYCE was set up after a successful meeting of Millennium Volunteers in October 2000. Following a three-day residential for Millennium Volunteers from across Northern Ireland, a number of them taking part said they were interested in meeting on a regular basis. They would consider activities that may enhance the Millennium project. Within two months VOYCE was up and running with a limited budget.

In a nearby bar the roar of the GAA match hailed the Armagh teams agonising defeat to Tyrone. Peter should have been standing outside on the pavement. It was a way of recognising him without the obligatory flower in the lapel routine. But he was not there. It was no surprise considering his original hesitation. Peter had initially been suspicious. Why did he have to give an interview? I explained that he didn't have to but the story of his volunteer work would be included in a book. A book! - now the shop was not just closed but the shutters were going up. Was this undue caution that an adult was attempting to enter the often-closed world of teenagers? A sample of copy already put together was e-mailed showing there was no plans for a wholesale invasion. This was not an attempt to undermine teenage autonomy in favour of an adult dictatorship.

Nevertheless it was worth a short wait. The car was just safely parked, when a tall slim figure emerged from the gloom of the bar interior. He looked up and down Warrenpoint's main square. Intuitively it had to be the young teenager himself.



We are getting something out of this, and it is very rewarding helping others - *Peter Hughes, Orla Ruddy & Claire Sarsfield*

He seemed nervous as he led to the rear of the bar and into a meager lounge. It wasn't the most ideal of places for an interview. A short distance of just feet was a blaring television set with the steady roar of GAA fans accompanied by portable foghorns. To the rear of the lounge was a handful of supporters who were quick to join the general ruck whenever the ball went to either net. Peter introduced Claire and Orla, two young students who were studying for their 'A' levels. Claire was bubbly and very open but Orla still had that natural suspicion of grown-ups. They are part of the Millennium Volunteers programme launched two years before to promote and sustain volunteering among young people. Both explained they were working for an award, which they would receive when they had completed 200 hours of voluntary work.

The Volunteer Development Agency took on the responsibility for running the scheme throughout Northern Ireland. The Agency sees the programme as providing an important impetus to promote and develop youth volunteering. The

programme encourages organisations to provide opportunities and support to young people to take part in a volunteering scheme of their choice.

“young people are involved
in all kinds of things as
Millennium Volunteers”

There are around 22 Millennium Volunteers projects in the North with a total of 840 volunteers between them. At the time of the interview 300 young volunteers had received awards

in recognition of their 200 hours of volunteering. Young people are involved in all kinds of things as volunteers, for example, The Young Independents Group in Derry who have created a moving house project for young people leaving care, and delivered a summer programme in 2000 for young people in various stages of the care system. In Fermanagh the local Volunteer Bureau set out to target young people from rural areas within County Fermanagh, though opportunities were offered to existing volunteers as well. The programme proved particularly popular with the result that limited outreach occurred in the early stages. The volunteers have been involved in a wide range of placements and events, and two of the Millennium Volunteers have been instrumental in getting the VOYCE group established. Upper Andersonstown Community Forum, enables Millennium Volunteers to be placed in their crèche, after schools clubs, homework clubs, and a number of partner projects.

The Agency was keen to work with a small group of young people who would inform the development of Millennium Volunteers from a young person's perspective. Peter was among a team of 18 Millennium Volunteers involved in a one off residential through which young people came together to share their experiences and forward their recommendations for future developments within the programme. Following the residential, a number of the young people were keen to continue meeting on a regular basis and to consider ways to enhance the programme throughout Northern Ireland.

Before long, the group had agreed on an identity - VOYCE, and they set about planning an event to celebrate the International Year of Volunteers. Over the course of a year, the young people worked tirelessly to plan the event, recruiting new members such as Claire and Orla along the way. At the event, Peter and another member of the VOYCE group Sheila spoke confidently of their experiences as volunteers, and encouraged their peers to join in the celebration, and to accept the challenge of Millennium Volunteers.

“Orla’s comment illuminates the **very essence of volunteering**”

But why would young people want to get involved in volunteer work?

Perplexity comes over the young volunteers faces. Then one smiles while the others look even more suspicious. Peter answers that it looks good on their Curriculum Vitae. A very fair answer. These young people are clearly not from 'the trouble with kids today' variety.

Peter is helping out a lot with the St Vincent de Paul. He is the veteran of the trio and has been around the scheme a bit longer. Peter explains he works closely with other VOYCE members who befriend those with disabilities. He insists that not everyone can become involved immediately in this work and that there is a urgent need for proper vetting procedures. Peter is proud that he has managed to clear these hurdles and moved on to helping through his volunteer work.

Orla and Claire are young ladies who are recent recruits. They hope to help people less privileged than themselves. Claire collects a lottery, the proceeds of which goes toward Northern Ireland Hospice. She wants eventually to go to Romania to work in a kindergarten helping Romanian children less fortunate than herself. She explains she has been involved with the Make a Wish group helping terminally ill children to fulfil their special wishes. Claire also has her parents to thank for getting her involved in her community she explains with characteristic enthusiasm.

Orla wants to help the disabled. She believes it will give her plenty of life enhancing experience. She certainly has definite ideas about where she is going in life. Orla claims the person who has influenced her to give volunteering a chance is her mother. Orla seems to be close to her mother. Her face softens when she tells how her mother was and is a volunteer. She said, “My mother said I should get some experience so I thought I would try volunteering. We are getting something out of this, and it is very rewarding helping others,” Orla added. Coming from a group so initially hesitant to speak about themselves Orla’s comment illuminates the very essence of volunteering.



People helping people - *Jerome Dawson*

“People **helping** people”

Jerome Dawson

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According to the American writer Mark Twain a banker is a person who will lend you an umbrella when the sun is shining but he wants it back the minute it begins to rain.

Another American Joe E Lewis defined a bank as an institution where you can borrow money if you can prove you don't need it. To need money implies you don't have any. Banks aren't charitable institutions that assist the needy. That is the job of someone else, according to bankers. In this case charity and business stand in opposition. One is about making money and the other is about giving to those who need it. Political leaders of global capitalism, whether it is Labour boss Tony Blair speaking just hours after his historic second successive term or George Soros, the billionaire capitalist, want to afford everyone the opportunity and the choice to succeed. This might be a bare bones way of looking at bourgeois society. However for the unemployed, the low paid and those in developing countries there are few choices in life. For people living in harsh conditions in developing countries it is often the stark and fundamental choice between living and dying. In less drastic circumstances anyone who has ever been unemployed does not have the luxury of even choosing which washing up liquid they prefer. It's usually the cheapest yellow pack brand. Those who are in work and earning average wages don't have many choices either. Their spendable incomes after paying the house hold bills are limited.

This, often harsh, reality of modern bourgeois society has provoked numerous responses by ordinary people to overcome the contradiction between those who have access to wealth and power and those who don't. At one level bankers and their branch managers are the regular butt of jokes. Their stereotyped image is that of the frosty faced individual scanning whether an individual is a good risk or not. Whether or not they are worth a gamble or a 'flutter' in the jargon. On another level the contradiction between the altruism and the free market ideology is resolved by the introduction of Credit Unions. The Credit Union Movement is one of the big success stories of the second half of the 20th Century. They cut out the man or woman who epitomises the money grabbing rich. In the 40 years since the organisation came to Northern Ireland it has gone from a small gathering in the front room of an ordinary suburban house in Derry to plush new state of the art offices which were recently opened on Lurgan's Market Street. The Credit Union is about helping people manage their money. The operative word here is union with all its connotations that are the basis of the Trade Union movement - that is, a union of ordinary working people combining to protect themselves.

It would be unfair to say Credit Unions do not make a surplus but that surplus is drilled back into the Credit Union for the benefit of its members without faceless speculators making a profit. "It is guided by a caring ethos that is opposed to that ruthless and selfish speculation of the stock exchange," according to Jerome Dawson, a Director of the Irish League of Credit Unions. He is one of the founders of the Northern Ireland chapters of Credit Unions and is also a founder Member and Chairman of the Ballyhackamore Credit Union.

In the last three decades, Jerome, a former Hughes Tools employee has travelled 1000's of miles across the world helping others learn from his experience. He is not paid for spreading his skill and adroitness. He is a volunteer who gives his time to

"It is clear he is
enthusiastic about his
volunteer work to day
as he was then"

help others. Jerome Dawson is a modest man who lives in modest suburbia in east Belfast. His home is neat and comfortable. It is clear that it is the product of a lifetime of work. Like his home, Jerome also appears modest and somewhat bemused that anyone would want to interview him about his volunteer work. He explains he has recently come back from Gambia where a team of Credit Union volunteers were training locals in money management. He has also trained people in the former Soviet Union and in Albania. The Credit Unions are attempting to get ordinary people to help themselves. Jerome said this is not some utopian pipe dream but a reality.

The Credit Union movement came to Ireland from the United States in 1959 to the outskirts of Dublin. It had taken over a hundred years for the movement to travel to the USA from Europe where it originated as a friendly society to help struggling small farmers and peasants. Its first port of call was in Canada where its small rate of interest was in direct competition with the banks. Then it went south to the United States before crossing the Atlantic again to Dublin. A handful of individuals banded together to sink their savings into a common fund to help each other. The movement moved North where it established a branch in Derry. Not surprisingly one of the founding members was John Hume now SDLP leader, Euro MP and Westminster MP. Today there are some 530 Credit Unions across the island of Ireland that are affiliated to the Irish League. From a humble 200 members with a meagre £450,000 capital in the early 1960s the movement has grown to 2.5 million members with a cool £4,100 million.

In those early days Jerome attended a meeting in the Ballyhackamore district of like minded people who wanted to save. "If realised then what was going to happen in the next 30 years I think I might have walked away," he smiles. It is clear he is enthusiastic about his volunteer work today as he was then. "I enjoy helping others in the community," he said. He realises also he is human. "There are evenings I feel like just sitting in front of the television, but I have to go out and attend a meeting somewhere up the country." It's when the meeting starts that he takes everything in his stride.

Jerome explains that those who rule the roost are all ordinary men and women who give up their free time. Volunteers are responsible for overseeing policy and that the chapter is run correctly. He is confident that this is democracy operating. He is

quick to reject any form of 'ism' that might suggest the movement is some sort of subversive organisation. Jerome believes there is a place for everyone in the Credit Union movement whether they are socialists or capitalists they are treated the same with the same low rate of interest for loans and a dividend on their savings.

He admitted that the Troubles have effected the way some people look at the Credit Union as some sort of Catholic front. He is quick to point out that politics is not a factor in the movement, the best of interest for members is its main concern irrespective of their religion, politics, or colour. He agreed that of all the organisations where money is kept the Credit Unions, even though they have had a fair share of robberies where some volunteers and staff have been traumatised, it would seem they have not had to run the gauntlet of paramilitary stick-ups. He suggests that this is because there is a realisation that the money in the movement's coffers belongs to ordinary working people.

Jerome Dawson like so many others is unsure exactly why he is a volunteer. He thinks for a minute. "I suppose I could say that some people take up golf or fishing but my hobby is the Credit Union." No, the word hobby is not exactly what he is looking for. "People work in their church or they help organise the local football team or they are members of the Chest Heart and Stroke, I am a volunteer with the Credit Union," he answers thoughtfully. It is obvious Jerome is still thinking, like so many others, about why he does it? Why he gives up precious free time?

It is clear the Credit Union runs in his blood. He speaks about the changes that have taken place in the movement over the years. Some he is comfortable with, some he is not, but he is still proud that he is part of the movement. But in those darker moments he hints that in this age of technology; clouds could gather over the ideal. He is reluctant to speak more. From between the lines it is clear that elements enthused by the Celtic Tiger economy now think it may be time for the Credit Union to cash in on these opportunities.

With the changes in the legislation in the Republic which will allow the Credit Unions to offer more services to their members i.e. ATM Pay Path etc. He is worried that a few may drift from the original philosophy. "Bearing in mind that our slogan is NOT for PROFIT; NOT for CHARITY; BUT for SERVICE, remembering that Credit Unions are about people helping people. Each Credit Union is autonomous body run by a Board of Volunteers who must work within the law and the rules as laid down by the members at their AGM."

"There is always that danger that some may drift, but knowing Credit Union people as I do they will always come back to their ideals." The Credit Union movement is all about People helping People to manage their own financial affairs whether it is in their community or their work place. He still thinks there is a great future for Credit Unions in the country and would appeal for young people to offer their services as they have a lot to give that can be a benefit to their Credit Union and the community."

"Jerome said this is not
some utopian pipe
dream but **a reality.**"

“Through **volunteer work** an individual can develop”

David McCartney

It was five years before David McCartney was able to watch the US box office hit 'Philadelphia'. Starring Tom Hanks the film was about a Philadelphia lawyer and gay man who is living with the Aids virus. He is forced to face ignorance and prejudice from people who supposedly should have known better.

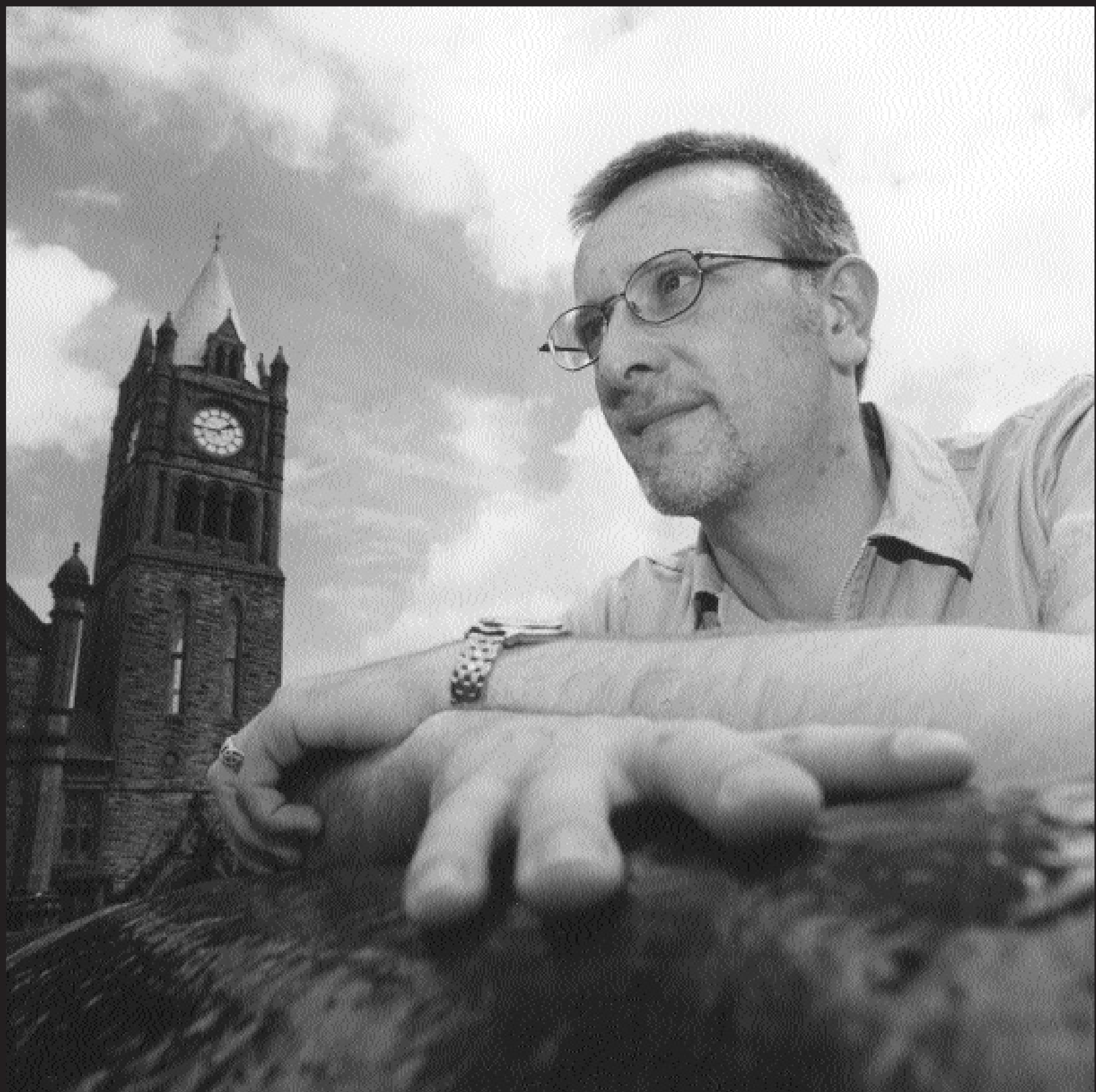
But intertwined with the film's theme is the notion of the Philadelphia lawyer. In the United States but perhaps missed on this side of the Atlantic, the phrase connotes the assumption of someone with outstanding ability. There is also the film's title name 'Philadelphia', a city that was founded by William Penn. In classical Greek the word 'philadelphia' means brotherly love. It was also the name of the ancient world city Philadelphus devoted to Attalus II, King of Pergamum by his brother Eumenes II.

For David McCartney the film's trauma was unbearable. He candidly admits that when he finally got around to watching it last year he sat in front of the television crying.

Philadelphia has all the hallmarks of a classical Greek Tragedy with its expected end. David's reaction was caused by his own experience of having cared for a close friend during his last days.

Not a lot of people know that Derry man Jim McShane was a mega star in Italy where he sang under the name of Baltimora, in the 1980s. Jim was gay and he came home from Milan to die in his home city. It was a traumatic time for

“there is **no time**
for **complacency**”



Through volunteer work an individual can develop - *David McCartney*

the young David McCartney. He had already come out and declared himself to be gay. It was a time when religious fundamentalists and the right wing were looking for a group to blame the then little understood Aids epidemic. For the moral right it was God's punishment on the gay community which the traditionalists believed was an abomination to the Bible. At around the same time fundamentalists in Northern Ireland paraded the slogan 'Save Ulster from Sodomy.' David was lucky; his parents were understanding.

Still in his 20s, David McCartney watched as Jim began suffering the physical and psychological twists and turns of failing health. Among many of his symptoms were the manic fits of depression. Jim did not want to die. Then the psychic pendulum would swing in the opposite direction. He would become deliriously happy believing that Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital had discovered a cure for the disease.

David is convinced that in the end Jim finally came to terms with his illness, his mortality and finally wanted to die. Death in these circumstances can be a blessing. David remembers the moment that life left him, "I had never seen anyone die before," he said recalling the time. "At the time it all seemed a matter of fact, it was only afterwards when my mind had time to process the information that I realised the awfulness. I remember it was the time of Benetton's advertising campaign which so shocked a lot of people. But if they could capture that moment when a person dies there would be a general hue and cry," David added.

Two Belfast men, Tom McManus and Aidan Vaughan, were becoming increasingly angry at the medical profession and the Health Department. They felt not enough was being done to prevent the spread of the modern Black Plaque. Gay men were most at risk. Tom and Aidan put together the outline of the Rainbow Project. Its flag was to be the rainbow, the universal symbol of unity. The enterprise was to make gay men aware of their health and how it had to be protected. Gay men visited Northern Ireland's main gay clubs and bars distributing condoms and the message to 'respect and protect yourself.'

David McCartney had always worked as a volunteer helping out on the Cara Friend helpline. Then he moved across to Foyle Friend, another helpline for gay people. His volunteering led him to downtown Belfast to the Rainbow offices in Church Lane. He now volunteers full-time for Rainbow and is the public face of the campaign to ensure that gay men are both physically and psychologically happy.

Aids is a particularly upsetting disease. It is linked to a fundamental and necessary human activity. According to Eric Fromm "Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence." According to Fromm the deepest need of humans is to overcome their separateness, to leave the prison of his and her loneliness. Love then is one of the deepest needs of humans. To ignore love means insanity because the panic of complete isolation can only be overcome by such a radical withdrawal from the world of the outside. Only by such can the outside world of separateness disappear. Love overcomes death according to Christians. In our culture love is equated with life and renewal.

From a loving act between two people, the death of a person with Aids sets up a horrific contrast. In reaction to the Aids epidemic governments around the world embarked on a terror campaign showing grim tombstones with the words "Aids" heavily carved on them. Newspapers and the media in general painted a picture of millions of deaths by the year 2000. The imagery was that of the hooded death figure with his sickle cutting huge swathes through the human population. To

some it looked as if the Time was Nigh. But such a frightening tactic assumes that those watching are perfectly healthy both in mind and body.

"No one thought about those struggling to cope both in and out of the closet," according to David McCartney. His experience of medical experts alerting the gay community to the danger within, was cold and clinical. This was objective science. The object at the other end of the microscope or the end of the scalpel was just that - an object. No longer are human beings part of such a process. The natural scientist seeks truth. The objectivity is above and beyond subject's basic

need for tender loving care. "The humanity is forgotten somewhere along the line," according to David. The only gay people who take a step towards protecting themselves are those with high grade self esteem. Most gay men in their 30s and 40s and older have grown up in and come through a society where they were encouraged to hide their homosexuality. Despite the 300 year old claims of the Enlightenment to reject traditional authority and embrace a humanist perspective, gay men are still victims of dogma. Heterosexual

“its flag was to be the
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marriage is the highest value. To be gay was to be a freak, a deviant, perverse. The self image in the mirror is of a shattered personality living the life of deception. Lack of self esteem resulted in high levels of depression and high rates of suicide among the gay community. Many gay men suffer nervous breakdowns as run of the mill. Many hide their sexual orientation because of homophobia among their peer group. Ironically some of the virulent gay bashers are in reality closet gays clearly in denial. Surveys suggest that a gay man is 70 times more likely to attempt suicide. This in turn can have a knock on effect by imposing suicide guilt on those who survived or are left bewildered and frightened. David McCartney has lost several gay friends who tried to square a gay circle in a hetero-world. The impact on him has been devastating. He admits he is often confused why some people who seem to be coping, and even coming to terms with being gay, then kill themselves. He admits in the words of Shakespeare, "There is no art to define the mind in the face. I think the social and personal isolation play a big part. You would never believe the terrible feeling of isolation allied to the inability to deal with the internal conflict," he said.

Psychological problems are a major difficulty for the Rainbow Project. It now has a counsellor whom like David is also a volunteer. He sees the project's task is to 'empower' the individual to take control of his life. However it was the physical health problems that were life threatening. Rainbow volunteers give out information into a range of diseases. They also provide details of how these can be avoided. David is not going down the way of the early government health adverts with their emphasis of scaring the hell out of people. Instead he tells how Rainbow has developed a series of fun cards similar to the Pokamon cards which can be collected. The idea behind such promotion is to produce a positive attitude towards health care and hopefully change gay men's behaviour.

There is little doubt that the world is becoming a more tolerant place for gay people. David notices that there is hardly a television soap that does not have its gay man, but he insists there is no time for complacency. Throughout the world religious and moralistic views can still dictate social policy. Many middle-aged gay men will tell of the midnight dream terror of going to the lowest level of hell because of their 'perversion'. The South of Ireland is one place where the dying hegemony of the Catholic Church may still have a sting in its tail and "there are many battles still to be fought for gay men to rid themselves of the second class status", according to Dave.

For example Northern Ireland still has 17 as the age of sexual consent whereas in the rest of the United Kingdom it is 16. The recent introduction of human rights legislation is another bonus in the gay campaign for equality. Such legislation makes it illegal for Government to discriminate against a person on the grounds of his or her sexual orientation.

David McCartney's volunteer work on behalf of the gay population gives him deep satisfaction, he said. He is a Director of Rainbow Project, which is run and manned by volunteers. The position is not by appointment but by election. In the best democratic tradition David has to go to the husking with his policies for advancing the cause of gay men's health. Each year he is held accountable. "None of your parliamentary shenanigans and double talk here."

He comes from a family business background which allows him the time and leisure to also volunteer as Rainbow Chairman. His job is to see that staff are managed properly and that everyone does what they agree to do. He is responsible for budgets and for planning. It gives him a sense of self worth and of satisfaction.

David also believes his volunteer work has a social side and a structure. Through volunteer work an individual can develop. He gives an example of one former Rainbow volunteer worker who is now with the United Nations, but more importantly the relationship between the individual and the group is symbiotic. He believes empowering others to cope with their lives also empowers David. It is from this empowering that David believes he can do better things.

One of the main ingredients in any volunteer work is of course money to run the project's Church Lane premises. There is some cash on hand from the state. Councils such as Derry City Council and Limavady Borough Council has always been enlightened and donated a few bob. David's face lights up when he announces that Rainbow Project is shortly to open a centre in his home city of Derry. For David McCartney this is a big story.

“there is no art to
define the **mind in**
the face”





Tel: 028 9023 6100 Fax: 028 9023 7570
e-mail: info@volunteering-ni.org
www.volunteering-ni.org

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