

Bridging the gap: Alex Bunting, Mary Kelly and JJ Magee outside the Bridge of Hope centre in Belfast. Mary and JJ hold pictures of relatives who were killed

PICTURE STEPHEN HAMILTON/PRESSEYE



# Out of the heartache, three stories of hope and healing

'I thought, 'My legs are gone, I'm going to die'

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**Former taxi driver Alex Bunting (55) had his leg blown off in October 1991 when a booby-trap bomb under his car exploded. He lost a finger, is deaf in one ear and his other leg was damaged. The IRA said it was mistaken identity. Alex, who now lives in Bangor, is married with two sons and three grandchildren. He says:**

I was 37 when I was blown up. It was early on a Monday morning and my first fare was a woman going to work. I was driving along Sandy Row and was just going over Boyne Bridge when I saw a flash like a rainbow on the dashboard. I was told later it was the detonator. I think it must have been instinct but I hit my door and pushed the lady who was sitting beside me into the footwell. As I did that the bomb exploded.

My leg went out the door first and I went out after it. I hit the road or the wall. It was dark and raining and I remember water running into the gutter, and some-

one yelling and screaming. Everything was in slow motion. I didn't feel any pain except in my finger. I thought 'My legs are blown off and I'm going to die'.

I remember asking about my passenger, she had shrapnel wounds but survived. All I could think about was my wife and how I wouldn't see my boys growing up, Alex was 15 and Colm was 10.

But I was lucky. There was a doctor travelling behind me on his way to the City hospital and started to work on me straight away. There was an Army foot patrol nearby and they used their field dressings on me and because the hospital was close I was there in 10 to 15 minutes.

I was awake the whole time until they took me into the operating theatre. They put 37 pints of blood through me and operated on me for 12 hours. I started bleeding again and had another nine hour operation. My wife was told there was a one in a million chance that I'd survive.

I had to get plastic surgery and learn how to walk on an artificial



leg and how to use a wheelchair. I must have been in hospital for about a year. It was a long hard struggle and I couldn't have come through it without my wife and sons and family. I'm very proud of all of them.

I find it hard to get about and my 'good' leg gives me an enormous amount of trouble. I'm in and out of hospital two or three times a year. I have my ups and downs, but mostly ups. I try to keep positive.

No one was ever charged and I don't want to know who did it. It wouldn't do me or my family any good. I want to move on. I feel very privileged to be here and I'm glad I am. A lot of people didn't make it. That is why I back this process of respecting everybody. We can't go on the way things were before and I want the two communities to work together for the betterment of both.

'We'd to tell our parents our brother was dead'

**Mary Kelly's brother Michael McLarnon (22) was shot dead by a soldier in Ardoyne in October 1971. Mary confronted ex-soldier Clifford Burrage, who fired the shot, on emotive 2006 BBC NI programme Facing The Truth, hosted by Archbishop Tutu. She says:**

Michael had been out the back of the house, my father had a garage and was always tinkering at cars. I was in the house. It was about 9pm and my mum shouted for them to come in for tea. There were Army patrols around and we heard a shot being fired. My mum said not to go out but he did. He came straight back in again and said he had been shot. Mum said 'God forgive you'.

He fell forward. There was a wee hole in the front but his back was lying open. He was going in and out of consciousness. Pandemonium set in and there was screaming and shouting. He was taken to hospital and the doctors operated on him for a couple of hours and kept giving him blood.

He died at 10 to two, and me and my younger brother had to go home and tell our parents.

I was 24, one girl in a family of eight boys (two boys died young). I was like another mother to Michael, it couldn't have been any worse if it had been my own child. Heartbreaking.

It was unbelievable. I can still remember my mother, that will never leave me. I had to try and keep everything under control, that was the burden on me. We have very good neighbours, they all came round, we got great support.

The headline in the papers and on the news was that the British Army had shot an IRA gunman. I actually think that put my parents in an early grave. He was innocent.

The soldier sent a letter to my mother. His wife was expecting their first baby and he asked her for forgiveness. I had mixed feelings about meeting him. My parents wanted Michael's name cleared. The only reason I did it was because it was a chance for me to say he was an innocent man, not



an IRA man. If there is something positive you can do when you are alive, you should do it. I did it for my children too — I have two daughters and two sons. I want them to know the truth. You can't forget but I don't hate anybody.

He is a born again Christian and has made his peace with God. If you say the Our Father, if you believe as a Christian and a Catholic, then God has already forgiven him. Why does he need the likes of me to forgive him? I have to ask God to forgive me too, I'm not perfect. That is my thinking.

Projects like this are important. People on both sides of the divide have suffered, people are hurting. If you can come together and say I understand the hurt and what happened to you, that will make a difference in the future — I got involved in cross-community work to help people move on.