



WORTHY: As a result of the 1981 Hunger Strike, I understood the importance of giving column space to all relatives of those who died in the conflict

After 14 wonderful years, it's slán for now

THIS is my last article as a fortnightly columnist due to changes at the paper, and the editorial staff for providing me with an occasional column.

I was honoured to write for *The Irish News* for almost 14 years and I am delighted to be asked to continue to write occasionally for one of Ireland's most prestigious and popular papers.

I would like to thank all those in the paper and the editorial staff for providing me with the opportunity to be a columnist, for their kindness and friendly advice.

I would also like to thank my life-long friend, Danny Morrison, whose opinion I regularly sought. It was of immense help to me.

Thanks also to those who read my articles.

Writing is a lonely and self-doubting experience, especially when the article leaves 'home' from the safety of one's computer, makes its way through the editor's desk, to the reader and then the anxious wait for a response.

The buzz and relief that arrives when someone sends a positive text is hard to explain, but it is exhilarating.

I have learned many lessons over the years especially the importance of the human story or the human connection to a story.

I will remember writing about the owner of Meleady's fruit shop on the Falls Road. I told her seven-decades-long story in the stipulated 700 words. It was the first and only time, in relation to my article, that the paper received phone calls asking for copies of the paper with the article I had written in it.

That taught me to always look for a human-angle to my article – and it was not at all easy to do.

But when I did, the feedback invariably was always better.

In the course of writing I discovered that Cathal O'Byrne, of *As I Roved Out* fame, a cousin of my granny Rooney, also wrote for the paper.

The big influences on me are my

Jim GIBNEY



mum and dad, and their herculean efforts to raise 10 children during the poorest of times, in the 1950s and 60s, and how that experience shaped my outlook.

Also the people I grew up with in the Ballymacarrett/Short Strand area – those in the IRA who gave their lives in the conflict, some dying in their teens, and those who survived, serving many years in prison. And that great community who were part of the resistance to unionist misrule and British occupation.

I currently work with Seanadóir Niall O'Donoghuaile, a proud member of that community.

A small number of families who lost loved ones during the conflict mean a lot to me because of the manner with which they carry their huge burden of grief.

All the hunger strikers and their families,

six of whom I visited while they were dying in the prison hospital – Bobby, Francis, Raymond, Joe, Martin and Tom.

Out of these tragedies I understood the importance of giving space in my column to all relatives of those who died in the conflict but particularly those killed by British state forces.

And this week we saw the two faces of the legacy of the conflict – the dignity of those deeply hurt relatives whose loved ones were massacred in Ballymurphy 50 years ago and the callous and cruel face of the protectors of the killers – the British government - who on the very day the relatives were in court securing the truth, released a statement announcing plans to legally protect the killers.

The families' incredible endurance and the extraordinary detailed and meticulous legal guidance from Pdraig O Muiri and Phoneix Law firm, ensured the consummate verdict of innocence.

In the time I have been writing much has changed in Ireland – driven I believe by peace and modernisation.

The debate about this country's constitutional future is stronger than anytime I recall arising out of the growth of Sinn Féin nationally, the impact of Brexit, the role of 'Ireland's Future', the decline in support for unionist parties, the growth in support for the Alliance Party and the willingness of civic unionists, loyalists and Protestants to take part in the constitutional debate.

The agreement by the Seanad on Monday night to call for the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, including the constitutional referendum and support for a resolution to legacy and a civic assembly, is very welcome indeed.

Much has changed and I had a wonderful time reflecting those changes in this column.

Slán for now.

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ON THIS DAY

MAY 17 1921

Ghastly Weekend

THE weekend has been a bloody and lurid one in the South of Ireland. Tragedy followed tragedy with appalling rapidity and there is scarcely a town in Munster but has a terrible story. In all there were about ten deaths.

Following the ambush of a party of police at Blackpool on Saturday evening, a body of armed men entered the house of Mr Liam de Róiste, the newly-elected [Sinn Féin] at an early hour yesterday morning and fired at Rev James O'Callaghan who was lodging there. Fr O'Callaghan succumbed later in the infirmary.

A daughter of Sir Charles Barrington, DL, Glenstal Castle, Limerick, District Inspector Major Biggs, two other ladies and a military officer were motoring on Saturday evening between Glenstal and Newport in County Limerick when they were fired at by a party of armed men. Miss Barrington and the district inspector were shot dead.

Prison Raid in Captured Armoured Car

ONE of the most daring episodes in the present extraordinary struggle occurred in Dublin on Saturday.

Dublin Castle states: 'When an armoured car when at the Abbatoir, North Circular Road, Dublin, it was attacked by a party of about thirty armed civilians. One soldier was wounded and the car was captured. Two of the civilians, dressed in military officers' uniform, then entered the car and proceeded to Mountjoy Prison. The gaol was entered by the two bogus officers who proceeded to the Governor's room and demanded the release of a certain prisoner.'

This was refused by the Governor who doubted the bona fides of the officers. The civilians fled back to the armoured car and escaped.

Death of Protestant Nationalist

WE REGRET to announce the death of Mr E F Vesey Knox, KC, once a prominent member of the Irish National Party in Parliament and an eminent Ulster lawyer. The sad event took place at his residence, Shimna House, Newcastle, County Down.

The late Mr Vesey Knox was born in 1865 and educated at Oxford. Called to the Bar in 1889, he was elected MP for West Cavan in 1890 and in 1896 fought Derry City and won it for the Nationalists after one of the most arduous contests in parliamentary history. He acted as London correspondent for the Irish News while he sat in the House of Commons.

TIM Healy, KC, the former maverick Nationalist MP, who attended Knox's funeral in Newcastle, noted the security build-up of the USC in the north: 'The whole area was full of Ulster Specials. There was a meeting of Sir James Craig's in Newry and the armoured cars to protect him were at least 20.'

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