



30 May 2014

Interview with:

Jim Arbuckle, Community Relations Facilitator

At The Lyric Theatre, Belfast

The Memory Project, Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd

File no: BC0125 (file 1 of 3)

TC Start: 02:10:21:03

Q: So maybe begin by telling me where you grew up and the kind of environment it was?

JIM: [02:10:27:18] I grew up in a housing estate in Londonderry, there were 4 or 5 streets all around, council houses, and it was probably a 100% protestant housing estate, so I grew up knowing everybody in and around there, and school was a 5 minute walk away, church was a 5 minute walk away, it was Claremont Presbyterian church... I grew up in a big family - there were 10 of us - now.... I'm number 9, I think, and my younger sister is number 10, so it was a big Presbyterian family and very old fashioned. [02:11:10:05] And my sister and I were the only two that were born in this new council house, prior to that my parents and eight children lived in a very small... a street called Bennett Street, sort of like two up, two down, outside toilets, and for most of my life growing up my father was unemployed after the. He was away in the second world war for a long time and came back I think around 1948/49 and from then on he was in and out of jobs, unemployed mostly while I was growing up. My mother, god bless her, she had ten children and she worked in shirt factories, different ones, she took cleaning jobs at night in order to provide for us all, and my older sisters, I have six older - no sorry, five older sisters - one younger, who would have helped out to look, to look after us as well. So it was... it was a happy enough childhood...y'know it was no different than anybody else's really in that area. [02:12:18:20]. And we didn't starve but we didn't have a lot and our clothes were mostly hand me down clothes, jumble sale clothes, all of that sort of stuff. But I grew up, went to school, the Model primary school - enjoyed that, enjoyed

particularly playing football and playing cricket (laugh) rather than academic stuff, and I went from there to the local technical college at... when I ... at that time I passed what was known then as the qualifying 11 Plus exam, and I had passed it, but I knew my parents couldn't afford to send me to the local Grammar school, which was Foyle College, so I opted for the Technical College which meant you didn't have to pay for books, for uniforms, for everything. So I had a technical education up to about 15 and a half, and I left . . . I left school with enough qualifications to get into an engineering apprenticeship so I did that and whilst I was doing the apprenticeship, I went to... and still attended the Tech on day release. [02:13:30:16] Engineering classes and night classes and ... the apprenticeship was a four year apprenticeship, and then I spent a further five years working in engineering for different firms and still attending night classes and that... so I got educated on a part time basis (laugh) more or less. And I had enough qualifications then, in engineering, to go to a Teacher Training College in Belfast, in Jordanstown, so I did that cos I wanted to go into teaching, I just had a - they say it's a vocation - I think it was for me, at that time. And I went into teaching then. So I taught in a Post Primary school for 25 years, fairly tough Post Primary school, students, pupils, from Protestant working class housing estates, and bringing all of their troubles into school [02:14:29:16] with them. It was set in a sort of a rural area, suburban area, initially it was a school that was built for 360 - about that amount - but with the drift of the population in Londonderry in the '70's, the school suddenly mushroomed - it exploded to over 700 pupils. There just wasn't room, so we had something like 13 mobile classrooms in the playground so we had no playground left, and that caused all sorts of problems then. And there was all sorts of problems going on at that time..... and..... 25 years in teaching and I decided that I wanted to try and do something different, so a redundancy came up in the school so I applied for it - voluntary redundancy, and came out of teaching and for a year - I think I didn't do anything really, for a year, just to get all that... out of my head [02:15:30:19] get my head cleared. And I then.... I thinkaye I went to Belfast again then, I did a training course with the BBC in Belfast, in Media studies, and did some work in Journalism and some work on.... local radio, that sort of thing, local newspapers. And while I was doing that.... I was in Radio Foyle at the time - someone phoned up and - I'm trying to think how I got into community relations work (laugh) somebody phoned up and said would you send Jim up to do a story - or something [02:16:08:16] ... with UNICEF ... the person, the Northern Ireland organizer of the United Nations Children's Fund was there.... so I went up and was chatting to her and she said y'know we're looking for an Education officer for UNICEF for Northern Ireland and with your background you might just be ideal for it (laugh) why don't you apply for it? So I said ok but it wasn't a full time - it was a part time and I was happy enough, I didn't want to work full time anyway so I did that and through that I got to know other people, other contacts, particularly people like Maureen Hetherington and Eamon Baker in 'Towards Understanding and Healing' and they said to me we're running a course in Towards Under ... would you like to attend? I said yeah, that sounds interesting so I'll do that. [02:16:59:02] So I did the initial course... on that.... liked it so much that then I did the Facilitators course, and from then on, I've I don't know for how many TUH courses I've facilitated, all around the

country. So that's the sort of shortened version of how I got to where I am today. And then, through I think TUH as well, I met up with Smashing Times then and I... thinking back... about 3 years they were looking for someone to go into schools with the performance in Donegal, so I went and did that [02:17:36:14] and here I am (laugh) today...

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TC Start: 02:17:55:05]

Q. Can you identify any parts of the performances and how useful are they for young people to see?

JIM: One thing I did notice with for instance....it's gone out of my head already (laugh) *Thou Shalt not Kill* with the performance of *Thou Shalt not Kill*, it's the love story that's involved in that, that strikes a chord, particularly with young girls I've noticed, and when you watch them and see how they react to it, they're really in to this love story....and then the horror of it that comes out at the end, when Eamon gets killed, and ... his fiancée is left then to grieve - I ... that's the sort of a message that, horrific though it may be, it has an impact I think. [02:19:32:16] Now that's only one thing... I'm trying to think of others as well, in the *Crossings* especially, Tom the part of Tom, when he gets involved in all that he gets involved in and then he skips across the border, and then he's really starting to think about what he's done, and the... horrible things that he's done, and the fact that he can't go back, and his father has died and his brother.... and he realises that he probably was responsible for his brother's death cos he taught him how to steal cars, and how to drive a car [02:20:15:02] that..... that feeling of remorse.... It's not really expressed as remorse, but I see it as remorse, and that comes across, I think, to young people - so that might be two things from those performances. . But I think the... powerful, dynamic performance of when you get the....the music, and the dance, and the flag protests, and everything that's in that, there's just so much in that, I think for young people, especially for young Protestant people, when they see that flag - initially they might think - oh flag protests, let's get out and y'know, attack the police..... but then when they realize suddenly that the police are knocking on their door, and they're taken to court [02:21:04:20] that's a salutary lesson for them, I believe. I mean, there's so much in all of that.... and then when they look at the horrible things that were done - the Enniskillen bomb was brought out..... it can't fail to have an impact.... yeah [02:21:25:10]

Q: Talk about the post show discussions – it's unusual for a theatre company to have the post-show discussion, the importance of the post-show discussions? [02:22:19:50] Is it relevant for young people? Are the shows relevant to the experiences of young people, from your experience?

[02:22:29:12] [Remember before you've talked about how with the flag protests when you go to work with young people in the community you're trying to keep them safe because they want to get involved in all of that because they're not actually thinking or anticipating what the future is, and then sometimes when something is presented in that way they can actually see Oh yeah, that is the reality of it. Is that of any use?]

JIM: [02:22:56:10] Yeah, I think After the show, the discussions between young people and between adults you know involving... it's always completely different, because you get a different perspective from the adults,some positive, some negative.....mostly positives, some could be negative - I'm thinking of Strabane (laugh) with young people it's... young people in schools that we've heard from, apart from the drama students that want to ask questions about y'know the performance, the script and all of that..... They have no experience of all that had happened, except for ones who have.... maybe lived through... or saw on television the young people involved in the flag protest. . attacking the PSNI, getting stuck in and thinking this is great, y'know it's good fun [02:23:59:06] we . . . especially during the summer time, in the Fountain – in the youth club - Jeanette Warke who runs it - she runs a fantastic programme of interventions during the Summer months to take the young people out of the estates, take them away on trips here there and everywhere, and also in the evenings - different activities to keep them within the youth club, to stop them going to flash point areas, where they might get involved - so that's the sort of work that's going on there. [02:24:30:00] The reaction of young people.... sometimes it's hard to gauge y'know but.... I know some people are good... some young people are good at hiding their feelings and their thoughts, and they'll say maybe, what they think you want to hear so you always have to be careful with them, but knowing that there's work to be done, there is work to be done....yeah [02:24:54:20]

Q: Anything else you want to say about the use in general of the arts in peace and reconciliation?

JIM: [02:25:13:06] The use of the arts ... in promoting reconciliation, I think is probably the most potent and powerful implement or strategy or whatever you would want to call it, to get across to people, I mean all of the arts, and I mean writing, poetry, singing, music, dance,.... obviously the performances - the acting, to portray, to show what happened during the Troubles, and to get that message across that what happened was awful.... and let's not.... do that again, and let's work with the young people, and try and get through to them y'know this is not the.....the way that adults live.... we've.... I've been thru all of that.... I've suffered that - I don't know if you want to know anything about that or....[02:26:20:04]

Q: Yeah.

JIM: One of the reasons really that I got involved I think, in reconciliation things, was ... shortly after... we had got married, and we lived in a flat at the top of Great James's Street in Londonderry which is just on the edge of the Bogside [02:26:39:11] and Caroline was pregnant at the time, and for days.... for whatever reason we had Army patrols walking up and down outside where the flat was, and Caroline had a craving for Mars bars (laugh) so she used to walk from the flat, the short distance to the corner shop and buy a couple of Mars bars to see her thru the day, maybe more! And this week in particular, this army patrol arrived, and they would stop - 4 on one side of the street, 4 on the other, and whether they were on observation or what or ... it was just a normal patrol or whatever, as she would pass by they would say hullo and being the person she is, she would say hullo, never thinking that there's anything wrong with this, being civil [02:27:30:01] and she'd come out with the Mars Bars the second day and the soldier said 'you wouldn't mind going into the shop and getting US Mars bars? And we'll give you the money, cos they won't serve us if we go in' that was the attitude at that time. So she did that, and each day, probably 3 maybe 4 days she did that, same time every day they would appear, she'd walk along, they'd give her the money, she'd go into the shop and come out and give them the Mars Bars and pass the time of day, until the last day when she went in, the girl in the shop said ' we're not serving you anymore, you've been watched and we've seen that you're fraternising with the soldiers, and you'll be got if you don't stop it'. Now, at that time, young women who were seen to be socializing with the soldiers were being taken out and what's known as 'Tarred and Feathered' [02:28:27:08] - tied to lampposts, head shaved and feathers, tar... so that was a very serious threat y'know, so we decided then we're going to have to move so, we reported this and we were re-housed under the Emergency Housing Act at that time, and shifted away out of the city, out to the suburbs, which was a complete shock for city people (laugh) she's suddenly... you're in a housing estate again, with not a regular Bus service or.... y'know so we had a whole lot to deal with.... but it was after that I began to realize, y'know, that, y'know, this isn't right, it's not good...we can't go on like this... so whilst I was going through my teaching career . . I was responsibility for.... I had responsibility for - it was a course known as Education for Mutual Understanding, so I had ...in charge of that.. in the school [02:29:29:07] which meant liaising and working with other schools to set up joint programmes, that we could get pupils from Catholic schools to come to our school and we would go to their school, and all of that sort of thing. And that was probably one of the other factors that got me to where I...(laugh) am today. [02:29:49:10]

Q: Was that successful? Bringing two schools together in the '80's?

JIM: [02:29:55:02] Yeah.... it was to an extent, for as long as the project would last, but after that there was still no contact, y'know so....it's hard to measure how successful it would have been cos you would be working say with the 4th year group in your own school and a 4th year group in the other school, and then bring them together to work together in a neutral venue, we did it through music, through writing, bringing in a song

writer to get them together, write and perform a piece of music in each school which ... which they did but.... after that y'know... where does it go from there. [02:30:38:08]

Q: And did you notice massive stereotyping by each group about the other?

JIM: [02:30:46:22] Obviously, yeah... yeah.... I remember in particular going to this... we had a great venue in the middle of the city for young people, and the group that I was taking across, were able to go without their school uniform, so they could go in their own clothes. Some of them turned up wearing football shirts (laugh) just to show what we are and you had to say to them 'well look it's your choice, you're 15, 16 years old but if you're going to demonstrate what your religion or your culture or tradition is then you might have to stand up for it if someone takes offence'. [02:31:31:17] So we would arrive, and then the other school would arrive maybe wearing football shirts of a different . . . but there's . . . y'know there's never any trouble because there were so many school teachers there - they were always under supervision but yeah, there was always a . . . a frisson between them y'know . . . But I'm sure to some degree that it would have helped in some way [02:31:57:09] but who knows?

24 November 2014

Interview with

Jim Arbuckle, Community Relations Worker

At The Junction, Towards Understanding and Healing, Derry/Londonderry

The Memory Project, Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd

TC Start: 01:33:53:19

Q: So children on the interface, I would assume in Belfast as well, they're experiencing still a level of sectarianism as strong as it ever was, or in a different way?

JIM: Well it's certainly in a different way because it's more localized and it's, it's not. . the violence that we grew up with, that we lived through even as adults, that our parents lived through. It's local and it's verbal abuse, physical abuse, sometimes incursions into the area from people who would attack property and people trying to do damage, that sort of, that's their experience of sectarianism. The young people in border areas I don't think, I can only think of one example working with a youth group in Lifford in Donegal where one chap, young, young man 18 years old, said he had to move out of Strabane because dissident Republicans were threatening him so he had to move and he was being threatened because of the activities of his father so you know that can, that sort of still happens yeah.

Q: But is there a disconnect between the parents experiences of The Troubles and what the youth. . . we'd have to again split it between those on the border versus the interface.

JIM: Mmm, yeah.

Q: Say the border, is there a disconnect between the parent's understanding of them trying to tell a story and kids trying to understand or are the kids even trying to understand?

JIM: I think when it's put before them, they don't understand in the way in which the performances, the performances have been, and maybe even some projects. . they wouldn't understand, they haven't experienced it, their parents will have experienced it and they know exactly what it is and what it's all about. A disconnect. .

Q: It's just cut, sorry Jim, we're just having a (technical) problem . . .

Q: I suppose what I'd be looking at is more of. . if parents are telling a story, if kids have no reference to be able to understand it, is that a problem from your experience, is that a problem of them being able to explain the depth of their hurt to the kids or do the kids just not understand and that's it?

JIM: If it's coming from their parents I think they would get a good understanding of it, if parents have suffered or experienced it in any way. How, how they take that on board, I'm not sure. . because I have heard in schools, in the border areas the young people are coming to it with a, an open mind, a mind that has come through the peace process as well and just, they just have no idea, no knowledge, do they have the same hurt their parents have? I know one chap in one school, came to us afterwards and said his parents had moved from Northern Ireland into the Republic because of the Troubles and he said 'my father has told me some of this stuff', but that's only one out of so many. If I go back to a specific area, say in the Fountain, young people will know, from their parents, from their aunts and uncles and will be fully aware of what happened...because all of the memories are there in that area. For example say the killing of William King very early on in the Troubles in a street fight, just up around the corner there, he was . . there was a riot going on between Nationalists and Unionists, he was kicked to death. There was a flute band was formed after that, the William King Memorial, in which lots of the young people and older people now play in that band, so they're experiencing the story of William King and that's in their psyche. William King was a Protestant and he was kicked to death by Catholics, and that's the way the story's told, you know.

Q: Does that indicate that the telling of a story is a good thing or a bad thing in your mind? In the experience of trouble and conflict?

JIM: Telling the story, I think depending on how it's told obviously, but it's always a good thing. I think the stories have to be told in respect to those who suffered, in respect to the victims. Their stories can't be airbrushed, and can't be put in a box and put away, they have to come out and they have to be told and it's not pretty, and, and we've heard a whole lot of that lately, in the news and everywhere else in Belfast and in Dublin and all over. It's not pretty, it's horrific, but it needs to come out, it needs to be told in a proper way.

Q: Why?

JIM: It's important that young people – when a performance is on and it's put to them this is what happened, this is a snapshot, this is what happened, it's horrific, will that lead to them saying we don't want that to happen again, those are the mistakes of the past, let's see if we can get a better way to resolve, excuse me, to resolve our differences or our political differences, religious differences. There has to be a way to doing that without getting involved in violence, I hope that, well I think that's the message that's coming out, that's being pushed towards them.

Q: And do you feel that theatre is a proper place to do it?

JIM: I think it's the best. And it doesn't necessarily have. . . theatre is, and it doesn't matter the location, whether it's in a theatre or if the theatre is taken to a community group, a local hall, a school, anywhere. I think theatre is important, because these things can be re-enacted in an honest sincere way so that young people can see, experience, hear what happened.

Q: Do you feel that plays have power, do they bring across an experience of drama or do they bring across an experience of Northern Ireland for people watching?

JIM: I think it's all of that, it's powerful. Some of the performances that I've seen, well all of them, have been powerful, the content, the story that they're telling, powerful, horrific in many cases and told in a way that it appears real. Now, I've seen people react, I've seen people go 'aahh', shocked, 'look at that, what happened there' and I've seen people silenced by it. Young people, it's always hard to tell at times that if you don't get a, a verbal response from them, if you don't get a big response from them you wonder did they take it on board but sometimes I feel like. . . they're shocked you know.

Q: What's your feeling of the post show discussion as a means of communication?

JIM: Once again it all depends on the audience You've got, sometimes it can go on, it can last for 45 minutes, an hour maybe because you're getting a good interaction, mostly from adults, you don't always get that from young people who maybe aren't as verbose or don't have the experience or are just for whatever reason. . . I think it's a

useful exchange and I think the theatre company Smashing Times learn from that as well, how the audience perceive the performance, is it good, bad, is it positive.

Q: Emm sorry we're back to the power of the play.

JIM: Yeah.

Q: To the post show discussion, because the post show discussions wouldn't be the end . . . wouldn't have a post show discussion after every play, it's a pretty unusual thing to do is it not?

JIM: I wouldn't know if it's unusual, I think it's vital, I think it's an excellent way of finding out how the audience perceive the performance, the message you're trying to get across, and that's whether it's to a big crowd in a theatre or a small crowd in an Orange hall or a church hall or in a school. Some performances we've had have been difficult with 200 pupils in an assembly hall, then you know to get any interaction going, it can be difficult. No I think it's important, its vital actually, rather than put on a performance and then leave it, and you don't know how people are affected either, you wouldn't want someone to be badly affected and then just cut off, without having an opportunity to state or to join in.

Q: Do you feel there's another step to be had after the experience, after the plays or after the storytelling?

JIM: It's like most projects that I've always been involved in particularly with schools, it's the follow up that's important, it can't always happen and doesn't always happen, to my mind it doesn't happen enough. But I think there should be a follow-up after the performance, come back within a reasonable time and talk to the young people again but I think there's an onus on the teachers and the schools as well, not to let the performance go. I think they should still be communicating with their students, pupils, what happened, how did it happen, what do you feel, there needs to be a follow up from their point of view.

Q: Does that happen in your experience?

JIM: I haven't experienced it yet, not yet. It's one of those things in schools, sometimes you go in and do a performance and that's it because it's end of term and it's a couple of hours out for the students and staff, hopefully that's not all the case, and hopefully it means a lot more to the young people than that, but . . .

Q: What's your understanding of the peace process, as in of the peace that exists today; do you feel there is one?

JIM: It's imperfect. It's certainly not a perfect peace, it's not what people voted for in the agreement, because there are still people, there are still armed groups in society who are hell bent on destruction and damage. It's the best we have, and as I always say, these young people that we know well, we've worked with, they've grown up in more or less in relative peace, in that they're not being bombed, no bombs no shootings, killings on a daily basis, but that doesn't mean it's a 100% peace. It needs worked at, it needs hard work and it needs the politicians in particular to be careful about what they say and what they do because their words can have a big effect on people.

Q: Do you feel this process is helping, what Smashing Times is doing, is that helping at all?

JIM: Well I have to think it's helping, yeah, yeah, because if we didn't have it, what would we have, what would we have? Any young people in schools around here, if you talk to them initially about the troubles or whatever, all they know . . . say for example we did the Hunger Strikers at one time, to them the Hunger Strikers are black and white photos in newspapers and textbooks or whatever. They don't really know or have any understanding so processes like Smashing Times, yeah, it has to have an effect, it has to be encouraged, it has to be promoted because it's a force for good so how could it be ignored or how could it be not progressed

Q: And finally are you hopeful of the future?

JIM: I'm always hopeful, yeah, yeah, I mean I, I see it, I know I've portrayed a couple of negative things as well, and I know say in Donegal, things are happening in Donegal that are sectarian and impact on the Protestant community there through the burning of Orange halls for example, which has happened fairly recently. But they've been getting support from the government in the Republic and from politicians, the people down there, that's important, that needs to happen but . . . I'm hopeful, yeah I'm encouraged.

Q: Is there a learning process then of what it is to get to reconciliation? Do people understand more what that means?

JIM: I mean there has to be a learning process in everything, yeah and particularly it has to come from a young age in schools in youth groups, in community groups, that we're all involved with, you know, that work has to go on, yeah, it's very important, it's so important that you can't, you can't just say oh forget about it, no no.

Q: That's it, thank you very much.

End of Interview