

Catherine Cook Peace & Reconciliation

(The video opens to Catherine Cook sitting at her desk. She gives the interviewer (Prof. Bill Flack) a paper that presumably gives her consent to be videotaped. The video then commences.)

0:25 The interviewer begins to give her the broad outline of what he is interested in asking Catherine followed by a few specific questions. He is interested in talking with her about Derry before, during, and after the Troubles and her own personal work during this time. "We'd like to know about how you've come to do the work you've done, about how you've seen your role over time, about your views of the conflict, the peace process, and more recent times, and then finally about the future for Derry. The first question is this: Which events in your past lead you personally to become involved in the work that you've done in Derry over the last few decades?"

1:25 "There was one major event that drew me to become involved in community development work." She describes a time where two bombs were planted in her neighborhood around Christmas time. The local football team was hosting a charity event at one of the local bars, so most of the community was drawn out to this. Her father trained horses and he was showing them that night when he witnessed people behaving suspiciously. He showed up at her door and he went to the back of the house (she was not home at the time). Looking back on this, she is glad about his decision because normally people would run to the front of a house when an incident occurs.

By the time he rounded a few people together, the bombs went off. The first bomb went off at the front of a house. Now when the first bomb went off, people gathered at their front doors to see what had happened. When the second bomb went off at someone's front door, a man was killed because he was standing right by it. She mentions that about 99% of her community was either Loyalist, Protestant, or both. And ironically, this man that was killed was a Catholic.

Catherine was not home when these bombs were set off, but the news spread and she had heard about it relatively quickly. Her and her husband drove home and were not let back into their house because the police were not sure that it had been damaged or not. She describes this as an event that drew the community together. A few of the local women started a community group in conjunction with the police and other agencies just to take kids to safe places. They started the group and began to collect money going from door to door. At the time, Catherine was working in a factory but was approached by a group member because Catherine could type the group's notes. And ever since she has been involved. So that was a big turning point for her into getting involved into community work.

5:30 Interviewer: "What year was the bombing?"

5:35 Catherine: "1988."

5:40 Interviewer: "And what was the estate?"

5:40 Catherine then gives a name of an estate that is too difficult to hear.

5:50 Interviewer: "When you made the choice to start in this line of work, what other choices did you have? What were your other options?"

6:00 Catherine: "Do nothing. Continue to do what I was doing, existing within the community. Maybe not being part of it. It (the conflict) opened lots of doors for me. Basically up to that point I was part of the traditional Unionists who would be in Leed. We are part of the British empire therefore we will not question the state. Whatever we get we were entitled to and you don't ask for anything more. So that's probably my thinking now.

6:35 Interviewer: "The bomb that was planted at your house, do you think that was planted specifically at your house or did the bombers just choose any place and you just happened to be the house? Someone else asks if it had anything to do with a Catholic.

6:50 Catherine: "No it was nothing to do with that at all, he (presumably the Catholic) didn't know the area." Her village was a large area and was split into three sections. "The bomb that was planted two doors away from my house was intended for a security force family who actually lived in an area that was called the Crescent. They had gotten the numbers of the doors correct, but they hadn't gotten the particular area. So the security force family the bombs were targeted for left the area after that event. That's the reason behind it.

7:40 Interviewer: "When you began in community relations work and as you continue to do that, how did your family and friends react to your taking up that line of work?"

7:50 Catherine: "Well I didn't say it as community relations work. Actually it was community development work. I was reacting to need within the community. And it was very insular at that particular time. It was more what my community needs as opposed to reaching out to any other community. So they were both bothered and hurt that I was working with the community. So when I started, I saw it as a short time thing. And when we began identifying the need within the area, I suppose it sort of took over. I was this housewife who cleaned her house and took her kids to bed and was always in the house. And that was not the right thing to do when you're from my community."

9:00 Interviewer: "Why?"

9:05 Catherine says that people would say things about her religion (her given answer is too difficult to hear.

9:10 Interviewer: "So it wasn't the education that was the problem it was where you were getting it."

9:15 Catherine: "It was the reaction to where I was going. And also a big cry in my community at the time was 'those Fenians over the time get everything'. There was a perception at that

time that the Catholic community at the time got everything from the state from the government. So the cry in the Protestant community at that time was the Catholics get everything and the Protestants get nothing. But there was no realization there that you had to get off your backside to do it yourself, nobody is going to do it for you. Community development had to happen within. Somebody turned on a spotlight and said 'we haven't got any money for community development, what are we giving to you?' There was no recognition that you had to go about applying for it and setting up committees, that just didn't come naturally."

"So I suppose my aim in those early days was to get a community facility. There were no community facilities in the area. We had two football patches that were used by everybody: boys, girls, adults, people walking dogs. That's what we had."

10:35 Interviewer: "Now when you were hearing those messages from people that you knew, what kept you going at that point?"

10:50 Catherine: "Well I'm not someone who is easily influenced by doing normal things. I felt that when I went to McGee (College), all of the examples that I was being shown were from the Nationalist and Catholic community, which made me angry." The college said that there was no real community action from the Protestant community, so they would look at all of the Catholic ones. She then brings up the tutor that she had whom she liked. "Her and I began to realize that there were two communities in Derry as well."

12:15 Interviewer: "In what ways do you think your view of yourself has changed since you began your work?"

12:25 Catherine: "Very much so. I wanted to say that this is who I am, I am x,y,z, and that's it. Now I'm not the person I was before I started. I suppose to say that we're changing with more experiences."

12:50 Interviewer: "In what ways do you think your community has changed during the last couple of decades?"

12:55 Catherine: "It has changed very much. It has changed for good and bad, there has been a lot of ups and downs." Catherine asks what type of community she's being questioned about, and the interviewer responds that he is asking her about her individual community and Protestant communities as a whole.

"Well my own community has probably gained from my involvement in community development work. I remember writing an article one time for the local papers and I called ourselves the forgotten people because we had absolutely nothing. Now we have a 1.6 million pound community center, we're partnered with another organization, we employ local people, and we have many other things. So from a community that had nothing, the Secretary of State visited us and we were one of the first groups he visited."

"So we're held up as a model of good practice for the Protestant community. But the atrophies of silence was horrendous in our community. And it has been like that from when I was a young girl growing up there. I can remember times in my life when I was used as a pawn,

and I let myself be one. But there were times in my life where I was protesting. And there was always violence between our community and our neighboring community. There was a time we had families who were living in their kitchens and their kids were sleeping on their kitchen tables in sleeping bags. People fled their houses for fear of attack from others. Both communities were feeling the same way. I tried to manage it as best as I could as a community worker within my own community.”

15:45 Catherine: “After that, we began a process of working with the other community. If there were rumors flying around that there was going to be an attack, we had a telephone network between the two communities so we could let the other community know.” She noticed that both sides or both communities felt like they were playing defense while they presumed the other was playing offense. But last year in 2004, we didn’t even have an angry word flown across phone interface. So things have moved on. But that’s not to say that it could turn like that. Because there are people on both sides of the community that can turn violence on and off and the media takes part in it. But the day to day level has improved tremendously.”

16:55 This is odd, but a quick clip of audio starts to play that was thrown on top of the tape. It goes away after a few seconds, but it is strange.

17:00 Catherine seems to have said that there was a small incident earlier that year in 2005 or the year before. But she mentions that she dealt with it. “We had one person murdered and we had 5 families threatened. But we worked through it. We got most of the threats lifted off the families. So there’s a lot of pressure put on the community workers and it’s hard because the community expects so much of you.” She then gives an example as to how there is pressure on her and how there are a lot of difficulties (the example is too hard to hear). “But I find that the majority of people recognize that we’re here for the betterment of the community.”

18:20 Interviewer: “And how did you answer those people who told you that you should have been where they were (he is referring to the example that was too hard to hear where her job wasn’t appreciated)?”

18:25 Catherine: “I said that I was trying to prevent all of you from being arrested. I am the person who is negotiating with the police. Because they were ready to come up and arrest them all. So the majority of the people will recognize that that’s what you’re doing. There are one or two that you get problems with, but you will find that anywhere. And any of the people who criticize the work that I do in the community, I would say to them that if you think you do a better job, come and do it.”

19:00 Interviewer: “I’d like to take you back to something you said a few minutes ago. You were talking about the mobile phone network. Can you tell me how that actually came about? How were the initial contacts made? How was the agreement arrived at? how did it begin?”

19:25 Catherine: “Well I worked in the peace and reconciliation group at the time. And there were three agencies. Someone from one agency (both the name and the agency are too hard to

hear) was concerned about what was going on. He contacted me and he brought PRT on board. The housing executive, who owns the majority of the properties, has a big investment along with the others. So they facilitated the meetings. I went as a community representative of my community. And those meetings and that whole process was facilitated. We met for six months before we really began to tell the truth with each other. So it took us awhile to get to that point to trust one another.”

20:55 Interviewer: “And that mobile phone network is a result of that?”

21:00 Catherine: “Yes. And actually our community can stand in the neighboring community to vote.” She mentions that received a phone call one night that there was a skirmish. So they are able to combat incidents as a cross-community effort.

21:40 Interviewer: “In what ways do you think that the other community (as in working class Catholics) in Derry has changed during the same period of time?”

21:50 Catherine: “I don’t know if I’m qualified enough to answer that, but there’s a lot of issues as well. Community development, poverty, and all of the issues that go along with living in a working class society do not have any barriers. Everybody experiences the same things. The Protestant community would not have been as well developed as the Catholic community in regards to providing services for the local communities. The Catholics would have been 20 years ahead of the Protestants. And a lot of the lessons that I have learned have been from Catholics.”

“The one thing I would say about us being so slow is that we’ve had to think about sustainability. We had to think about how to manage and continue everything when the funding has run out. But I find that a lot of the Catholic communities got money from the government when the government wasn’t even thinking about sustainability. They weren’t even thinking about a peace process or an end to this. And because of this, they have big centers with practically no sustainability. Now the local strategy partnership in Derry is looking at funding small and emerging social-economy enterprises that might be attached to some of those centers. But we’re lucky in that we had to look at sustainability. And I think a lot of the Catholic communities now have to think of how to do it.”

24:00 Interviewer: “I remember last year we were talking about a lot of the voluntary sector organizations and how they were very worried about running out of money and what they were going to do. It looks like you figured that out.”

24:35 Catherine: “I’m not saying that we’re experts or anything like that, but it’s in the back of your head. There are a lot of concerns from a lot of community workers about residencies and about areas. Rather than have a shared area, it’s more like we are a neighborhood renewal and you’re not. So it may divide areas, but I don’t know.”

25:25 Interviewer: “You told us a little bit about your experience of working with members of both communities at the same time. I wonder if you could tell us about another experience or

two of working in mixed or cross-community groups.”

25:40 Catherine: “Well I’ve worked with the peace and reconciliation group for 7 years and a lot of the work was cross-community. One of the projects that I am still involved in with this group is working on family holidays. We take families and go away for a week (the name of the place is too hard to hear). We plan that week before then and we do community relations programs during that week. But it’s about coming together as people and as families.” She then describes the place that they go. One part is for the families while the other part is for the teenagers of those families. “So that’s one piece of work that I’m really involved in and I really enjoy doing.”

27:50 The two talk about the site that she travels to with families every year. They talk about the history of the place and of a nearby castle that is located there. It is a good place to bring peace between families and others. Catherine and a student then get into a small conversation about a couple of the student’s friends that ignore their religious differences and they just be together.”

30:30 Maureen: “I remember the first time I’ve done a youth exchange with the peace and reconciliation group. I was interviewing young people to go on a trip to Germany. And I was talking with people between the ages of 18-25 who have never had a conversation with someone who was Catholic or Protestant.” The student compares this to racism between blacks and whites in the US.

31:35 Interviewer: “In your view, what has been the special place of Derry both in the context of the Troubles and the peace process that has made Derry different or unique as compared with other areas in Northern Ireland?”

32:00 Catherine: “That’s really difficult because it could be the fact that we are such a small city. A lot of Protestants don’t think they connect with this city. And I don’t understand how because if you look at the walls of the city you will think that the history is rich with Protestant culture. There’s so much that’s in our history that I don’t know how you can’t connect with this city. It’s a Nationalist city. And yet there’s a minority connection with the city, and I think that’s what helps a city.”

33:15 Interviewer: “One of the things that I’ve been impressed by is that in my experience with Derry and Belfast, Derry has always seemed to be 10 years ahead of Belfast in terms of the peace process, communities working together, and other things. What is it about Derry that’s so different from Belfast that people here have managed to get that much further in the process?”

34:10 Catherine: “I think it’s because we are a small city and we have to work with one another. And to do everything that you want to do to build a society up, you have to do it together. But we have our difficulties like everywhere. We have difficulties over our name. Some people look at Derry and think that it’s fantastic. That Derry is what a united Ireland is going to look like. But there are some people that say that if Derry looks like a united Ireland, then I don’t want it.” She brings up the controversy over the name change in Derry. Catherine then brings

up an instance where she and a friend went to a soccer match to prevent any kind of violence that may occur. There turned out to be no police there, but rather a private security force. The police were not present because they would have antagonized the Catholics, but the security force was ineffective because all of the buses were stoned. "So we've moved on, but we have a long way to go." The student asks what year this occurred, and she replied that it was this year.

36:25 Interviewer: "How do you think the 1998 Belfast Agreement has played out in Derry?"

36:35 Catherine: "It has played out to a certain extent because we have relative peace. We've had very few major incidents compared to what we had during the course of the Troubles. People are getting on with their everyday life. A lot of job losses have happened, but I don't think anybody would want to go back to the way it was. The suspension of the assembly was terrible because we have faceless politicians who don't even know what it's like to live in Northern Ireland and they're coming in to tell us to do this and that. At least whenever we had our own 108 elected members we knew who would be the best for us. I think the assembly was suspended at a time that drove communities back from each other. So I feel that there's a sense of loss in what could have been, but people are afraid to say it as it is because no one wants to go back to the bad days. And I suppose the civil society arm of the Good Friday Agreement was never really given much attention to. It was never given much responsibility." She then gives an example that the civic forum board's funding was meagre compared to other areas. There is no equality.

"And that's a big loss. We're an organization about encouraging one another to become active in public life. And the government doesn't recognize that." She mentions many commissions held by the government that do not have many women as employees. "They're not taking the gender equality strategy" She tells the interviewer that she believes it is a sexist society.

40:15 Interviewer: "How do you change that (the sexist society)?"

40:20 Catherine: "It's difficult. A lot of women talk about tokenism, but I have a problem with that. You can only change something if you're in it because it is very difficult to change things from the outside. So there are many times where I'm asked to go on the committee because I'm a Protestant woman. And that doesn't bother me because if I'm not there, whose voice are they going to hear? But Derry is the only council in Northern Ireland that has a female officer."

42:00 Interviewer: "This next question is a little complex because there are three different parts to it. The first part is: How do you think a typical person from your own community would describe the current situation in Derry? The second part is: How do you think a typical person from the other community would describe the current situation in Derry? And the third part is: How do you think that typical person from the other community would characterize the point of view of the typical person from your community?" The interviewer then repeats his questions.

43:45 Catherine describes one place, the Fountains, as a place that isn't typical of Derry. She says that if you grow up and live there, you will almost certainly be sectarian. And she is very

expressive about not living there. "A typical Protestant will not go across town after 6, unless it was a well-planned event. They wouldn't do this because they would be afraid of being singled out." Catherine elaborates that typical Protestants will not go to many events for fear of being singled out and abused. She gives many examples of places where Protestants would not generally go.

"Unemployment is the same whether you're a Protestant or a Catholic. There are very few employment opportunities in Derry. We had one of our largest employers close their doors completely last June. It has had a massive impact on families." A phone call interrupts the interview, but it starts up again shortly.

47:50 Interviewer: "So did that cover how a typical Protestant describe the current situation?"

47:55 Catherine: "Well I suppose you could say that they don't fit part of this town because they can't get parades, there's an inquiry whenever they want to walk somewhere. The shops don't equate the two communities in the city." She gives a few examples of products that are offered that only Catholics would buy. "St. Patrick's Day festivals only have the colors green, white, and orange. So you can go on and on with this. I would say that those would be the most typical remarks that you would get from a typical Protestant." She then brings up a college that is moving to a Protestant community to attract more Protestants. Catherine describes another situation where two high schools had to merge due to funding. But since many Protestants would have to travel further, they would be bullied and assaulted even more. So now even more Protestants are moving out of Derry. "So that's the typical mindset of a Protestant."

50:35 Catherine: "I really don't know about a typical Catholic. They would probably say that it's a great place to be. There are great shops, great bars, great music, and everything is accessible. A lot of them would go to the Waterside (a Protestant community) and a lot of them wouldn't. You could say the same about Protestants as well. But most people come across town on both sides."

52:10 Interviewer: "And then the third part of that question was how that typical Catholic would describe the perspective of the typical Protestant. What would the typical Catholic say if you were to ask them: How do you think a typical Protestant in Derry would describe this place? What do you think their perspective is?"

52:35 Catherine: "That's a difficult question. They would probably say the same thing I said. The young people may not come across town at night. The majority of the working class community would shop in the city. Catholics would say that Protestants are getting a whole lot of things on the Waterside (Catherine mentions a couple of shops that have just opened up there), but Catholics aren't getting anything new."

53:30 Interviewer: "So do you think that the two communities, by and large, understand the other's perspective pretty accurately?"

53:40 Catherine: "It depends. I think there's an arrogance at times when Catholics tell others

what Protestants think, but it isn't at all what Protestants think. I find that with a lot of the work that I was doing with the PRG (Peace & Reconciliation Group). We would take groups of Protestant to meet with key Republicans and key workers in the city. And they were telling us what it was like to be a Protestant living in Derry. So I felt that there was a sort-of arrogance there. And I wasn't the only person who felt that. A few of the Catholic workers with a group admitted that they don't know how Protestants feel and that it would be arrogant to assume."

54:45 The interviewer then suggests that they take a break. The tape then remains on the same frame for the last minute and a half of the video, then the tape ends.