



Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



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Dear All,

This is the first time that I have edited and led on the AfIV Supplement of the SEFF Newsletter, this has always been Ken's domain; and something he has been passionate and very capable in keeping you updated on the work of the Advocacy team. I would like to take this opportunity to commend Ken on the commitment and skills that he brought to the SEFF Advocacy team for the past 5 ½ years, Ken was a very professional, tenacious and determined advocate.

You could have asked for no one better in supporting victims in the wide variety of cases and issues that he handled during his tenure with the team. Ken will of course be missed by yourselves and ourselves alike. As a personal friend and on behalf of you all, the SEFF Advocacy Team and all SEFF Staff and I would like to wish Ken the very best and good luck in any future work, ventures or projects he will undertake; there is no doubt he will excel in whatever he decides to do. He has put a piece in this AfIV supplement and there is no doubt we will be inviting him back to make further contributions in the future.

We as a team will continue in his legacy in endeavouring to bring justice, truth and acknowledgement for innocent Victims. Continuing to lobby on wider victims issues on your behalf and of course delivering a personal individual service to those of you who require our support.

I have been working in Advocacy in SEFF for the last 3 ½ years; when I first started the emphasis was very much on achieving justice for innocent victims and this will continue to be one of our major objectives. Success in the pursuit of that justice has been limited and frustrating for us all; we look at the forthcoming trial in relation to the murders of James Eames and Alfred Johnston in 1972 (and for which John Downey has been charged and is currently on bail for), as some sign of hope; but with the passage of time the path towards justice does not get any easier.

Over the past couple of years, the aims and the work of the SEFF Advocacy team has broadened. 'Experiences recording' and 'Testimonies' are more important ever and will continue to be over coming years, as we attempt to redress the balance of the distorted narratives that is being put out by perpetrators and their supporters of unjustifiable atrocities, murders and terrorist actions on all sides.

We will assist as much as possible in you telling your story; if you do need any assistance or help please do not hesitate to contact any of our team, all their contact numbers are beside this editorial. To broaden the content in our AfIV Newsletter Supplement in future editions we would very much welcome short contributions from innocent victims/survivors to hear your reflections and opinions. Please submit material to myself - peter.murtagh.afiv@seff.org.uk

Please have a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

Take care. Pete

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FORGIVENESS

This will be my last musings for the AfIV supplement in the SEFF newsletter as an employee. I was considering what to write when I read this morning's Belfast News Letter. (Fri 27th November 2020)

Philip Bradfield had penned an article with the Rev Denise Acheson, the daughter of Norman Donaldson who was murdered in Derrygonnelly 40 years ago (25th November). It was SEFF who helped facilitate this interview with the Donaldson family. Norman at the time of his murder was doing charitable work, collecting donations for a baby scanner for the Erne Hospital, when the Provisional IRA brutally took his life.

The Rev Acheson's thoughts were very personal and philosophical that she was prepared to share when she said, "You never lose that sense of profound loss but to a certain extent you can learn to live with it and still find joy and hope and purpose in life." Her strong Christian faith gives her that strength, as she tries to balance forgiveness which is intrinsically connected to her faith and her own personal journey.

Her words resonate somewhat with what Gordon Wilson said following the Enniskillen bomb. He said he bore his daughter Marie's killers 'no ill-will' and that he would "pray for those responsible". Those words at the time were manipulated by editorials and headlines in the media, being interpreted as forgiveness; he never actually said that. It was as a friend of mine whose mother was murdered, said that it was, "... scary to consider that so many people could not tell the difference between hating and not forgiving."

I can concur with this view, the thought that if we do not forgive then our lives are consumed by hatred. That is not the case, my life is not destroyed by hatred, it is damaged by the murder of my brother, and I will never ever forget him and what the terrorists did. I will also never ever forget what the terrorists did to my fellow citizens in Fermanagh and further afield. That is something that will always make us better than them; we did not allow hatred to develop to such an extent that could have ended up in us taking the law into our own hands, and becoming just like them.

It also leads to the thought, does a blanket statement that I forgive, have value in mending our broken society? It possibly will help the individual and signifies how forgiveness resonates with each person in a different way; it is a personal thing and I will never criticise someone for holding their views. Another Christian friend stated to me, "Don't ask me about forgiveness - it's not relevant. I believe there is no forgiveness without repentance. If you brought some person along who said, 'We did it. We are sorry. Will you forgive us?' we might start to think about it."

That statement gets to the crux of the issue, it is 2020 and the terrorists and their political annexes continue to make demands whilst they remain steadfast in their refusal to acknowledge the wrong and illegitimacy of thirty years of murder and mayhem. Their statements are always couched to suit their narrative; they will continue to demand public inquiries and re-investigations whilst denying it to others.

It was as a journalist said to me, "... forgiveness does not mean opposing the responsibility of properly delegated authorities to hold the perpetrators to account." That is something that is largely missing, the terrorists held to account for their evil actions.

Forgiveness can never replace truth and justice, something it increasingly seems that the authorities are determined we will never get.

Ken