

Don Mullan

The Parkmore Youth Club 1977-78

In 1977-1979 I commenced a 2-year "Youth and Community Work" Diploma course at the Ulster Polytechnic, Jordanstown, Co. Antrim. Part of the first year course involved a four month concurrent placement in a Belfast Youth Club, the last month being full-time. The course involved students from both the Catholic and Protestant communities from throughout Northern Ireland and included one student from the USA. Because of the political situation, Catholics were sent to Catholic Youth Clubs and Protestants were sent to Protestant Youth Clubs.

Sectarian murders at the time appeared to be on the wane. (Several of the "Shankill Butchers" had been caught). I decided I would like to cross the sectarian divide and work in a Protestant Youth Club and made that request known to my course tutors. It was they who placed me with Mr. Sandy Woods, the leader of Parkmore Youth Club on the Ormeau Road, Belfast. Part of my reasoning was simply to challenge my own prejudices and encounter the humanity of "the other side."

I was, however, conscious that I was taking a risk and, therefore, I had to continually monitor the ongoing political situation throughout the four-month placement. Mr. Woods, in fact, telephoned the college authorities on Wednesday, February 8, 1978, to tell me not to come that evening. The reason was because the IRA had killed an off-duty UDR man, William Gordon and his 10-year-old daughter Lesley with a booby trap bomb in Maghera, Co. Derry.

Then, on the day I collected four of the youths to bring them on a visit to "enemy territory," the Irish Republic, the IRA killed 12 Protestant civilians at the La Mon House Restaurant, on the outskirts of east Belfast. It was a horror story with some of the victims burnt beyond recognition. As I listened to reports on the car radio throughout Saturday and Sunday, I realised that when I left the lads on the Ormeau Road on Sunday evening, upon our return from the Republic, I could not take a chance of returning to Parkmore Youth Club again. And I never did.

One of the youths, Hammy, I met the following year when he came to an event at the Polytechnic. He actually asked to meet me. I retain a photograph of him to this day. I remember him warmly. I have no idea what ever became of him.

Early one Sunday evening, July 31, 1994, I sat with my young eight-year-old daughter in the living room of our home in Dublin. The lead story on the 6 o'clock RTE News stated that the IRA had shot dead two leading loyalists in Belfast. They named one as Joseph Bratty. Instantly I recognised the name and went to my attic and retrieved the following essay. It was one of two essays I wrote as part of my course requirements. One was about a group in the youth club and the other about an individual at the youth club. My individual story was about Joseph Bratty and my group essay, below, was about his gang.

Joe Bratty's identity was confirmed the following day in the newspapers as they mentioned his nickname "Chinkie."

What became of the other lads mentioned in the essay I have no idea. However, this evening, while searching for the date of Joe Bratty's assassination in "Lost Lives – The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles" (McKittrick, Kelters, Feeney and Thornton, Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, 1999), I discovered a reference to the death of a friend and associate of Joseph Bratty, Thomas Annett, murdered on July 12, 1996, in what appeared to be a Loyalist feud. Thomas Annett was known as "Tucker." In the early stages of the essay I make reference to "Tucker A." It is he.

Back in 1978 I was motivated by youthful idealism. I was then 22 years old. Now, almost 50, I look back and wonder if I had the opportunity to do it again, would I? There is no doubt there were risks involved.

Sadly, Joseph Bratty went on to become a leading Loyalist paramilitary and it is believed his murder was in revenge, primarily, for his involvement in the Sean Graham Betting Shop massacre on the Ormeau Road, on February 5, 1992. Five Catholics were killed and seven others seriously injured when two loyalist gunmen sprayed at least 44 shots into the shop.

Mr. Woods, I recall, was none too pleased when I failed to return to Parkmore Youth Club to complete my course placement. I found this strange since the same Mr. Woods had called the college authorities just two weeks before La Mon suggesting I not come that evening (February 8, 1978) because of the killing of an off-duty UDR man and his daughter in Co. Derry.

My instincts told me not to take any reckless risks in the immediate aftermath of the La Mon bombing. Over a quarter of a century later, I believe my decision was right.

Nonetheless, I have no regrets for having taken the decision to ask to be placed in a Protestant Youth Club. I found amongst the youth there the same vulnerabilities that one might find in any youth club throughout the world.

Reflecting on the death of Joseph Bratty in 1994 I wrote the following:

I do not wish to minimise the brutality of Joe Bratty's actions in later years and the suffering he may have caused, anymore than I wish to minimise the brutality of those who planted the bomb at La Mon, or the British paratroopers who murdered 14 unarmed civilians, before my youthful eyes, on Derry's Bloody Sunday. The violence of all three cannot be viewed in isolation because all are inextricably bound up in the ongoing hurts of Ireland's colonial history.

We cannot undo the hurts of the past, but we do have a responsibility to future generations to spare them the burden of bigotry and an imparted sickness of the soul. Whether we like it or not, Catholics and Protestants, Celts and Planters, Irish and British, with all their varied complexities, have been thrown together on this tiny island, whose varied strands, when mixed together, resemble a tangled knot of spaghetti. It is not easy to forgive and it is even harder to forget, but we owe it to the generations to come, to honestly acknowledge the hurts of history and

to humbly ask forgiveness of one another.

Don Mullan
Dublin, 29 August 2005

Group study: Parkmore Youth Club, Ormeau Road, Belfast (6 March 1978)

Parkmore Youth Club lies directly behind Parkmore Street and its junction with the Ormeau Road. The catchment area is better defined as the Ballynafeigh Village, which extends as far as the Ormeau Bridge, follows the River Lagan until it passes the Annadale Flats, and then tapers eastwards until it again reaches the Ormeau Road.

It is an area where, over the past number of years, a great deal of movement can be detected. Once predominantly Protestant (with a ratio of 80:20), the southern movement of Protestant families towards the Cregagh district, and the influx of Catholic families from the redeveloping "Markets Area" has brought about an unusual balance, which the Ballynafeigh Community association is trying to nurture to the fullest advantage.

Sunnyside Street, Kimberley Street, Deramore Avenue, etc. is a mixed area, while the Annadale Flats and the area lying between Deramore Street and Whitehall Gardens remains staunchly Protestant.

The Ballynafeigh district has seen much bloodshed and social unrest. Suspicion is rife among both Catholics and Protestants. Contact and communication are limited and greatly hindered, as can be seen by the emergence over the past decade, of St Mary Euphrasia's Youth Club, catering for the Catholic community, and Parkmore Youth Club, catering for the Protestant community.

It was against such a background that I (a Catholic from a Provisional I.R.A. stronghold, the Creggan Estate), chose to work.

There were a number of reasons why I wished to work with a group from a Protestant background. To begin with, Belfast (the scene of so many sectarian murders) was surprisingly quiet, offering me the unique opportunity of viewing for myself the religious, political, cultural and historical differences my fellow countrymen held on the other side of that very real and tangible divide.

My aims and objectives were to challenge and inform my own fears and attitudes, and hopefully, in a quiet and gentle way, do the same with the small group of adolescents with whom I chose to work.

There were a number of groups in Parkmore Youth Club. Most were friendship groups, built around the netball team or the football team. However, the group I chose to work with was a small number of lads who came to the Youth Club with seemingly no other reason than to sit around and pass the time.

There were always four prominent members to this group, although as time went on, I observed they were never always together, and indeed, many of their deeper friendships lay outside.

Joe (better known as "Chinky" because of his oriental features), was aged 17 and of slim build. He had a way of conducting himself which made him stand somewhat aloof and mysterious. He had created the "hard man" image around the club, and it was this, coupled with his "James Cagney" approach, which gave him the qualities of leadership. An interesting episode occurred one night during February:

I arrived early to find Joe and a couple of other lads waiting to get in. Once in, I noticed Joe's neck was bleeding with the collar of his shirt heavily stained with blood. He seemed to be in a state of confusion:

- a. He had been up the laneway behind the U.D.A. club, having a "pump."
- b. Someone pushed him against the wall. (He thought it was Tucker Moore "messing.")
- c. He felt a twitch on his neck.

As I washed the blood around the wound, I discovered a very fine slit on his neck, obviously made by something sharp like a knife or a razor blade. . . . The circumstances are hazy around this incident. Indeed, "Chink" (Joe) likes the image of the "Hard Man" around the club. His leadership is built on this basis and he is renowned around the club for being a hardliner . . . What I can see also is that kids in Belfast have learnt to be tough. What amazed me about Joe (assuming that his story is viable and authentic), was that once the wound had been stitched and bandaged, he came straight back to the club, where he spent the rest of the night arguing with Mr Woods about the troubles.

Admittedly, the slit throat and the medical image was good for his image. (9 February 1978)

Tucker M., on the other hand, was only 15. However, he was tall and extremely well built with strong broad shoulders. It was more his maturity in stature, rather than in mind, which gave him acceptance with the other members.

Tucker A. was approximately a year older than Tucker M. Standing about 5ft 7ins in height, I found him to be aggressive and straightforward. This tended to put him on a slight par with Joe, and as time went on I could see very clearly his leadership within a sub-group, which consisted of himself and Tucker Moore.

Hammy, I must be honest in saying, was the one whom I liked most in the group. Aged 16, his small stocky build was made very distinct by his red flowing hair. Hammy too could be aggressive; nevertheless, he tended to play up to the leadership and would sometimes send searching glances for approval. It was this which kept him very much in the follower's role.

I realised from an early stage that the group were Loyalist-orientated. Tattooed on their arms they had political emblems, dominated by the word "Ulster". Indeed, some of the first questions I was asked when I joined the group were:

- "What religion are you?"
- "Are there many taigs in Derry?"
- "Do you fight with them much?"
- "Are you afraid to go through the Bogside?" (1 November 1977)

It was vitally important therefore that I did not ruin the group dynamics. My timing was essential. To tell them straight away I was a "taig" form the infamous Creggan could easily result in my rejection. The most important task was first of all to establish relationships with each one, and to deepen my friendships.

I learned as time went on that the group was preoccupied with both sex and violence. On one occasion I noticed Tucker M., Joe and Hammy huddled together in a corner of the club premises. One member of the group would speak, while the other two listened and then simultaneously all three would erupt into laughter. It was obviously an adolescent "dirty joke corner." As I entered the group, Hammy asked me, "Don, what's the difference between a pregnant woman and a light bulb?" "I don't know Hammy." "You can unscrew a light bulb." The group laughed, while eagerly watching my reactions.

Just then, Hammy's girlfriend Denise attached herself to the side lines. Immediately Hammy threw a pointed question in my path: "Did you ever have intercourse?" he asked me in a less polite manner. I could see immediately that his question had a three-fold purpose:

1. He was obviously trying to embarrass me.
2. He was trying to impress Denise and the other members of the group.
3. He was being inquisitive about emotions which at this particular time in his life (and in all the group members' lives), they were trying to cope with. Indeed, many of their songs brought his point across.

Observing Denise in this situation, I could see she was slightly embarrassed. Not so much for herself, but rather for Hammy. Denise was mature enough to realise that Hammy was trying to act big. Overall, I felt the girls in the club had become somewhat hardened. Consistently the lads would use obscene language or make obscene gestures in front of them, until it had progressed to the stage now, where they complacently carried on with what they were doing, little bemused. An interesting contrast will be seen when later I brought members of my group in to a different setting.

As my knowledge of the group increased, I realised that one of the main expectations of the group was the ability to fight. Indeed, it was this, more than friendship, which decided the leadership. All members of the group had a symbol with "K.K.K. Ulster" tattooed on their arms. They called themselves the K.K.K.s, which stands for "Klu Klux Klan." The qualities necessary for this group were, Joe told me (while the others listened), "a hatred for the taigs, a hatred for the blacks, a hatred for the f...ing 'Peelers.'" Overall, the main requirement was a willingness to fight and to do fearless tasks. Obviously, in a number of areas, the group were just "spoofing." However, I was amazed at certain characteristics they related to in a T.V. documentary on soccer violence. My recording for Monday 14 November 1977 tells the rest:

Just before 8.30 p.m. the "K.K.K." gang entered the television room. Somewhere along the line they had heard that Panorama was doing a documentary on soccer violence within the Millwall F.C. grounds.

Silence fell as the programme started. As pictures of terrace violence flashed across the screen, there was an immediate response. The room erupted into cheers of encouragement and when the police were apparently bearing the brunt of the attacks, there was at times a slight hint of jubilation.

The Millwall supporters were split into three distinct groups. "F Troop," "Treatment" and "The Half Way Line." The "Treatment" section wore masks around their heads. When they were interviewed almost all the requirements Joe, Hammy and Tucker had specified were indeed the same requirements for those who wished to become members of "Treatment." In addition to this, the National Front had recruited many of its membership for the recent violent rallies in London. I mention this because one of the requirements mentioned as a necessity for "K.K.K." was a dislike for the blacks.

(14 November 1977)

As with sex, violence too made up the lyrics of their songs:

We are the Ormo's,
We ride in force,
We hate the teddies and Provos of course.
We're going places,
We're going today.
We'll kill any taigs
That get in our way.
La, la, la, la, la, ...

Each member had discovered within the group something of a collective identity. There was acceptance there also and an

element of support. I found this particularly on one occasion when I heard Tucker Moore helping Hammy conjure up an alibi regarding an incident which had happened at school.

I could see that Tucker M. and Tucker A.'s friendship extended outside of the club premises. I arrived at Parkmore on one occasion to discover that they both had changed their hair styles to the skinhead look.

A brief examination of the group's language code showed very clearly that they were not academically inclined. Their expressive vocabulary was indeed very limited and when difficulty of expression was encountered, often the word "fuck" hurdled the barrier with well-oiled ease.

Group interests varies. All in the past belonged to Joe's U.D.A. club. However, since this had folded up, the club became the focal point. Their Loyalist Band too helped to bind them together and it was not uncommon to see and hear the lads drumming with their fingers, stamping and whistling to some well-rehearsed tune. Hammy and Joe were two proficient band leaders.

The climax of my interaction with the group came exactly two weeks after the Panorama episode. Up until this moment I had a specific line of action in mind and intended, when the atmosphere was right, to reveal the fact that I was a Catholic from a Republican background.

Again sitting in the T.V. room, Tucker A. challenged me: "Don, Hammy says you're a taig." My whole strategy had been leading up to this point. My recording for that night tells the rest:

It had been my intention to build up a fairly solid friendship with the lads, so that when this moment arose, it would be interesting to note whether they would reject my friendship, just because I was a Catholic.

I told them yes, I was a Catholic. This seemed to knock them for a few seconds. Then Tucker A. proceeded, "But you told us you were a Protestant." "No, I told you no such thing." "But you told us you were from the Waterside." Yes, Tucker A. was right. I had told them I was from Waterside. Therefore I decided to level with them and tell them the truth as to why I had said this. I told them I was very aware of being a Catholic coming into a Protestant area in the infamous Belfast city. I was frightened because of this, just as they would be, coming into the Creggan and Bogside. I literally was frightened for my life. That was the reason.

Hammy by this stage had joined the group. There appeared to be a silent acceptance of my words. Then the whole thing seemed to go sour, and left me wondering for a good few unpleasant moments, whether it would be safe to continue my visits to Parkmore.

Joe assumed a military air, and began to question my reasons for being there, particularly since I had been so interested in the K.K.K. – I could easily be a Provo.

At first Tucker M.'s standing was "there's good and bad on both sides." Tucker A.'s position was "all taigs are bastards, therefore you're a bastard." Joe appeared to be taking a similar stance. Then Tucker M. began to follow the rest with the statements "all taigs are Provo f...ers." Hammy, however, was adamant in his statement: "I don't give a f... what you are Don." I really felt under pressure and tried to explain to them how I too had once held the same attitudes as them, only from the opposite point of view.

Then they all began to laugh simultaneously, explaining how they had only been having me on. I was quite relieved to say the least, since it meant that all my friendship-building had not gone to waste.

It was amazing what developed. We all formed into a wee intimate group, in which they asked me about my experiences in the Creggan and whether I had been involved in the troubles, and whether I knew any Provo's etc., etc. We then began to talk about priests and "penguins," and they were quite surprised to discover that I have two "penguins" for sisters. A few references were made to the Virgin Mary, and Tucker M. asked me did I know the "Hail Mary" and if I would say it.

(28 November 1977)

Hammy at this point had been the deciding factor. I had become particularly friendly with him, and it was the strength of our friendship, I felt, which made him adamant in his acceptance of me. The other members of the group too had had the opportunity of getting to know and like me as a person.

I had broken down their mysterious fear about Catholics, and since I wasn't a member of those taigs with whom they fought, then it was okay:

Big Tucker M. told me tonight that he hated the taigs. However, I was different. "What do you mean?" "Well, you're not one of the cheeky ones, or a Provo." Again there seems to be that mythical fear of the unknown.

(6 February 1978)

Nevertheless, there always remained that element of suspicion. Indeed, as late as January 30, I recorded such feelings:

I have the feeling actually that the lads are just a wee bit weary of me. They don't seem to know just how to take me. They know I am a Catholic and that I come from the Creggan Estate. However, like most unknown and feared

places in Northern Ireland, there is always that element of mystery, of not knowing what really is going on behind the scenes.

(30 January 1978)

Early in February, I discovered that another lad had attached himself to the group. Upon investigation, I learnt that his name was Stephen, and that he had only recently been released from Rathgale Training School, having been placed there after being found guilty of an assault charge. Joe introduced me to him, while the opening sentences ran like this:

“Where did you say he is from,” Stephen asked. “Cregagh? For a minute I thought you said ‘Creggan.’”

“ That’s where he *is* from,” Joe continued.

“ Aaa: are ye?”

“ That’s right,” I told him.

“ Oh fuck. Down wi’ all the provees and all.”

(8 February 1978)

After a bit of hassle, regarding transport arrangements, and the changing dynamics of any group, I finally secured a group of four for a week-end trip into the Irish Republic. My group therefore consisted of Joe, Stephen, Tucker M. (although in this case, financial difficulties made his involvement uncertain), and an outsider to the group, Jim. Pick-up time was 4.30 p.m., at Parkmore Youth Club, on Friday 17 February 1978. I was in good time to collect Joe and Stephen who showed up at 4.15 p.m. We chatted for some time before collecting Jim at his home. The group wanted Tucker M. to come, and to be honest I too wanted him to come along, especially when I learnt that his mother had only died recently. As was mentioned, Tucker was having financial trouble and because of the pecuniary difficulties had regretfully pulled out at the last minute. Joe and big Stephen soon persuaded him to come along and before long, the journey had begun.

There was some surprise that we were not stopped at the border and searched by the army and especially the Irish police. Throughout the journey, there were a number of references to the troubles. As moods began to swing, songs were introduced to break the monotony of the journey. The main songs were Loyalist songs, although they did sing a number of general pop songs and even a few Republican songs.

I noticed from the start, Joe manoeuvred himself into the front seat. The seat of privilege.

I found that the group as a whole were very unaware of life outside the big city. There was a terrible (if not frightening) lack of awareness, especially in Joe’s question, “Don, if Ireland, North and South, were joined together, would it be one of the biggest countries in the world?”

I noticed too that the group lacked an awareness for the environment and the property of others. To begin with, after they had finished eating chips etc., the papers were discarded out of the car windows. And as for smoking, I found that even though there were ash trays provided in the car, they continually persisted in nicking their cigarettes on the floor.

At an early stage, Stephen became something of a scapegoat. I feel there were a number of reasons for this. Generally, he did more talking and was much more open than the rest of the group. He tended to speak his mind more freely, something which the rest of the group hammered him for, in a very subtle and sometimes cruel way.

As we passed through Dublin, there was a lot of interest expressed at the size of the T.V. aerials. Joe in particular could not believe that further south, the inhabitants could only receive one channel, R.T.E. Another good reason for not wanting to join the Republic.

As we passed through the city, the group became quite excited when they saw a number of girls walking around the streets. It was apparent that one of the main group expectations was that of women. They began to roar and whistle at the sight of every pair of young feminine legs. Stephen again was the one who tended to make his voice heard loudest.

As planned, we arrived at Mount Argus Passionist House for our tea and a pleasant break from the journey. At first they were a bit uneasy. Especially when the door opened and they were confronted with a massive crucifix hanging on the wall. Generally they found the place to be a bit “spooky,” but on the other hand not bad.

Once the group had their tea and were feeling a little more relaxed, they became quite chatty with the brothers. Jim tended to be an avoider, breaking away to look at the records, while the rest of the group sat and talked, and at no time making any apologies about being either Loyalist or Protestant. Again Stephen was the one who tended to do most of the talking. Tucker generally throughout the trip never had much to say, while Joe preferred to stay in the background until he had found his feet. However, once he found them, he had no hesitation in giving his Band Leader’s display, doing all sorts of tricks with a billiard cue.

I found too that the group tended to relate everything back to the experiences and the environment they were used to. This came across very forcefully when (after the initial silence of meeting a black habited brother), Joe pointed to his black belt and said, “the ‘Peelers’ up our way wear belts like that. Only they have guns on them.”

Joe during this time displayed a good sense of humour and appeared very witty. Jim appeared very cool, while his main interest in conversation revolved around the safe areas of horses and gambling. In fact, he continually asked me about going to see the races. His behaviour was good and mannerly. Tucker remained quiet. I could see at times he relapsed into a pensive state, undoubtedly thinking of his mother. He did, however, join in with the group during their sing songs. Stephen I found to be very

open. He sat and chatted freely with the brothers. However, the rest of the group criticized him later for this, calling him a "spoofer." At times, he was a bit loud, but overall he was harmless and good-humoured.

All related reasonably well with the brothers and expressed the fact that they looked forward to meeting them again on Sunday when they returned.

Outside Tallagh, something spontaneous and very revealing happened. As we turned a bend, a man waved us down. As I made ready to stop, the lads openly voiced their disapproval. "It's a f...ing Provo hold up." Later indeed, they told me that they were sure I had it planned "to bump them off."

Once we had stopped, we discovered that a car had overrun the road and had ended up in someone's garden. Luckily, the driver had not been hurt. However, he was finding considerable difficulty in getting the car out of the garden, especially since the garden was raised about two feet above the ground. What were we to do? We tried pushing it and shoving it, but all to no avail. Then Stephen suggested reversing it and building up the ground to the level of the garden. It was quite a skilful piece of initiative, which worked. Before long, the car was out of the garden, much to the pleasure of the owner. Indeed, he was so pleased that he invited us down for a pint. This was something I had to give a bit of thought to. However, upon reflection I felt to stop someone outright from doing something was to rob them of something which is very basic and sacred to them, namely, their freedom of choice. I also had to remember I was dealing with boys from a different religious background and tradition to myself, and therefore decided to place emphasis on their own responsibility. My hunch paid off. They all sat contentedly over a pint and at no stage during the week-end had I any problem with drink. The group had talked a lot about drink on their way down, and it was clear to me that this too was one of their expectations.

During the car incident (which I have already noted), Stephen was the one who came up with a few worthwhile suggestions. However, I discovered as we continued our journey, that like William Foote Whyte's "Norton Street Gang," he was heavily criticised for this, because during this incident he put the leadership in jeopardy, by becoming the initiator in a task role, much to the dismay of Joe and Jim.

About five miles from our destination, we stopped in a little town called Baltinglass for chips. In the shop, Joe got a bit out of hand. He was extremely rude and vulgar in his remarks to the woman behind the counter, whose facial expressions conveyed annoyance. Joe had asked for a "sausage supper" and once he had the sausage in his hands, I will leave the rest of his remarks and gesture to the reader's imagination. It is enough to say that I felt extremely embarrassed at their arrogance and cocksureness. On top of this, they persisted in cursing while in the shop. I realised that the time had come when I had to assert my authority and lay down a few rules and regulations.

When we were all in the car, I switched on the light, and looking at each one of them individually, I gave them a good talking to. They all listened very silently, especially Joe to whom I was mainly making my address. He pretended to be unaffected by the talking. However, he told me in other ways that he hadn't meant any harm. He could not come straight; nevertheless, he began to sing a recent top of the pops number "I was only joking." This lasted from Baltinglass to the college. Obviously, to apologize was to show weakness, and this was not good for his image.

Later, while having some tea in the college where we were staying, Joe and Jim, who mutually paired off, became quite abusive towards Stephen. Both united in again making him a scapegoat. Stephen tried to pretend he was unaffected; however, his body posture and facial expressions suggested otherwise. During this time, I intervened and told them to stop; however, both persisted. Later I made a point of seeing them both on their own, and told them off, asking them to have some awareness of Stephen's feelings and emphasising we had come here as a group and therefore we should be trying to look after the welfare of one another.

There were five of us on the group, and the college authorities provided five rooms. However, only three rooms were used. The lads were genuinely afraid of the priests, and expressed the fear of being killed during the night. Joe and Jim therefore took a room between them, while Stephen followed Tucker M. into his room. In fact, he went as far as removing a bed from one of the other rooms and taking it into Tucker's.

I could see that Stephen had been leaving himself open to attack throughout the day. I noticed that during our tea, even though I had left out plenty of biscuits, he persisted in lifting a handful. This again was heavily criticized by the group.

In the later stages of the evening, Joe and Stephen began to slag each other about two remand homes which they are both acquainted with. Joe, I could see, was really getting under Stephen's skin, and stirring things up. There was every possibility of a fight developing. However, I could see that Stephen's bark tended to be louder than his bite.

Next morning I made breakfast for the group. We chatted with one another during the breakfast in the students' kitchenette. However, when the rest of the students came about, the group became very insular and began to huddle around one another. Something which I noticed they did on another occasion, when we went off to visit Finaghy Youth Club.

During dinner I noticed that the general etiquette of the group was extremely poor. As far as I can remember, only Jim knew how to use a piece plate, the rest used the table.

Later in the evening, we reached Brittas Bay, where I had planned a farm visit and a disco. All the lads found difficulty in mixing with the Kirwan family, with whom we had our tea. There was a silent awkwardness. Even the kids in the house who are generally very chatty, found difficulty in making conversation. I think that both parties were glad to take refuge in the T.V.

As mentioned, I had arranged to take the group to "Tophers' Disco." However, by the time this came around, only Joe and Stephen still wished to go. I therefore arranged to leave Jim and Tucker at the Kirwan farmhouse. At Tophers, I found the two

lads, Stephen and Joe, enjoying themselves. Within a very short time they had found a couple of girlfriends. On the dance floor, I noticed that Joe was very sure of himself. I noticed too, that Joe had very little awareness of the feelings of the southern girls. In the club, as I have mentioned, he has been abusive to me in the presence of other female members of the club, hoping to embarrass me. The girls I had found to be somewhat hardened to such abuse and Joe immediately felt that down here, it would be no different. However, he persisted in asking girls the most embarrassing questions. One girl was so insulted that I had to apologize to her for him.

On our way back to Kiltegan (some 32 miles away and about an hour and a half's driving), the lads slept soundly in the back of the car, with Joe again holding the front seat. I noticed that the snow was beginning to fall. However, it did not appear to be very heavy, and apart from having to slow my driving, everything was going to plan.

24 miles from Brittas Bay and only eight miles from the college, the group were abruptly aroused from their slumber by my shouting, "Come on lads, out quick and push, otherwise we'll be stuck here all night." Heroically they all got out, but to no avail. We were stuck hard and fast, with snow rising around the car very rapidly. I had never experienced snow drifts before, otherwise I might have been able to read the signs. However, that wasn't really all that important now. The trouble was, what was I to do?

The lads were now damp and shaking. It was dark outside with nothing in sight. Remember, we were stuck on top of the Wicklow mountains about two or three miles from the nearest village, Tinahely. The heater of the car was beginning to warm the lads up, while they dried themselves off with various articles of clothing lying around. The only thing I could think of was to spend the night in the car and next morning look for help. The group were very excited and were conjuring up all sorts of rescue imaginings. They were satisfied to stay the night in the car. I kept the engine running and turned out all the lights, so that I wouldn't run the battery down. Then something said, "No!" Some finer instinct, perhaps. I thought perhaps that if the car should be covered during the night, we might smother, or maybe there would be that sort of panic which William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* contains. At any rate, I just did not feel comfortable about staying the night in the car any longer. I therefore told the lads that I would be going out, and hoped to be back with some help within the hour. I told them to remain calm, and not to worry.

Whether it was because Stephen had a little football supporters' hat with him or not, he was the one the group volunteered to go out with me. He wasn't having it at all, and anyway, I didn't think it right to take any of them out in such a bad night.

About five hundred yards down the road, I discovered a laneway and decided to take the chance of following it. Finding a house, I began to ring the bell and bang on the knocker. Having aroused the family, I explained to the man and woman of the house what had happened and that I had four young lads from Belfast with me. The man of the house gave me his torch and told me to fetch the lads.

Again I made my way along the road. Locking the car, we all formed a human chain, as Jim suggested, and in unbelievable conditions (the worst I have experienced in my life), I made my way with the lads to the house.

Mr and Mrs Hannon were extremely nice to us. Mrs Hannon lit a warm fire and made us a lovely and most welcome cup of tea. Since it was now Sunday, I asked Mr and Mrs Hannon how they would get to mass in the morning. Mr Hannon told me that they didn't have that problem, since they were Protestants. What a stroke of luck; the whole mood of the group changed immediately and they all relaxed. "We're Prods ourselves," Joe ventured to inform them. After this, a friendly and warm discussion about farm life began. What a contrast to the Kirwan household.

I was really glad that I had stumbled across this farmhouse. Earlier, when Stephen had expressed his desire to come and live here, he was heavily criticized by the group, and Tucker displayed a somewhat aggressive tone when he exclaimed, "Too many f... ing taigs." Now they had the opportunity of meeting a Protestant family who were happily living in the Irish Republic, with no apparent signs of ill treatment.

The people of the house showed a great deal of trust in that, once they saw us settled, they went back, to bed. It was interesting to watch what happened after this.

A power struggle began over the chair in front of the fire. Joe of course took it. Everyone else huddled around. I noticed too Joe taking the leadership role in that, feeling uncomfortable in his damp trousers, he took them off and dried them out in front of the fire. The rest of the group did not follow suit, perhaps due to the fact that I had told them of the family's young and very lovely daughter. Later Joe rose to go to the toilet. None of the group made an effort to take his privileged seat. This being so, I therefore decided to take it, just to see what would happen. Joe didn't like it at all, when he returned.

In the morning, they became arrogant with the people, especially the young girl who was working very hard to make them breakfast. They just seemed to take everything for granted, and had little awareness of the fact that each one of us were very indebted to the hospitality of this charming family. Joe began his old caper of asking the girl awkward questions. The poor girl was so innocent that she hadn't a clue what he was talking about anyway. However, during breakfast when I had the group on their own, I made a point of speaking to them.

I was trying to draw their attention, but every time I seemed to have it, someone would start speaking above me. I realised, therefore, that in order to make them appreciate the seriousness of what I wished to speak to them about, I would have to raise my voice to an aggressive level. "Now fucking listen," I exclaimed, rather angrily, finding that this brought about some silence.

Later, Stephen again got a bit out of hand. When he had found a couple of shovels, he began to throw big hunks of snow at the window. I told him to stop, and when he persisted, I told him that he had gone far enough, and that the next time I was coming down, he wouldn't be in the group. He became very abusive and threatening at this.

Perhaps the feelings of isolation which he had been receiving throughout were somewhat intensified by my attack. "Go and fuck

yourself, ye ol' bastard then." But as I have said earlier, Stephen's bark is louder than his bite, so I just ignored him. Anyway, he had stopped.

I took the group up to dig the car out later in the morning. All (with the exception of Joe) worked very hard. Joe was content to sit and direct operations from the front seat. "What's the sense of getting out, when we've only two spades?" He was using his head and his reasoning powers, which obviously helped in making him leader. Eventually when the car had been dug out, I ordered him to push.

Journeying back to Dublin, Stephen again came under attack. He was criticised for giving his ring away to the girl he had courted the night before. He was very hurt. The group, again especially Jim and Joe, kept putting him to the test, just to prove him wrong. Stephen, you see, had worked around these parts with Fossett's Circus, and claimed he knew some of the area. At this point, he again had taken on the Task Role of giving information. This tended to undermine the leadership to a high degree and it was important therefore that he be put in his place.

The cockiness which had become characteristic of them again began to display itself during dinner at Mount Argus. At one stage, an elderly priest introduced himself to the group. I had to hide my laughter when after shaking hands with Stephen and saying, "How are you Stephen? I'm Fr Charles," Stephen immediately retorted, "All right, Charlie." Joe put on the "not interested" act, then forgot and began to chat away about the overnight experiences. During dinner, the group split into two factions. This was probably due to the layout of the table, which made conversation at group level extremely difficult. At the end of the meal, Stephen (in response to Br John's suggestion) volunteered to thank the cook. Shortly after this, Br John took the lads for a tour of the big church. As they made their way around, Joe said that he felt a sense of evil. In the sacristy, as they looked at the priestly garments and chalices, etc., the group laughed and made fun.

On our way home to Belfast, we stopped at a little town for chips. A number of very interesting things happened here. Earlier, in the farm house at Crossbridge, Joe produced two £5 notes from his pocket. Big hearted Stephen, now penniless, sat in the back seat. Jim too stayed low, while Tucker accompanied Joe into the shop. About five minutes later, Joe and Tucker arrived back. Joe was eating a big hot pie and chips, Tucker a bag of potato crisps. There was nothing for Stephen and Jim.

As we approached Belfast, I asked the lads what they felt was the most enjoyable moment of the weekend. Stephen felt it had been the disco, while the other three united in heralding the snow drift experience, as the most exciting and enjoyable. Before we parted, they all asked me when I would bring them down again.

To begin evaluating the work I have done with this group is extremely difficult. Many of my own fears and attitudes have been challenged and indeed I have had the opportunity of getting to know a number of Protestant people. I still find myself laboured with many fears. However, my Parkmore placement has done much in dispersing many of my myths.

At the group level, however, this is not a measurable or tangible fact. Hopefully, the group's short introduction to southern Ireland will have helped them to break down their myths and fears also. And hopefully, their friendships with myself will have helped them to realise that it is possible to get to know and even to like the "other side."

Perhaps the seeds have been planted. If they have, then I pray that like my own, they too will grow to a greater understanding and acceptance.