

Michael Donnelly – Murdered by British Army 09/08/80

My name is Annmarie Galbraith. I am a mother of 2 young children aged 12 and 7. On 09/08/1980 I was 10. I was sleeping at the bottom of my parents' bed as I did often being the youngest of 7 children and still classed as the baby. I did not hear our front door rap but my daddy did. I awakened when I felt him get out of the bed and I looked at my mummy who told me it was ok go back to sleep as it was very early in the morning. I can see my daddy's face as he came back in through the bedroom door again and it was as white as a ghost with an expression which I can only describe now as tortured. The only words he spoke to my mummy were "Michael's dead". In that instant my mummy sat up and started wailing as if she was in immense pain and was rocking back and forward. My daddy seemed frozen to the spot. I had sat up and was saying "Michael who daddy, Michael who" and he said "our Michael love, our Michael". From that point on my life was never the same. I felt the pain of losing my beloved big brother who came over to our house and took me and my other brother to new and exciting places across town where there was no trouble and no gun fire and Protestants and Catholics played together and did new things I had never experienced. I had lost Our Michael who was trying to make a difference, who helped my mummy, who worked in the handicap school and was loved by all the children, Our Michael who when my mummy didn't have a doll for my pram for Christmas went out and spent his last penny on one so that my mummy would not feel like a failure and I would not be disappointed. Our Michael who taught me how to make pickled onions with raw onions and vinegar and baked bananas.

Our Michael was 2. He was a person but not only a person but a very good person. He was training to be a social worker and was heavily involved in one of the first cross community groups in NI. He moved over to the University Area to get away from West Belfast and all that it entailed. He loved his family and regularly took me and my brother over at the weekend to show us a different way. Our Michael was a brother, a son, a nephew, a cousin but he never had the chance to be a husband, father or uncle because on 09/08/1980 a British soldier decided that he was going to kill him.

Our Michael had been out for the night with friends across town and had returned to his flat. My sister and her boyfriend called in and asked to stay as they had heard there was trouble in West Belfast and didn't want to chance crossing town. Our Michael was the oldest of 7 children and would do anything to look after us so he said yes. He said that he was going to make his way over to make sure that us younger kids and my mummy were ok. My daddy was a drinker and my brother who was 13 at the time had been caught throwing bricks at the police a week before and this worried Michael as he did not want him involved in anything like that. Michael decided to walk up Leeson Street, where we used to live and were known, instead of the Grosvenor Road as it was more likely there would be trouble on the Grosvenor Road. From witness reports he got three quarters of the way up the street. He was the only one on the street at the time. There had been unrest earlier but that had died down and people were standing in their doorways as was the custom at the time. A British Army patrol was at the top of the street around 20yds away and opened fire with plastic bullets at my big brother hitting him in the chest. He spun round with the impact and stumbled down the street and then fell. A man who knew Michael ran onto the street and put him over his shoulder and was trying to carry him

into a house to safety and the British army continue to shoot at him. A St John's Ambulance was at top of the street and after a time people managed to get Michael into the Ambulance. The ambulance was stopped twice on a 500yrd journey from Lesson Street to the RVH by the British army. One of the ambulance men had to run to Springfield road barracks which housed British soldiers and RUC men to ask for help to get my brother past this check point and into the hospital. My big brother, our Michael died.

The British army said that he was rioting. It was proven in a civil case that my parents took against the army that it was an unjust and an unlawful killing and the judge did not believe the evidence given by the soldiers.

The morning Michael was killed my parents had to identify my brother twice. Two women had come to our door to deliver the news about Michael and stayed with me and my brother until my parents identified Michael and then a couple of hours later the RUC came again and said that someone would have to identify Michael again as they were not present when it was done the first time. British army soldiers and the RUC were constantly outside our house while my big brother lay in his coffin and we and the rest of his family and friends mourned him. They made comments anytime we passed them. When we brought Michael's coffin from the house to bury him the special needs children from Fleming Fulton School made a guard of honour from our gate to the hearse and behind them was another guard of RUC men.

Life from then on had changed irrevocably. We were the ones whose brother had been shot rioting. When I told people he had not been they laughed – mud sticks! I hated the police and the British army and with good cause. My mummy and daddy changed, they seemed to rarely speak to each other. My daddy had always been a joker did not seem to find anything funny anymore and my mummy withdrew into herself and only functioned in the basic sense. She stopped eating properly and survived on bread sprinkled with sugar. She ended up in hospital with scurvy. We lost our big brother and in effect our parents on that day as they never came back to themselves. My daddy died of lung cancer and secondary brain tumours several years later and my mummy did an agonizing death from stomach cancer. I think that this was caused by the years when she couldn't eat and practically starved to death with grief. My two brothers who Michael had worried about so much began to drink and get involved in petty theft. They are now both down and out alcoholics.

The HET sent me and my sisters a letter with a pack saying that they were going to investigate Michael's death. I read it and initially didn't want to get involved but the fact is that they are going to do it with or without our involvement. I could not let that happen. The British state in the shape of the RUC and British army had already done as much harm as they were going to do to our Michael and I was not going to give them free reign to say what they wanted without me making sure it was right! I read over the documents again and became hopeful and excited about what it promised. We would have full disclosure of all the documents and they would keep us informed every step of the way. My sisters were very sceptical and were more hesitant but I felt that we had to engage as they were going to do it anyway and we had to have input. I was not prepared for what was to come.

The initial meeting with the HET investigators didn't really in my mind go smoothly. We had researched the HET and had studied Dr Patricia O'Loan's report and naturally had concerns regarding the questions that were raised. The senior investigator seemed to get quite irritated by our questions and basically said he could not answer them and was not there to discuss Dr O'Loan's findings. We explained that we were not there to discuss it either but they had to understand that we were concerned and had formed questions of our own that although may mirror Dr O'Loans report were still questions that we needed answered before we could engage. We also tried to get across the point that because Michael had been killed by the state, his name blackened and the course of our lives changed forever that we needed to be confident in the impartiality of the HET, its investigators and backroom staff. It would not be acceptable for ex army or RUC to be involved in any capacity in Michael's case. The senior investigator challenged us as to how we knew our brother was innocent which made me so angry. He stated that we would have to prepare ourselves for maybe hearing things that we did not want to. This man who had come to us, who wanted us to blindly trust him as a member of the British establishment in investigating Michael death had not even bothered to read anything about my brother. He came to meet us and in my mind insult us by asking how we knew he was innocent (quite forcefully) had not found out anything what so ever about him. My sister said that she would send the questions to him in writing as he had asked. She did so and got a very terse bordering on rude reply but no answers to our questions. I left that meeting very down. Subsequently we applied for our brother inquest papers in May which we did not receive and then found out in July that families were no longer allowed these documents. Why? These documents are public documents and have already been in the public domain. We were told the morning of our next meeting with the HET that it was the HET who had put a hold on these documents but when we went to the meeting the two investigators had a copy and were going to discuss them with us only to be told by us that apparently they had stopped us from getting access to them. The senior investigator who seemed to be bothered by us was not present and had been replaced by another investigator. We were told at that meeting that we would not be allowed to see any draft reports and could we find witnesses ourselves and try to get them to give statements. We would not be able to see any of the British army statements made at the time and we would not be able to see the inquest documents which were in a folder across the table from us. The soldiers IF THEY CHOSE TO ENGAGE would be allowed to have access to everything. They would not be questioned under caution, if they give a medical reason for not engaging this would not be checked out so basically it was up to them if they wanted to talk and if they did they could be spoken to in a place of their choosing be it their own home or as had been done in other cases in a hotel over lunch and given all documents relating to their case including their statements to refresh their memories.

My experience with the HET has left me devastated. I met with the HMIC and expressed my feeling and was happy with the report they produced but very disappointed that they were not allowed to make the recommendation to scrap the HET as one of the investigators said privately he would have done given the chance.

I had dealt with Michael's death as a child and had always seen it from a child's view point. I am now an adult and a mother and my first child is a boy. I am very over protective of my children and people say don't worry it won't happen but they don't

understand it already has. I have had to relive Michael's death all over again. I have thought of how our lives would have been different and better had he been given the chance to live. Would my brothers be the way they are now? Would my mummy have died the way she did? What would he think of my kids? Would he have married and had kids himself? I have nightmares reliving that morning over and over again. I see him in his coffin and his friends breaking down and sobbing unable to be comforted. I see my mummy's eyes devoid of feeling and emotions as she shut down to cope in the only way she could be retreating into herself. I relive events that happened at that time that would not have happened. I burst out crying in front of my children who do not understand why their mummy is so sad and crying. I suffer from depression and am on medication and have been through extensive counselling down the years and was doing really well until the HET. After those meeting I ended up back in counselling as dealing with Michael's death all over again and from the point of an adult has ripped my insides out. I could not and would not engage with the HET or any other body that has anything to do with the British establishment again. I don't think I would survive putting myself or my family through that all over again. The HET has to go completely.

In all of this it needs to be remembered that my brother Michael was a person with a future who had his basic human right to life taken away from him unjustly. He had people who loved him and still do. They also have to remember that the families they are dealing with are people with feelings who have grown up in a country torn apart by violence and have lost someone they love and every time it is looked into or investigated it is devastating for them. It opens up wounds that barely get time to heal and every time they open these wounds they make the scars go deeper. The HET not only deepened my scars but has infected the wound and I am unable to even consider working with them or anything remotely like them again.

Annamarie Galbraith