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**Interview with:**

**Andrew Redican**

**Retired Secondary School Teacher**

**Venue: Abbey Arts Centre, Ballyshannon**

**The Memory Project, Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd**

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TC Start: 06:13:21:15

Q: So Andy, you have been teaching in this area....near here for a while so tell me about that?

**ANDY:** [06:13:34:00] I taught in Drumkeeran, that's in County Leitrim, it's at the Northern tip of Lough Allen, I taught there from 1967 until 2002, so I'm nearly 11 years retired, and I lived there, I raised a family there, so I know the area pretty well, we're .... Drumkeeran is 17 miles from the border at Belcoo, and I was thinking back on.... life and thinking about Troubles in Ireland, I'm always.... I always feel that the old history syllabus that I learned at school, that was the one... we went.... we started off with St Patrick and we come up to.....we came to the Treaty time, but there was never any further, I think that was a brilliant move on the Department, because of the Civil War and everything like that [06:14:32:08] but the way history was taught that time, it turned, nearly all of us into, in our own mind, we were republicans in one way or another, because, it was phenomenal ..... well especially with my teacher, it was phenomenal the way he got..... he, he made history come alive.... we shared some triumphs - very few now.... but we shared a lot of..... losses and sadness..... and the way he made it attractive was, when we were doing, we'd say....the, the battle.... Clontarf [06:15:07:18] and Brian Boru and the defeat of the Danes at Clontarf - we learned the poem:

Stand ye now, for Erin's glory,  
Stand ye now for Erin's cause

Long ye've grown beneath the rigors  
of the Northman's savage laws

We learned poems like that, we went on then to, we'll say.... when we were doing the CROPPY BOY, when we were doing the Fenian's and... we, the Fenian was killed.... there was an Irish Poem 'Sínte ar thaobh an t-sléibhe, do chonaic me an Croppy bocht, bhí an drúcht go trom ar a éadan, agus bhí piléar tríd a h-ucht'. So we could see, we could feel, get that feeling of the.... the sadness, and we could nearly feel that Croppy out in the, out there, so all aspects of history was taught that way, and when we came away, we were... in ourselves.. y'know like, we were sort of, nearly republicans in our mind, we may not be joined republican movements or anything [06:16:05:07] and that's when I, in 1955, I remember the first campaign, it started - the one that I remember anyway, in my time, it started in Northern Ireland - that would be the time that Seán South from Garryowen was killed, and young O'Hanlon and you had the songs there, the songs to go with it, there was a group of ones on the run and they were very close to our home, as a matter of fact they got, probably ..... got milk and things like that - I remember them getting things.... [06:16:32:02] But nobody would ever dare... talk about them or spill on them y'know.... even though they were suspected as that - because ..... I suppose it would be a bit like ... the Playboy of the Western World, y'know, there was a sort of that disrespect for authority y'know, like in the Playboy.... and the guy that did wrong we'd say in the Playboy of the Western World, he was a hero because he killed his Dad y'know.... so that period there that's what I'm talking about that we.... but when I started teaching then, I started in '67, I remember we brought, in May '68, we, we brought School children on an outing, from the school we were in, to Belfast [06:17:18:13] and the Troubles were just starting then, now in no way would you have brought anyone then Northern, to Northern Ireland after that, you would never bring children when the Troubles started, and I found that my..... wife had a sister living in County Down, now we would go the longest way round to try and not go thru Northern Ireland, we were afraid, we were afraid because ....well I suppose ... we were Catholic... you'd never know what would happen, and on top of that, I remember my wife telling Finian - Finian, one of our boys, he was a bit of a smart aleck, y'know [06:17:58:07] - I'll give you an example of him, he was celiac and he was in at the Doctor and the Doctor said to him are you sticking to your diet? He said no, I've no glue....so when were coming up to the checkpoint in Crossmaglen we were.... my wife was shivering - I can still see her, I was quite tense myself and she said now make sure... make sure you don't say any smart things to the.... to the police or the soldiers - make sure.... so it had a huge effect on us for years there, we went a way round to Northern Ireland there [06:18:32:24] ...

Q: Getting back to the education, looking back do you feel that there was no coverage if you like ... or you weren't taught anything about the other side of the divide in Northern Ireland?

**ANDY:** [06:18:51:12] .... we weren't because it was totally ignored y'know..... everything stopped at ... at the Treaty, around that time and that... because Civil War and all that,

because..... they kept, the syllabus kept away from that completely y'know....and..... when I started teaching, I never, I never once... I don't think the students ever knew where my political allegiances lay because .... Well I didn't really have any anyway y'know.... like I'd be one of those that would change governments at the next election, I wasn't tied to a party now - me father was very much tied to Fine Gael [06:19:29:21] so he was and, me older brother might be more pro Sinn Féin at the time y'know... but definitely, that was one thing I made my policy when I went to school, I never discussed politics or conflict as such. [06:19:46:16]

Q: So the Troubles broke out in 1969 with the start of civil rights....and then, working as a teacher, that obviously made you conscious of, if you were sensitive to the fact that you say you were brought up as a republican whether you liked it or not... did you tailor your history teaching as the troubles developed in the North?

**ANDY:** [06:20:11:21] Yeah, well you see the Troubles in the North .... I think what happened was... in the area that I was teaching in, that community, the area there... the Hunger Strikes - that changed a lot of peoples' attitudes at the time....it was.... and a lot of people joined Sinn Féin at that time, so you'd be very reluctant to discuss much about Northern Ireland at all because... just in case, y'know like, you never know whose what - d'you understand that? But it did leave its mark and .... after .... We'd say after the, the Hunger strikes, the Sinn Féin party got much stronger in our area, so they did [06:21:01:08] which I don't think is too bad I think at the moment because they are now going for elected, y'know like democratic politics and things like that so [06:21:12:14]

Q: You're dealing with young children, so in the same way as your teachers had an influence on you, you therefore, could exert some sort of influence over them in very subtle ways? Did you sense from the kids some of the influence of their own parents?

**ANDY:** [06:21:33:15] ....oh yeah.....you'd get that... you'd get that coming across that, there at times and .... you'd notice as well maybe ....maybe attitude, maybe from one child to another, maybe indirectly related to politics but you try to, talk y'know like, you try to steer them away from politics altogether, that was my way of dealing with things..... one of the best things I did, reluctantly I hadn't done it when I was teaching, was I ... followed a course in ... a certificate in drama, community drama with Smashing Times Theatre, and it was all ..... done... the course was done in Northern Ireland, and it was Catholic/Protestant, and I think that was one of the best things ever I experienced in my life [06:22:24:09] we never discussed... I never knew exactly.... who was exactly a protestant or who was a catholic, yet you had a sense about it y'know....and I remember having a.... we had to swap a story, I don't know if ... you mightn't know anything about this, one the things we were asked was, as part of a theatre exercise was, you give a... tell a story to someone else about a very important item you have y'know, and I was a student in Cork, in the University in Cork, wouldn't have been all that diligent as a student, and I suppose coming onto the exams I felt the pressure anyway, but my mother, god rest her [06:23:06:24] she sent me a ... picture of the Sacred Heart and

would you believe it I still have great faith in the Sacred Heart, but anyway that little thing that she sent me, a little picture that size y'know, she sent it to me and I prayed to it, definitely, prayed to the Sacred Heart and took it out and looked at it, but we did the exams y'know and myself and another guy - he was from Belfast, he was a student down there, he had been a cleric..... a clerical student, Kiltegan had a house there at the time, and ... [06:23:44:19] after the exams there was a party one night, so we went to the party and we lasted about till about 3 o'clock I think it was, and we had I think it Smithwicks... twas Time at the time...or Phoenix I think it was the bottles at the time, so we came out with the tops off and one in each pocket, and we proceeded for home and we were passing the Church of the Sacred Heart in the Mardyke in Cork, and twas the feast of the Sacred Heart, and there was an all night vigil in the church...so I said Pete, we'll go in and say a prayer, so the two of us went in... you could imagine now the two of us coming in at 3 o'clock in the morning, a bottle in each pocket and a thumb stuck down in it, anyway, we went in and we knelt down, and you could..... you could sense people looking at us, but I didn't care, we said a prayer anyway so [06:24:36:02] we came out and I said to Pete.... what did you pray for? And he said I prayed to get fags! He said what did you pray for? That I get the exam and get out of this bloody place, I said to him, and we walked on and we were coming up the road and we met this guy - we knew as well, he used to drink in the, in the pub there, and he said oh the Shinnners - he called us the Shinnners, we were with Northern Accents because down in Cork I'd have a Northern accent, and Pete from Belfast had a Northern accent, now the Shinnners, and Pete said have you fags? And he took out a packet of cigarettes - there was 10, you know the 10 ones, and he handed it to us and we went over and we sat on the wall and we smoked them till .... till they were gone [06:25:20:02] now I told that... that was the story that I gave at that.... and when I came out I realized I gave the story to a protestant girl, it was only after that I gave it, but she had to take my story, and it had to become hers, that sacred heart picture was hers so she had to go along and tell it to someone else. Now I didn't do that intentionally y'know like, it just was accidental but there it was, we were swapping across Catholic and Protestant, and I felt that was one of the best things we did up there was. [06:25:53:10] And the drama. On the course, each of you brought a story and then we picked 4 stories or 3 stories at the end and they were developed and professionally directed. And I acted the leader in the Short Strand area - a republican - based on a true story by Pat Mc Cullough - he gave us his true story, and I played his father... but one of my children .... one of my children was church, was protestant y'know, so we were mingling out, and we worked out, so, to me I think that the future, if we are to work really towards the future, it'll be exchanging stories, you know like catholic, protestant [06:26:43:22] recognizing that everybody has ... entitled to their traditions and culture, swapping them over, and seeing them, that they're very much part of Ireland now. There have been part of Ireland, they are now and that's it, and go on from there. [06:26:57:19]

Q: So do you think that, you've said that like it or not you were educated as a republican or brought up in some sense, do you think that's getting more and more diluted now

and people really now are less concerned with those things and are they more concerned with economic matters?

**ANDY:** [06:27:21:03] At the moment its all, economic matters are very, so, so there... lot... there's a very.... depressed... oppression does that feeling in this country at the moment - so much so there's is a lot of negative thinking, you know what I mean, negative thinking in.....nobody realizes, nobody was wondering where the money will come from, yet everybody wants to get as much of it as they can, be it social welfare, be it any old way at all and there is a great opposition to any form of, y'know like taxation that might get us out of this here.... [06:28:00:00] Now I know people, there are a lot of people in terrible straits y'know they have families, they have houses bought, they have to try and pay for it, but it is, it is permeated through society .... I find.... I find..... that there is a gloominess [06:28:16:23]

Q: But that economic gloom permeates all society, both sides, so in a way it might actually serve to bring people together?

**ANDY:** [06:28:31:08].... yeah... I do... I know what you mean....

Q: Getting back to your point about the stories, this is what this project is about, this is what we're trying to explore, is by telling those stories of the past that you help them to exorcise them? Have you had experience of that from the other side? You told your story at that workshop, what did you hear from other people that caught your attention?

**ANDY:** [06:29:02:12] ..... would you believe it..... not.... not.....

Q: I don't mean specific stories.....

**ANDY:** The stories they told me were, y'know like from the other side, weren't directly y'know like, you wouldn't know... they were children's stories about sparkling and things like that, y'know like things like.... they wouldn't ..... I never got, from the other side, I never got a story saying about themselves y'know that type of a way.... That, you know like their families and things.... the only time.... that I got it was... we had ones coming in about y'know like peace building and peace reconciliation and all that type of thing, there was one chap but the name of Declan Bowers, he was ... he was a protestant, and he was telling about the joy of his y'know like the 12th of July marches and all that type of thing, and his father handed that down to him y'know [06:30:06:17] and you could get from him, y'know like that he was a real.... But he was striving, and getting across, to recognize that, we'd say people would celebrate 1916 or St Patrick's Day or anything y'know like things like that were nationalist, you could get that, and this was the idea that I got from quite a lot from them up North was, if we only could share our culture... our shared culture - and it is a shared culture only we stereotype - we have done that all the year.. [06:30:44:04] because, I remember, my mother was a bone setter, and she set

this woman, and when they were finished anyway they made tea and there... this was in Leitrim now... and I'm talking now about a way back in the 1950's, and there wasn't any trouble at that time, I think it was before that ... before the Troubles started again - and ... she got tea and when she drank it she forgot where she was and she says Oh Jesus Christ this would scald a protestant! (laugh) twas that hot and the other one launched into her - quite rightly so y'know... so we stereotype y'know like? [06:31:23:09] and that has been built down though the years y'know....we, we got the feeling.... when we were young as Catholics, we got the feeling that a protestant wouldn't go to heaven! y'know?.....and sure the way we were taught was .... who is my neighbour? My neighbour is all mankind of every distinction, even those who injure us or differ from us in religion y'know like?.... [06:31:43:18] even though - EVEN though - you see the two words....differ from us in religion....so we grew up with different mentalities and that's base now at the moment... of course the problem now in Northern Ireland at the moment, I'd say a lot of the problem, where you have the violence now that you see there that with the flags and all that - they're ... they're youngsters that are unemployed I'd say, they're in poverty, they're there - they've nothing... they've no work and they're y'know like - anything for a bit of craic and that's ... that's a lot of violence I'd say at the moment in Northern Ireland....[06:32:18:18] but then there are people behind that, I would say, who is stirring that up, you know like stirring that up because there's money in it [06:32:27:22]

Q: But it only appears to one side - on the unionist side?

**ANDY:** [06:32:33:05] Well it appears that way at the moment but ... you have at the moment ..... you have what they call the Real IRA or the Continuity IRA, I don't know what they're doing but there is a an underlying something there, I'm not... I don't know ...y'know you only pick up things there, you see the laundering of .... cross border laundering and all that stuff - they're building up monies for something or else it's for personal gain or something like that y'know...[06:33:00:04]

Q: And living in the border region.... you would have been more exposed to day to day issues of the troubles than we would say in Dublin?

**ANDY:** [06:33:16:19] Oh well I remember well driving down, and getting involved - they cratered the roads between Fermanagh and Leitrim, they cratered - they cratered them up at Kiltyclougher

Q: Who did?

**ANDY:** the British Army... at the time, they cratered them - they were unapproved roads, so they cratered them - blew up them so - I remember a whole gang down filling up the craters because that was resentment y'know like.... the isolation, you were being cut off from your neighbour... or your neighbours on one side and the other side, that I suppose gained support for . . . the IRA side or whatever it was at the time y'know - I

remember it well, we were down there, driving down there myself, and my wife and family down there in it there and watching them being filled - I didn't actually take part but I would if I'd say if I was let I would get out.... [06:34:10:02] and do it myself as well y'know...

Q: AND did you have any exposure to any of the violence?

**ANDY:** No never, never [06:34:20:10] I was never exposed to any violence, no.... that was ... the only exposure was.... with me was the ... we stopped going Northern Ireland - y'know ..... we were going freely over and back to Enniskillen where you did some shopping and things like that, and especially you could go up and down freely after ... you know like the European the EEC y'know .....like the borders.... there was no customs there...but we didn't go up there.... but I remember clearly, after the peace process was initiated, myself and my wife went for 4 or 5 days all up to the glens of Antrim and the Antrim coast, and we weren't worried what type of a house we were in for bed and breakfast, because the Peace process was there and it was a great thing... we had never [06:35:12:24] done that before though - we had gone round as I told you to, we'd say to her sister's place in Annalong in County Down - we would have gone through the bad roads in Monaghan and cross that short distance through Crossmaglen and all that, of course we were going through one of the hot spots at the time... but it was the great feeling that we could go up that time, up there to the North because my wife, she did her training - she was a nurse, and she did her training in Newtownards ... and she says... she tells me that at the beginning they used to love to go to Dr. Paisley's speeches - they were sort of a carnival type of a thing, but then everything started to polarize - you had the civil rights marches, and they turned into... I suppose they hijacked y'know.... and that type of way so.... [06:36:09:16] ..... (noise in B/G)

Q : Maybe pick it up from your wife used to enjoy going to Paisley's....

**ANDY:** [06:36:25:14] She enjoyed going to Dr Paisley's speeches at first y'know like, and I suppose they weren't all that bitter until the civil rights got on the go... then... and then there was infiltration of them and of course Dr Paisley's out bursts were more.... Were I suppose vitriolic maybe against the papacy and all this type of stuff and that took the craic out of it y'know... but.... she loved .... She loved her years in Newtownards and every 3 or 4 years they all meet and they go and they stay in a hotel over a weekend and renew friendships and ..... most of them are protestant....so they are.....there are some Catholics as well but most of them are protestant and they are great friends of my wife and cards come every Christmas - so you see ... life is [06:37:19:20] a funny mixture isn't it? When you look at it that way, that those people are still there and that the Troubles that happened in the period of time, y'know didn't, didn't break the bond of friendship y'know....there is that .....acceptance and .... maybe .... respect I suppose, and acceptance for another way of people's way of life and thinking and all that.... [06:37:43:14]....ok very good.... END IV

**End of Interview**