

## Maureen Heatherington Part Two

(The tape begins with a table of what seems to be 9 women having a discussion with each other. The Maureen Heatherington Interview should be around 14:30.)

00:00 The session seems to be already well underway when the tape begins. A woman in blue woman tells a story of how other people moved into her house seemingly without her permission, but she expresses adamantly that she met good people. One of the women who appears to be conducting the session starts to speak.

1:10 Interviewer: "Do you want to talk about why you came into this group or what you have benefitted from it?"

1:15 Woman in green: "Well I have a confession to make. I have no interest in politics." She then said that she was dragged into a class for a friend. But that she has enjoyed it very much. "It was interesting to have a safe environment to talk about your fears." She then talks about her bigotry with the rest of the group.

2:45 Woman in pink stripes: "I've enjoyed this, it has been a great experience. It shows you how to and how not to do things." The group then makes a few jokes and laughs. One of the leaders of the session thanks the women.

4:15 Woman in white: Do you know what I want us to look at? The police. There's so many revelations at the moment that have been turning my opinions on their behalf. Let's look at that."

4:40 Interviewer: I have a question to ask. Sinn Fein is planning a march for Thursday and I wanted to know how you felt about that."

4:55 The woman in blue exclaims that she denies no one the right to march as long as it doesn't deprive the freedom of others. The woman in white then says that Sinn Fein is trying to turn things around and blame others so they appear in a positive light.

6:20 The group gives their permission to use the tape.

6:45 The video changes to an individual sitting woman who is about to be interviewed. She gives her permission to be videotaped.

7:00 Woman: "Basically the group you just saw is a group of Protestant women who have been working together for about 6-8 months. They meet once a week and talk for 2-2 1/2 hours about different political issues. When they first started meeting, they met in a group called Women Into Politics which allows Catholic and Protestant women from the same community to talk about political issues. This ranges from the politics of Northern Ireland to more local politics. After that program, these women asked for further training which was provided to them by the Peace and Reconciliation group over the last few months. And as you can tell, they are a very

passionate and excited group who enjoy participating in this. Their age range is from 50 to 65, they tend to be from the middle class, and they live in the more Protestant part of the city.

8:40 Woman: “The other group of Catholic women that they mentioned meeting with at the end of the interview is another group that took part in the same program. At the groups’ own request, the two groups were united and have been meeting for a while with mixed results. One of the things that we’ve been talking about is that reconciliation is painful and that is not something that is acknowledged by everyone. The women from both groups are reaching out with each other, but it is a hard process so this group expressed a little frustration at the end.” She then says that not all of the statistics stated by the women were factual.

11:40 The camera changes to a wall with a few pictures on them. The same woman as before is there and seems to start explaining what they are.

11:45 Woman: “Basically what we’re looking at are posters that were done by the Catholic and Protestant group.” This group made posters that reflected the current relationship and what they see the relationship turning into in the future.



“Basically what they were doing here was they were talking about someday they would much rather see some sort of an interchange between the two parts of the city of Derry. And a lot of the symbolism they were using here is joint symbolism such as the rainbow, the pot of gold, and the shamrock.” She then moves on to more posters that share the same sentiments as the last one.

14:30 A sitting Maureen Heatherington finally appears and her interview finally commences. One of the two interviewers asks for her permission to be taped, and she agrees to be videotaped.

14:40 Interviewer: “We just wanted to begin by asking you a little bit about the Junction and what you all do as well as the peace and reconciliation projects that you’ve worked on.”

14:55 Maureen: "I'm Maureen Heatherington and I was a community relations officer for the Derry City Council. Within that capacity I developed a community relations strategy plan for a 3-5 year period. And I realized that working with a community relations council is quite difficult. You have council that is actually elected on sectarian lines. So the issues that arise from the community relations program is that you have council with their own agendas and to do a community strategies plan is very difficult." She then mentions that she has been one of the lucky CROs (Community Relations Officer) because she has been allowed to do some things that other councils have not. 26 areas in Northern Ireland were granted sufficient funding to hold a community relations center, which is where she came on board.

16:10 Maureen: "After 11 years of working there I realized that the program was also limited because of the smaller funding package and the fact that you're always constrained when working with large organizations. We did a huge consultation on community, but this caused a large need for resource centers like the Junction (the name of the her community relations resource center) which I now manage."

"The idea is that the Junction can be a safe space for people who want to discuss or converse on sensitive issues. It is a space that will allow people to do peace building work." She mentions that this center will provide a library and a signposting center for anybody who wishes to contribute to the center. So we will have levels of practice at the international, national, and local levels." So people can come in and work with the program, but it is encouraged that they leave and develop their own program. "This center will act as a holding house for all of the different types of information out there. It is also a safe space and we will allow other groups to use it as well. It's just for providing space for different types of groups who want to do the type of work that we're engaging in: peacebuilding, conflict resolution, mediation, and negotiation skills."

18:35 Maureen: "So my role over the past 11 years has been very active in fundraising and working with young people. I've helped to set up a resource called the Seeing Sense Project." This was developed to sit young people down and help them to become informed by prejudice. She describes it as a simplistic journey and is very proud of this product. "We put this resource at the school level and we targeted kids between the ages of 12 and 15. Since one of the leaders of this was a former teacher, we have been able to get this resource into every post-primary school in Northern Ireland."

20:10 Maureen: "Another project that I've worked on for a number of years was with a lady from the South African Trust. She set up a project here with myself. That was giving young people the chance to explore other cultural traditions and then to explore their own. This is an opportunity for young people to meet people from the other community and other traditions. They were targeting young people between the ages of 16 and 25 so they can see over the wall, so to speak. So we brought a South African group called Prophets of the City." She gives another example of a dancing company that came through. These groups would show creative ways for overcoming conflict. So a committee was formed just for them which allowed them to learn about this conflict and about other things as well.

22:45 Interviewer: "So you get many different kids to come together?"

22:50 Maureen: "Yes. From different communities, from different parts of Northern Ireland. Also the border counties because of the whole border issue is very difficult. We also brought in international facilitators and we brought young people from Burundi to talk about their conflict situation. We've had Prophets of the City where most of them have been involved in gang warfare, so they were able to tell their story of their transformation. They could also talk about the different gradations of color, and young people here have never experienced that." The tape stops briefly as someone passes through.

24:10 Interviewer: "It seems a lot of your personal work has been involved with children. Is there a reason why you chose to work with children?"

24:25 Maureen: "Well I've also done a lot of work with adults. But these were projects that I identify different levels of work that I thought I needed to be doing and I wanted to be a part of committees that make things happen."

25:05 Maureen then gives a personal account from when she was happily married in the 1980's. She mentions that a large population have not been impacted by the conflict. Her husband joined the security forces, and on his first day on the job he was shot. He lost his arm, and this was a big impact on her. She assumed that the IRA only shot bad people, but now her husband was shot. And she realized that she had to do something about this rather than living in fear. So she started to do work with young people in schools. She then describes the transition for her from healing with her shot husband to helping others. "If you have an experience, if you're hurt, you can't open yourself to other possibilities until you have validated your own experience and to be heard." So she started with a poet who wanted to start up a storytelling project. It was a storytelling archive and it was comprised of anyone and everyone who wanted to contribute a story to tell. "We have to allow people to heal before they can open up to other possibilities."

30:10 Maureen: "So recent work will include a project called Towards Understanding Healing, which is actually a storytelling project. We've brought together victims of state violence and paramilitary violence, ex British soldiers, parents of killed soldiers, and parents who have been impacted by the Troubles in Britain and elsewhere. For those people who want that space to dialogue, we have created spaces for them. Not everyone wants to do it, but there are huge numbers of people out there that still want to bring closure. So the basis of this type of work is from my own personal experience of trying to work through a lot of the issues myself."

32:05 Maureen: "So that's some of the work. I've been involved in other projects such as a major sectarian program. We have 11 schools and 360 people involved. So that has been great because every school has received 5 or 6 workshops. They're now developing their own charter for good relations and anti-sectarianism. Then we're going to have a huge day to bring them all together. So many other people after doing this program say that they want to meet people from other communities." She describes that they want each other to have a positive encounter. But

there are many different projects that she is engaged in.”

33:00 Interviewer: “You’ve talked about your children before we started. Could you talk more about the impact on children (the question was very difficult to hear so it could be very different)?”

33:15 Maureen: “Well I have three sons. One is now an electrician, and two are still in school. When they were growing up, it was hard whenever their father was working most of the time. So it was like being a single parent and I had nightmares about something happening to my kids because of my husband’s profession. The big question with our children was how to raise them without having a hatred for others. So as they grew up and tried to be very impartial by having them meet other people, that was a challenge for me.”

She says that going through conflict resolution is one thing, but giving it to your own family is another thing entirely. It’s very uncomfortable, she has learned a lot from it. But they need their own experience to really learn on their own. She is proud of the maturity of her own kids and she mentions that her youngest child works with another organization that deals with healing. Then Maureen talks about how kids are blamed for a lot of things today, but that they deserve a lot more credit.

Maureen says that there are adults she knows who will never change their beliefs, and she accepts that. But the real challenge is preventing them from spreading their hurtful beliefs to a younger generation. “But the most important thing is to validate their own experience and then we have a sharing program so that people don’t hurt others anymore. And if that’s enough, that’s fine with me.”

39:00 Maureen: “There’s a man that I worked with who brought together descendants of Nazi perpetrators and descendants of holocaust victims. And he talked about how important what these people pass on to the next generation is. And I say that sometimes adults are hurt and will go to their grave with hurt. Other will reconcile. But one of the things that someone (the name is too difficult to hear) would say was ‘How could we have reconciliation when there has never conciliation?’ And we’ve had an 800 year conflict in Ireland but we’ve never really had a conciliation.”

40:40 Interviewer: “You talk about the future and peace. What do you think of the current peace process here? And also, what do you see is needed to maintain that peace?”

41:00 Maureen: “I think there has been so much that has happened since the Good Friday agreement. So many people are opening up now and talking about things that they haven’t talked about before. And that has come as a result of the peace agreement. My frustration and anger at the moment is that we have the wherewithal to resolve this conflict. We have an affluence here that so many developing countries don’t have. We have resources, we have an excellent education system, we have a good national health system, we have so much. And I suppose that my anger is that we are in the final stages here and politicians have got to show courage and leadership. But when you switch on the radio and you hear the rhetoric that comes out, it’s all about votes. Why can we not have politicians to start thinking differently. And I get

angry because I have traveled to other countries and I have seen what poverty is, I've seen awful conflicts and hurts. And I think that here we have managed to control a lot of that because there are large numbers of the population that have stayed away from the conflict. We also have a level of affluence. But we need leadership, language, and visionary thinking in order to move this forward."

43:20 Maureen: "Because we cannot get stuck again. I mean look at the Middle East. Nobody would ever think that that would go back to the way that it has gone because it is so bloody and it's heartbreaking. But there's potential for us to slide back. There's almost like a frozen anger and that people can't move out of that. But we're in danger of sliding back. So I would worry about the peace process for the future. We've received two types of funding to get this problem sorted out. And there are people in other countries that need the money more than us. And if we don't resolve it now when the opportunities are there, it will pass us by. So we need to think bigger for the economy, the infrastructure, and other things that need the money."

45:00 Interviewer: "Would you say that you worry about the future?"

45:10 Maureen: "I do think that, at the end of the day, I personally believe that Sinn Fein and everything else will find ways of working together. They will have to. And whether we like it or not, we're just a part of this European community and we have to start thinking bigger. I hopeful because whenever you're working with people, you're so humbled by what people bring to the table. Some people have suffered so much, and yet they have so much joy and love. And being around people like that with this difficult work, it's the best work. So there's a lot of hope there too." She brings up an author that said "Ireland will never have a future if history is always repeating itself."

"And I think that we will get there, but it's the frustration of taking so long and the fear that we do slide back. For every single person hurt, there's a ripple in the family, their friends, it's all of these people who have now become impacted. We haven't had a large amount of people killed, but it's a lot for a small island." She brings up a man that was shot several times and he now uses his suffering for counseling. He just doesn't want anyone else to feel the pain that he feels.

48:00 The interviewers thank Maureen and she gives her permission to be videotaped.