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Weekender

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Married with three children, Denis Bradley gave priestly care to trouble-torn Derry in the wake of Bloody Sunday, was a drugs and alcohol counsellor, and laterally a successful film-maker. Enough to permit most human beings to rest on their laurels, but he told Seamus McKinney he is looking for something new ...

Hungry for a challenge

I still see myself as a priest. The only one thing that fully satisfied me was the priesthood but the Church won't allow me to be a priest at the moment ...

JUST two minutes in Denis Bradley's home at Derry's Templemore Park and it becomes clear his is a unique job as he discusses arrangement for the Caens film festival by phone.

Former priest, drugs and alcohol counsellor, his latest incarnation is as producer of the first all-Irish-funded feature film.

Sunset Heights is the culmination of Denis Bradley's work over the last 10 years since setting up Northlands Productions, Northern Ireland's most successful independent film production company.

Due for release at Caens in May, *Sunset Heights* was shot in Derry and tells the story of gang warfare in the next century.

It is a thriller but carries the underlying theme of what happens after violence when greed and lawlessness replace society's nobler motivations.

Born in Buncrana, Co Donegal in 1945, a brief resume of Denis Bradley's life gives the distinct impression that he has not stopped running since that first day.

Two hours in his company leaves those who have led normal lives feeling inadequate. Denis Bradley is a driven man.

In recent weeks, his profile has been raised through his personal recollections of Bloody Sunday when, as a priest at Long Tower overlooking Derry's Bogside, he saw men shot dead for the first time in his life.

Unsurprisingly, he lists Bloody Sunday as

people they were very trusting.

That amazed me.

Describing his vocation as a priest as a privilege, he recalls his years as a curate as his first great love, the other being his wife, Mary and family.

"I loved saying Mass and I loved preaching. I was born a mouth you see," he frankly admitted.

Interviewing Denis Bradley is a fascinating and frustrating experience. His life is more interesting than most but he rambles - a point acknowledged by himself - to his great passions, politics and social change.

The first move into a life spent working for social change came in 1972 when he opened the House in the Wells, a shelter for homeless alcoholics.

"I was always aware of social issues. The first thing I actually did was an institutional thing; I set up the House in the Wells which is still going.

"Like a lot of other things in my life, it happened accidentally in that I became aware of a number of men who were lying out. There was a hostel in the Waterside at the time but nothing on the west bank and most of these people were from the west bank.

"I don't know where this came from but there has always been an interest in me in creating structures which are capable of letting things happen; which are broad enough and wide enough and can change enough to let things happen," he said.

He quickly realised the House in the Wells was not dealing with the core issues of alcoholism so, in true pioneering fashion, he embarked on what he believes was his greatest achievement, the Northlands' Centre.

The first of its kind in Ireland, the Northlands' Centre provided counselling for alcoholics. It subsequently expanded to take in the whole drugs abuse issue and is now Northern Ireland's leading drugs rehabilitation centre.

Then bishop of Derry, Dr Edward Daly gave the young priest permission to become totally involved in Northlands.

But it was at this time, in the mid 1970s that perhaps the greatest trauma of his life



QUESTIONNAIRE

Mary Peters



MARY Peters struck gold for Northern Ireland at the 1972 Munich Olympics. She is single and lives in Dunmurry - her brother John lives in Sydney, Australia

... she spoke to Joe Kearney

1. What is your full name?

Mary Elizabeth Peters

2. Place and date of birth?

Halewood, Liverpool, July 6 1939

3. Earliest memory?

Playing with kitchen scales, weighing things

4. Where were you educated?

Kingsthorpe Road Primary School, Hunt's Cross, Ballymena Academy, Portadown College

5. Occupation?

Lecturer on Women In Sport, Retirement, Motivation, Leadership, and other subjects

6. Favourite book?

All of Maeve Binchy's

7. Favourite Author?

Maeve Binchy

8. Favourite film?

The Quiet Man

9. Favourite piece of music?

The theme from *Chariots of Fire*

10. Favourite broadcaster?

Cliff Morgan - *Sport on 4*

11. Favourite TV/radio programme?

All sport and comedy

The other was the day, shortly after Bloody Sunday, that he was called to give the Last Rites to a young British soldier who had been blown up. It was a grizzly experience in which he annointed half a body as the other half lay some yards away.

His memories of Bloody Sunday centre on the shootings and the subsequent Widgery inquiry.

He still chides himself that, with other Derry priests, he led local people into an investigation that was never going to find the truth.

"We were naive to think that any lord chief justice - in any country, I'm not just saying this about Britain - was going to point the finger at the troops of that country and say you murdered these people."

After studying at St Columb's College in Derry and spending six years studying for the priesthood in Rome, the then Fr Bradley was finally appointed to Long Tower as a curate in 1970.

An innocent abroad, he was thrown from the shelter of the seminary in Rome slap bang into the middle of one of the ugliest war zones in Europe.

"I was really hitting Derry at the flush of the troubles. I suppose the real troubles were beginning because it was the time between the demise of the Civil Rights Movement and the start of the real troubles as we know them."

The priesthood was his first great love and remains the only period of a packed professional life that ever really fulfilled him.

Indeed Denis Bradley - now married with three children - openly admits he would return to the priesthood if sanction was ever given for married priests.

"Being a priest you were in a very strong position in that you were in a very trusted position. People were very open to you, all kinds of people, and even institutions were open to you."

"If you had any ability at all to deal with

His decision came through the reality of two loves - the priesthood and the woman who was to become his wife.

Speaking openly, he described the trauma and pain of the decision.

"To some degree, not to some degree, I still see myself as a priest. The only one thing which fully satisfied me was the priesthood but the Church won't allow me to be a priest at the moment."

As a Bogside priest, he was well-known to local people who felt they were losing him.

"The big question was: Was I going to leave Derry? There was no question of me leaving Derry. I fell in love with Derry," he recalled.

He openly admits that this sense that people were losing him has driven his desire to work and change.

Throughout his life, Denis Bradley has laid personal ground rules. One was that no-one who founds an institution should stay with it indefinitely.

So, after 10 years with Northlands, he started looking around for a new challenge and Northlands Productions was born.

At the time he was serving on the BBC Council and was aware of a new ruling that 25 per cent of all programmes had to be bought in from independent groups.

In its 10-year history, Northlands Productions has scored notable success with the weekly *Witness* programmes and, perhaps its greatest success, *McGilloway's Way* with the ever-popular late Olly McGilloway.

That brings Denis Bradley to another great turning point. His swan song, *Sunset Heights*, is all but complete and he is looking for the next challenge.

"I don't know what to do. I was thinking of writing but writing doesn't come easily to me."

A life history of spectacular successes and courageous decisions ensures whatever Denis Bradley decides, it will break new ground.



● IN LOVE WITH DERRY ... since serving in the Bogside as a priest, Denis Bradley has fallen in love with Derry and has made his home there
Picture: Margaret McLaughlin

13. Favourite Irish county?
Antrim
14. Which living person do you most admire?
Nelson Mandela
15. Which historical character do you most admire?
Florence Nightingale
16. What is your favourite food?
Salmon
17. What is your favourite drink?
Gin and tonic
18. Who or what has been the greatest influence on your life?
My mother's death when I was a teenager
19. Greatest vice?
Haven't any!
20. Greatest virtue?
Honesty
21. If you could spend tomorrow with any one person who would it be and what would you do?
My mum... give her lots of hugs and spoil her
22. Who would be last on your Christmas card list?
He knows
23. What sickens you?
Rudeness and delayed flights
24. Are you a spiritual person?
I am a free spirit

It could be disaster to play the bagpipes in Hawaii today

NOT everybody has a sentimental attachment to St Valentine's day.

That was the day the Hawaiians chose to stab Captain Cook in 1779.

James Watt, who according to schoolboy legend invented steam, registered his patent for the duplicating machine on the same day the following year.

In 1974 a health freak died of carrot juice poisoning but then he had been hoovering up eight pints of the stuff every day for years, so maybe his departure wasn't surprising.

It was also the day in 1929 when six members of the Chicago Moran gang were machine-gunned by rival gangsters in the St Valentine's day massacre, an unhappy event witnessed by Tony Curtis - or was it Jack Lemon? - in *Some Like It Hot*.

I have never been fully able to suppress my own memories of one St Valentine's night in the fifties.

Nine of us - four couples and the driver - set out for a Valentine's night dance in Dungiven.

The car was John's pride and joy. It was basically an Austin but over the years so many bits had fallen off and not been



Owen Kelly

KELLY'S WORLD

replaced with approximate bits of other vehicles that it was no longer identifiable as any particular model.

He had a theory that petrol engines could be made to run on tractor fuel, and it was also - as he put it himself, using a wee sup of oil, so between the grey smoke from the tractor fuel and the stink of

burning oil, the journey was ...interesting.

That was the year of the dirndl skirt, so a couple of girls dressed for dancing would have filled the average car. Getting four such girls and their partners into this downmarket version of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang could only be achieved by putting the men in first and parking the girls on top of them. You might think this would have engendered a certain cosiness. It didn't.

John at least had a seat himself but even so he drove with his head out of the window, which was due in part to certain deficiencies in the lights.

Then there was the gear stick. It was buried in layers of dirndl skirt and therefore, for reasons of delicacy, could only be operated by the wearer. As each gear-change became necessary, John would shout "Now", she would rummage among the layers of skirt and shove the lever in the direction he called out.

Sometimes it worked. Mostly it didn't and we wheezed to a halt.

There was a hill alleged to be a mile long to be negotiated. Chitty Chitty Bang Bang refused to have anything to do with it.

We all got out and John began to reverse up the hill. We walked behind in two groups, four silent girls and four glum men.

Halfway up the hill came the first puncture. It took the four of us, directed by John, to get the wheel changed, for all the jack points were rotten and the only way we could prop the car up was on stones prised out of a nearby ditch. We had to repeat the process a couple of hundred yards further on when a second tyre burst.

John kept a supply of odd wheels in the boot as a precaution against multiple punctures and the replacement was effected in a hostile atmosphere not helped by his prediction that we would get in free because it was now after twelve.

In fact the car park was empty when we arrived, the band were loading up their instruments and we only went in so we could say we had actually completed the journey.

The caretaker was brushing the floor and he eyed us with amusement as we trudged in.

He brought the girls soft drinks, eyed our

crumpled suits with the evidence of roadside repairs plainly visible and produced a couple of extra brushes and a shovel.

"Give me a bit of a hand," he said, "You're dressed for it."

I got home about six in the morning and that was only because most of the way was downhill.

Two days later Chitty emitted its last asthmatic wheeze as John drove past the parochial house, blew out its last cloud of grey smoke and died in the road. Without benefit of clergy, of course.

MIST Report.

"Wallet, says I, I haven't needed a wallet since the ten-bob note was done away with."

BOOK CHOICES

1 *Elv*. By Nick Nielsen. Harpen Collins pb \$5.99

A highly-amusing tale set five centuries in the future, when only three books survive in England and houseflies weigh thousands of tons. ELV, not surprisingly, means Evolution Limitation Volunteers.

2 *Wasted*. By Marya Hornbacher. Flamingo hb \$12.99

A devastating account of the modern obsession with food and body image, by a 23-year-old who was bulimic at age nine, anorexic by 12 and in a mental hospital by 18 ... and then decided to fight back.

3 *Black Market*. By James Patterson. Harper Collins pb \$6.99

Thriller in which Wall Street will be destroyed by a secret militia group unless federal agent Archer Carroll and lawyer Caitlin Dillon can stop them. Stirring Stuff.

YOUR Man says...

"Do you know what a gentleman is?" Your man says to me.

"I'm sure I'm going to regret this," I said, "but for the purpose of this discussion I don't know the definition of a gentleman." "A gentleman can play the bagpipes," Your Man informed me, "but doesn't."

NORN Ironspeak, Year 7, Lesson 23.

Kris - thin slices of potato, fried, flavoured and sold in packets at inflated prices.