

An Interview with T.J. English

at times hilarious melding, and clash, of cultures (only in America). This didn't really prepare me for NYC anyway, but it did give me a deep appreciation of Mexican and Mexican-American culture that has remained steadfast. And even more importantly, it reaffirmed something that had been developing in me, a sense that ethnic identity is not an inward-looking thing to be shared only among those of your same ethnicity. It is, in fact, an inheritance to be shared with others; it is a point of identification and connection with people of other cultures and ethnicities. This, to me, is the final triumph over the trauma and shame of the Famine—to be so secure and at peace with our Irish identities that it becomes a point of connection and solidarity with, and compassion for, the family of man—the human family. ■

Hunger for Justice

Diane Lefer

IT WAS JUST a year since British paratroopers shot and killed her son but when Mrs. Lavery saw a British soldier lying wounded, she went to him. She held him in her arms, offering what comfort she could as he died.

"Everyone has a story," she said when her daughter Rita found her, cardigan stained with English blood. Maybe it was the only job he could find. Maybe he didn't want to be here. Rita, vengeful then, didn't understand. "He was somebody's son," said her mother. "I only wish somebody was with my son when he died." Johnny Lavery died alone.

Stories can explain us and sustain us. Stories can nourish. But sometimes a story is too rotten to swallow in spite of which it gets crammed down your throat. Between the ninth and eleventh of August 1971, British paratroopers killed eleven Catholic civilians in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and put it out that they were legitimate targets: gunmen of the Irish Republican Army. Not one of them had that reputation. No weapons were found. No forensic trace of gunpowder or petrol bomb on the bodies.

"The British government fed the media," says Rita Lavery Bonner. "The media fed the people."

When Frank Quinn was called a gunman, the story turned the family's life upside down. They had to leave their home, his father had to leave his job. Today, forty-two years after the killings, the Laverlys and the Quinns and the other Ballymurphy Massacre Families are still fighting to get an official apology from the British government and see their loved ones' names cleared. They still hunger for justice.

When we say "Ballymurphy," we're talking about a housing estate in West Belfast, row upon row of municipal government-built housing—two- and three-bedroom homes for families that had previously

lived as many as twelve or more to a room. In Ballymurphy, the boys could have a room to themselves, the girls slept in another. Then you might make space for aging grandparents, or a married sister and her husband and baby, but still, imagine how hard and crowded conditions must have been before when a child like young Johnny Lavery could look around and say, "We live in a mansion!"

A Ballymurphy child was never seen sluggish in the house. The girls played hopscotch tossing an empty shoe-polish tin. The boys took the tin to kick it. You could tie a rope around a lamppost and swing. When there was extra soup in the house, you took it to the neighbors in case they had none. If you got to the baker's by 7:00 in the morning, you could bring home the broken buns cheap.

In the Teggart household, you could tell the day of the week by the meal:

Monday - stew

Tuesday - corned meat in a slab

Wednesday - potatoes and cabbage and bacon

Thursday - sausage, potatoes and beans

Friday - fish fresh from the fish market

Saturday - soup made with fresh chicken but take the chicken out before serving

Sunday - serve the chicken

Saturday night you had your bath. Then you had your Sunday clothes and the house smelling of shoe polish and leather in the morning and Pat Quinn is pleased to tell you he was the baby of the family who hadn't yet made his First Communion so he could eat breakfast while the others had to fast till after mass.

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Pat traces his ancestry back to the clan of legendary Irish chieftain Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, whose rebel forefathers posed a serious threat to the English invaders until his defeat in 1603. O'Neill fled to Europe in an unsuccessful attempt to gain military assistance from Catholic Spain. His—and many other Irish properties in the north

of the island—were confiscated and then granted by King James I to Protestant settlers from Scotland and England, trusted to be loyal to the Crown. England had been colonizing parts of the north for years, but this was large-scale dispossession. The native Irish were consigned to inferior legal and social status—"second class citizens in our own land," says Pat.

The cultural divide created in the seventeenth century remains an unhealed wound. When Ireland, after years of guerrilla warfare, won independence in 1922, the six northern counties—predominantly Protestant at the time—chose to remain part of the United Kingdom.

Loyalists are still fervently committed to their British citizenship. Irish Republicans, most of whom rely on peaceful political means, still expect the Six Counties will eventually be part of a reunited Ireland. Extremists and splinter groups still resort to violence—whether to drive the colonial power out of Ireland or to preserve the status quo.

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"The Troubles" erupted in the North in the late 1960s: thirty years of bombings and shootings with ordinary people caught in the crossfire. Loyalist paramilitaries killed Catholics while the Provisional I.R.A. volunteers killed Protestants and killed police of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and killed British soldiers who did their own share of torture and killing.

Still it took the Ballymurphy community by surprise when sectarian attacks began in their own neighborhood.

"My mother was a Protestant till she turned Catholic to marry my father," says Alice Teggart Harper. "We got on with all the family on my mother's side."

"My best friend was a Protestant," says Rita. "Her family all came to Johnny's wake. They knew he wasn't a gunman."

When Protestant mobs burned Catholics out of their homes on the Falls Road and families had to seek refuge, thirteen-year-old Rita thought it a summertime adventure to hurry over and offer help. When the British soldiers first arrived to keep the peace, Catholic and Protestant girls ran out together to bring them tea.

"We all did live together," says Kathleen McCarry, "but instead of trying to keep the peace, the British segregated us." The Army escorted her family out of the Springmartin area making that neighborhood exclusively Protestant. Protestants were moved to make way on the other side of the line for Catholics.

The two communities became more bitterly divided. Slowly but surely, the British peacekeepers became the oppressors.

The Troubles came to Ballymurphy on August 9 when the British government implemented a policy of Internment without Trial.

Anyone suspected of I.R.A. involvement was to be rounded up and held in preventive detention. In working-class neighborhoods like Ballymurphy, you needed only be Catholic and male to be detained. Soldiers kicked down doors, wrecked homes, took men and boys away, sometimes in chains, to be held indefinitely in prison without any charges filed.

"That night, it was like the end of the world," says Kathleen.

"Shooting and shouting, the men put out of their houses and lined up along the streets."

Some say the rioting started amid gunfire, Protestants shooting from the hill down at Ballymurphy as fathers tried to evacuate their kids. Boys were sent to Ballycastle and girls across the border to a refugee camp in Kildare. The last time Rita saw her brother Johnny alive was when he put her on that bus to safety. Outraged women banged the lids of their pots and pans, teenagers threw bricks and stones and here and there a petrol bomb. The Queen's parachute regiment was called in—battle-hardened, combat-ready. One ordinary soldier knew what was to come. When you call the paratroopers "somebody is going to get killed."

Kathleen's brother, Eddie Doherty, "wasn't one for rioting. His main concern was Marie and the children and he had sent them away to a wee place in the country." Then he made the rounds to check up on other family members. That afternoon, some time around 5:00, Eddie Doherty was shot in the back.

Noel Phillips, nineteen, was shot and wounded and later killed execution-style, two bullets, a shot behind each ear.

Joan Connelly saw Noel fall and hurried out to help him. The bullets that hit her tore off most of her face. She bled to death where she lay, crying for help. Her daughter Briège Voyle, one of eight children left motherless, can't forget what happened in the days that followed. Paratroopers passed by the Connelly home singing the *Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep* song with its merry refrain of *Where's your mamma gone?*

Joseph Corr, father of seven, was out walking. When he saw the paratroopers, he knew it best to turn around. He was shot in the back as he headed for home.

Joseph Murphy, shot and then beaten, died in the Army barracks.

John McKerr was doing maintenance inside Corpus Christi Church when he stopped to show respect for a funeral and stepped outside. He was shot and killed. McKerr had no weapon though he'd once known how to use one: serving in the British Army, losing his right hand in action during WWII.

Soldiers sealed off the area. Not even delivery trucks were allowed in. Children went hungry, so Paddy McCarthy loaded up crates of milk and bread. "Milk for the babies!" he called. No bullet killed him but Paddy fell dead of a heart attack when subjected to a mock execution.

Daniel Teggart had moved his family to Ballymurphy to escape violence in the old neighborhood. When he failed to come home that Monday night, Alice phoned the hospitals. Three times she went to the Army post asking did they have him. She found her father at last in the morgue, shot fourteen times, his face and body so brutalized and disfigured, she recognized him only by his dark, curly hair.

Waving a white handkerchief, Father Hugh Mullan went out to anoint a wounded man. They shot him down. Frank Quinn ran to help the priest and took a bullet in the back.

That night in the Quinn home they heard on the news that a priest and a young man had been killed. "Someone is going to have a sore heart tonight," Frank's mother said. But it wasn't till morning she was to learn the ache was coming to her own door.

Five months after the killings in Ballymurphy, the same parachute regiment was deployed in the city of Derry where, inspired by the U.S. civil rights movement, the Catholic population was agitating for equal access to education, employment, and the vote. The paratroopers opened fire on a peaceful march, killing thirteen civilians, wounding many more, all of it captured on film. The story went round the world and became known as "Bloody Sunday."

"If the paratroopers who killed our loved ones had been held to account," says Pat, "Bloody Sunday might never have happened."

In 2010 after the longest and costliest investigation in British history, the Saville Report cleared the Derry victims of any I.R.A. involvement and called the killings "unjustified and unjustifiable." The British government issued an official public apology.

The Ballymurphy massacre went unremarked except for the families that still live with the pain.

There are families that never again had a Christmas tree. Mothers who tried to take their own lives. Brothers and sisters who never drank before found solace and early death from drinking. It all leaves a taste in the mouth, some say sour, some bitter. There are families where a loved one's name was never again spoken at the dinner table. Too painful.

For Ballymurphy, there's been no statement of innocence, no apology. In Ballymurphy there were no cameras.

"It goes back centuries," Pat says, back to the twelfth century, in fact, "ever since British John Bull came to Ireland. The potato famine was genocide against the Irish. I have no qualms saying it. There was food in Ireland but they shipped it away." He hates the British government, but hastens to say "not the British people, though there was a time I threw bricks and every time I heard one of them was killed, I cheered." He pauses. "It doesn't eat me up as much now."

Think of I.R.A. hunger strikers starving themselves to death in the prison at Long Kesh. Centuries of emigration and dispossession and exile. Leaving for America. Burned out of the Falls Road. Forced to move. Or off to England to find work. One of Rita's brothers wanted to seek his fortune there, but their mother wanted him to bide with his parents. After Johnny was killed, she encouraged him - Go! He'd be safer in England.

It's the lies, it's the lies, it's the bloody state that's to blame. No investigation, no questioning of witnesses. Just the soldiers, backing each other's stories.

On television, the young paratroopers making a laugh of what they done.

There's a gnawing in my stomach. My stomach is tied in knots. My breath, sometimes I can't get my breath. It's all on top of me. I can't get air.

"It's not just the ones who died," says Rita. "Just at the corner here, the soldiers broke into the butcher shop and took the knives. They had my brother Terry spread-eagled on the car. They used those knives to slice off his trousers and his shirt and slice his back. He walked on broken glass."

"What they did to other people," says Alice. "To hear it made the hair on your head stand. You wouldn't think in your wildest dreams that a human being would do it to another human being."

"For thirty-six, thirty-seven, thirty-nine hours they tortured him," says Rita "and they didn't only stop there because the torture went on in his mind. He never slept right, his children and his wife have the ripple effect from the daddy kicking out and screaming at night."

Eddie Doherty's mother was the one who used to "nurse the sick and deliver the babies and wash the dead," says Kathleen. "If a child was sick in the area, they sent for my mother to come. But when Eddie was killed, she went a wee, frail, woman. She went all to pieces. She just wanted to be on her own sorrow. She got where she didn't

want anyone around her. She was just sitting by the grave, washing it, washing it, washing it."

"I'm not an angry person," Alice says, "but I still get angry. When I see the television, what they're doing in Iraq, I feel the trauma all over again. The British Army doing it again, what they do to people's loved ones. The next thing and the next thing, you never really get a chance to move away from it. It's a pain that never goes away. It's always there."

In 2011, the Attorney General of Northern Ireland agreed the Ballymurphy families should have a fresh inquest. Nothing happened. "All I want is my brother's name cleared," says Kathleen. "I would be over the moon."

The families asked to meet with British Prime Minister David Cameron. He refused.

"If he would apologize and make a statement of innocence in writing," says Rita, "I would go and bring it to my mother's grave."

What Rita never showed her mother was Johnny's autopsy report, the document that reported the full extent of his injuries and proved the official story of his death was a lie. "My heart felt sick," she says. "You go to the corner of your house and read it and you're numb and it's like a slow motion thing. Sometimes the truth hurts," she says, but she wants the whole story and she wants the world to know it even if it takes more than forty-two years.

"The Irish," says Rita. "We're stubborn."

"Centuries of resistance," says Pat. "Saoirse," he says. "That's the Irish word for freedom."

"Freedom for me," says Rita, "is freedom of speech. Freedom to go into any area. It's always in my mind what can happen. In a blink of an eye, your life can change. It's built into me now. I tell my daughter you can go there but please don't let them know who you are, what you are. Don't give them your name."

"Freedom would be having my country, my nation once again," says Pat. "And the poor and working class people to get their rights." Then

he adds, "Freedom would be not hating anybody. I would love to wake up someday and not hate."

"The humane thing, it does come back to you," says Rita. "It does come back."

"The Troubles" ended officially in 1998 with an uneasy peace agreement.

The other day on the radio there was a program remembering a notorious bombing in the Shankill Road that killed nine Protestant men, women, and children twenty years ago, followed by the reprisal murders of several Catholics. Kathleen's husband said, "Turn that off."

"No," she said and kept listening. "We have to hear each other's stories."

As for the British soldier whose blood stained Mrs. Lavery's cardigan, he had a story, too. It came out in the newspaper his name was Brian and that he was an orphan. Mrs. Lavery cut out the clipping. She carried it in her bag for the rest of her life because the only mother who could grieve him was the one who had held him in the arms that so hungered to hold her own son.

Recipe for a Broken Heart
in memory of Frank Quinn

Mix tears, grief, despair, and hopelessness.
Stir it up for 42 years.
Slowly add recriminations and lies.
Put in oven for a long time.

Serve it cold to David Cameron,
courtesy of Pat Quinn