



Remembering: “Petals of Hope”

Artistic responses to the Omagh Bomb

Conversations with Carole Kane and Malachi O’Doherty

Boris Pinto

“It goes somewhere that is beyond language at a deeper level, and eventually you may have to talk about it, but at the initial stages, it gives you something to hold on to.”

We actually witnessed the bomb go off. We were on a hilly part of the golf course and we could see right across the town and just saw a huge plume of smoke and dust. I thought, because there was a petrol station in our line of sight, that the petrol station had exploded. My dad was surgeon on call at the Tyrone County Hospital that day and he immediately tried to phone the hospital to see what had happened but all the phones were jammed and he couldn't get through. So he left. Pretty soon after that there were helicopters in the sky.

And he went up to the hospital and parked at the front and it was like a normal day. But Accident and Emergency was at the back of the building and he came across a scene like from a war zone. And it was particularly difficult for him because there were people that he knew calling out his name.

There were only two surgeons in the hospital and the other surgeon was on holiday. So he worked non-stop for two and a half days. My mum actually went to the hospital and told him to come home because he was running on adrenalin.



Thankfully none of my family were caught up in it, but I remember my dad coming home and breaking down in tears and that was the first time, at the age of 14, that I had ever seen him cry.

I knew people who were affected. One of my friend's parents were killed in the bomb so I remember there being endless funerals.

My barber had a shop across the street from the bomb and I saw it on the News. When I saw that I thought, he's dead. The shop was completely destroyed. And a couple of weeks later my mum bumped into him and she literally jumped on him and said, we thought you were dead.

But he had been in Donegal that day, and that is how he survived.

You just think it is unreal because you are watching it on television. I think on the grand scheme of Northern Ireland, Omagh was a peaceful town. I don't recall that sectarianism was an issue, though it probably was. We had been sheltered.

I think because so many people were involved it was easier to normalise it. There was definitely a lot of solidarity. In those kind of situations you just have to find a way of going on.

Structurally the town came out of it as a better place, with the high street developed.

As for *Petals of Hope*, well when you are young any opportunity to get out of school you just grab with both hands. And so there was this project and you maybe didn't know what it was about. The nice thing was that it brought together people who wouldn't normally socialise with you, who did different sports and didn't mix. It sounds like a clichéd thing but it was a necessary part of whatever healing goes on. It was a fantastic idea, because I am definitely someone who doesn't like waste.

Obviously flowers had come from all over the world and it was a huge response and that wasn't forgotten.

It helped build community spirit, acknowledged the support and it was a memorial to the people who died.

In my professional experience, I have come across traumatic events - say when someone kills themselves - and I literally do say, there is nothing I can say and people respond to that because sometimes there are no words.

It was a very hands on thing, you're putting your hands into things and mashing up. It was a bit of a production line and I was on mashing duty.

It goes somewhere that is beyond language at a deeper level, and eventually you may have to talk about it, but at the initial stages, it gives you something to hold on to.

Someone would come to the door and it was a friendly face, a hands on thing, and it was a bit like the *Petals of Hope*, mucking in, trying to make something of the mess that had been created.



libraries ni


irresistible learning


Omagh
DISTRICT COUNCIL

VS VICTIMS &
SURVIVORS
SERVICE

This publication has received support from the Victims Support Programme for Groups Working with Victims and Survivors, which is administered by VSS on behalf of the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Victims and Survivors Service.