

THE GOOD NEIGHBOUR

‘Donna’



It was a typical estate where there was nothing going on apart from drug dealing, paramilitary beatings, and paramilitary shootings -they used to be regular occurrences. In the late 90s it was the early days of the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement so tensions in the estate were still very high. The police and the army land rovers would patrol the estate and young thugs had nothing better to do other than to stone them. That was just on an ordinary day before the big rioting started. Come the evening the balaclavas came on, the milk bottles were filled, walls were knocked down to provide ammunition to throw at the police. It was just “open season” and crazy. I just wanted to get home before dark, get everything set, the house locked up and stay in.

I can't for the life of me remember how exactly I found out about it. It involved our neighbours- the husband was Protestant and his wife was Catholic. Obviously Drumcree had happened and road blocks were being put up. He had got a telephone call to his place of work to say – “we know you are married to a Catholic; we don't want Catholics in this estate ; you've got until tonight to get out or we're going to come and burn you out.” He took that security risk very seriously and he literally pulled up (at his house). He had two kids and he got the kids out and his wife. He took the basic stuff and he came and knocked on my door and told me what was happening. That was it -he'd packed his stuff and was gone. I got to thinking- well if they are coming to petrol bomb their



house that's maybe their incident, but what happens if the house next door catches fire? The girl next door is partially deaf and has two young kids. You know their life is at risk and then my house is the next one and I

just thought -I'm not having my life, my neighbours' lives or their house being put at risk.

It was as simple as that. I went round to my mum and dad's house and I explained the situation. My dad gave me a fire extinguisher and I went back home. I was not going to move and I thought if anybody came anywhere near me or my neighbour's house I will be putting the fire out and that's all there is to it. I stood in the lane behind the house and yes there were people running up and down that alley way with petrol bombs and they petrol bombed the police and army as they drove past. I stood there determined that not one person would be touching that house.

Every wee noise I was kind of like right this-this is it; this is me ready to go. I stayed there for hours just going out the front, checking out the front making sure everything was fine and then going round to the back again. Then I'd check my son who was in bed to make sure he was alright. I stayed to about 4 o'clock in the morning- it was starting to get light so it was and the estate had quietened down and I kind of knew that tensions had calmed a bit.

It didn't cross my mind that I was in any danger. I was just looking out for my neighbours despite their religion, despite anything else. They were friends; they had two young kids; my child was living in my house and well if I wasn't going to do it, nobody else was willing to do it. Somebody had to do something and I was that person.

