



# Remembering: “Petals of Hope”

Artistic responses to the Omagh Bomb

**Conversations with Carole Kane and Malachi O’Doherty**

# Elaine Gallagher

"I'm obviously very, very thankful to still have her alive and it was tough, because as an eight year old, you do want the attention of your mum and dad..."

My sister lost her eyesight at the Omagh bomb when she was 15. I was 8 turning 9. I remember a lot about that day and about the follow up and even though I was young, I had to grow up quickly as a result of it all.

Claire was just going into town with her friends on a Saturday and you could say, was in the wrong place at the wrong time. A piece of shrapnel from the car that the bomb was in, sliced behind her eyes and she lost her sight and, for a while, her senses of smell and taste; these gradually came back.

I was supposed to be going into town and got a phone call last minute to go with my cousins to their holiday home in Mullaghmore. So off I went with them. I remember driving down the road in the car and all of a sudden, my auntie Anne who was driving the car, being very cross with us and telling us to be quiet. When we got to the caravan we were told to go outside and play and later I was told that Claire was in an accident.

About two or three weeks later, we went up to Belfast and I thought it was great getting to go shopping for the day and as soon as I walked into the room, I knew that Claire had lost her sight. She had two white patches over her eyes and I knew that our family would never be the same again.

I'm obviously very, very thankful to still have her alive and it was tough, because as an eight year old, you do want the attention of your mum and dad; obviously their number one was Claire.

As a family, we learned that it would be easier for us to get on with things and to learn to forgive. As a family, we decided that. It has made things easier. Individually we have good days and bad days and Claire has good days and bad days. She has gone on to do her degree. She was only 15 but she went back to school, did her GCSEs, her A Levels, went and did a degree in Belfast, got married, has two beautiful children which is very hard because they are so beautiful and she will never see them.



*This drawing by Oran Bowes, shows his mummy, Claire.*

# Elaine Gallagher

“Being a student in England is quite refreshing in that not a lot of people know about the troubles in Ireland.”

Being involved in the *Petals of Hope* certainly provided me with a lot of healing. I went on to study art and focused my project on textiles, hand-made papers, which is what the *Petals of Hope* project was.

I'm now doing a degree with the hope of becoming an art therapist which I definitely wouldn't have chosen to do if it hadn't been for the Omagh bomb and I then went to art therapy sessions and gained an interest in that and wanted to help other people.

Being a student in England is quite refreshing in that not a lot of people know about the troubles in Ireland. If they know what happened, not a lot of people know what happened in Omagh, especially people my age in England. They wouldn't know unless they had a relative involved or something, but I find it quite healing to talk about the Omagh bomb with people that don't know.



I find it helpful to me to be able to talk about it and I never have a problem talking about it. Yes, there are times when I get upset which is normal. That's a given. But having a boyfriend from England who doesn't have any clue about the Troubles is refreshing too because he hadn't heard of the Omagh bomb. His parents had, obviously from the news but teaching him about the Troubles has helped me deal with what happened and I think it has somewhat opened his eyes to how the world is and what goes on in other people's lives and made him realise that no matter what's going on in your life, there's always someone else with something else going on that could be worse, could be similar. We were always brought up as children to know that. Yes, what happened to Claire was horrific and horrendous but there were people that day who lost their relatives and we just have to be thankful that we still have Claire, as hard as it is every day to accept that she will never see again. We have her and we are the lucky ones really.



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