

The testimony of Dolours Price turns out to be priceless

I, Dolours, RTE 1



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I, Dolours uses a mixture of archive footage and dramatisations



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Like the Mafia, the IRA is structured around the family. Certainly it helps if you support the ideals of Irish nationalism, whatever they are, but the republican "family" is often literally a family.

So in I, Dolours, the extraordinary film about the life and terrible times of Dolours Price, she recalls that the kind of bedtime stories she would hear as a child, were not Red Riding Hood or any of that soft stuff. It could be about some IRA bombing campaign that went wrong, and "they hanged my mate Jimmy".

She recalled a childhood in which she was expected to tend to the needs of an aunt who was blind and had no hands, as a result of handling explosives which went off prematurely. This in itself would be enough to traumatise a person, even if she'd never been involved in the IRA bombings in London which led to her own imprisonment, and that of her sister Marian.

Dolours and Marian would eventually have the honour of being the third generation of Price women who would spend time in Armagh jail for their contributions to the cause. But she has made a much more important contribution to Ireland in general with this film, and with other testimony which was recorded with the journalist

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Ed Moloney, on condition that it not be released until after her death - she died in 2013 of a mixture of prescription drugs.

In doing this interview, she has done something that is extremely rare for anyone who has been in the IRA, at any time - she has suggested that it was all a waste. Not that it is easy for any member of the "Republican family" to tell the truth about the IRA, because apart from their understandable unwillingness to admit to crimes, there is that toxic culture of secrecy which can afflict many families, and these mafia-type outfits in particular.

But Dolours Price is different, and you feel this from the moment she appears on screen in Maurice Sweeney's film. Clearly she is deeply intelligent, with an instinctive command of language and the clarity of thought of someone who is beyond caring what others think. As for her fortitude, of that there is no doubt.

Some parts of I, Dolours consist of reconstructions of various monstrosities in which she participated as a "volunteer", but the really priceless stuff is her telling of her own IRA story - she told the Provos from the start that she didn't want to be just "rolling bandages", but still they "put me in a room with a load of rusty bullets and some steel wool and my job was to clean those bullets...this incensed me".

But she did it, for the cause. She drove some of "the disappeared", including Jean McConville, to their doom in the badlands across the Border. In prison she would go on hunger strike to demand that she be moved from a jail in Britain to one back home. The force-feeding which ensued, left her with an intractable eating disorder.

Indeed there was just one glimpse of some ordinary happiness in her life, a reconstructed scene on a beach with a man in the distance and two children - she would be married to the actor Stephen Rea, and have two sons.

All through this film, you kept wondering what a woman of such obvious intelligence and sophistication might have done with her life, if she hadn't been born into the IRA. And ultimately you are left with the fact that she has done this really important interview - she has risen above "the family" by insisting that the IRA campaign which claimed her and so many more besides, turned out to be horribly pointless.

This is the bigger truth that they can never utter, one far bigger than whether Gerry Adams was in the IRA or not.

As Dolours Price tells it, if she had known where Sinn Fein would end up, without hesitation she would have found something else to do with her life. Something far, far better.

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