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**Interview with:**

**Olivia O'Hagan**

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

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**TC Start: 01:53:00:12**

Q: OK Olivia maybe you could start by telling me where you were born, grew up, the kind of family life you had?

**OLIVIA:** [01:53:19:18] Well I was born outside Portadown, 1953 and I'm one of 10 in the family and I'm the youngest of 10 so basically I was reared more or less by my sisters and brothers, and I was the youngest, and we had a very colourful and happy childhood, great parents and... they all were very keen for us to get educated and do well and be part of the bigger life, and also to travel. They also encouraged us to travel, so we did a lot of that and (01:53:59:17) then, then my parents died, my mother was 20 years younger than my father and... she died before him of course, and then my father died. My father died whenever I was about 19, no my mother died, my mother died whenever I was 19 but my father whenever I was about 28, 29, yeah. [01:54:28:05]

Q: And where did you travel as a family outside?

**OLIVIA:** [01:54:31:00] No, no, we never went on holidays, my father was a farmer and his season, for...the busy season for him would have been March until October, and we grew a lot of berryed fruits as well as... he went into mushrooms but very little dairy farming but basically he was a person who grew a lot of stuff and he was the first person to grow strawberries in and around the Portadown area. [01:55:02:05] And the first person to grow roses for Sam McGredy and you have the black rose that he introduced

and my father worked very strongly with him in partnership and that's, that was the environment I grew up in so it was lots of... fresh fruit and vegetables daily, and lovely fresh bread and fresh butter, we made our own butter and we slaughtered our own pigs and we used the bladder of the pig as a football and we had good, we had a great. . very happy memories of our childhood. [01:55:38:11] Very happy.

Q: And did all the children go to university?

**OLIVIA:** [01:55:42:11] And all of us went to university bar my 3 brothers. My, my two brothers did not go to university, 1 brother was told to go to university and he refused point blank, he said I'm staying on the farm and that was it. But the rest, all the girls, were all sent to boarding school and all sent to university, and if, if we didn't want to return then that was it, that was fine, it was no problem, just travel, get, get a life for yourselves and make more out of your life than just sitting around home, so. [01:56:16:08]

Q: Where did you move to after university?

**OLIVIA:** [01:56:21:03] So after university I went to work in...Chester, in the Health Service in Chester, so I worked there for 10 years and then I came home and, I came home about.... it was just after mommy died or while mommy was dead I was studying at university in Manchester and then I just stayed over there, after mommy died I just stayed over there. And whenever my sister wrote to me and told me to come home because Daddy was living on his own and that everybody else was married, I decided then that I would come home [01:57:01:01] and instead of Daddy dying, she died, at 43 years of age. [01:57:06:14] Very suddenly.

Q: Was it difficult to make the decision to come home considering the kinds of things that were happening in Northern Ireland?

**OLIVIA:** [01:57:15:20] Well it was it was... there was a lot, a lot, a lot of things that affected our family in a way, a number of people. . mistaken identities, they were shot dead for.... first cousins shot dead, and my sister, the one who died at 43, she was abducted and held at the Blackwater, until her husband drove a bomb to a pub that served soldiers. She was abducted by the IRA, [01:57:50:11] so she was held at gunpoint at the Blackwater river, and her husband was made drive a bomb to the pub and... whenever he got out of the car he shouted bomb and pushed it down the hill, and the bomb exploded, there was just a wheel left. And as soon as it was radioed through that the bomb had been safely left outside the pub, my sister was thrown into the Blackwater [01:58:20:00] but she didn't die, she managed to hold onto some weeds and then she got herself out of the Blackwater and her husband was lifted by the police and my sister was lifted by the police and they were held in the police station for 4 days. [01:58:41:16] And they were accusing them of deliberately planting the bomb even

though they hadn't planted it. But it was as a result of that, that I came home, and then my sister died. It was the traumatic experience that had on her because y'know they kept saying had they masks on? Y'know, did you know the identity of these people? Y'know the fear and the terror of driving that bomb which was 150...a 150lb bomb over 4 major ramps [01:59:16:06] past a police station, as well, but not going to the police station, going to a pub where - which had served British soldiers - that was the target and it didn't... it didn't go...it went off, but it went off down the street, nobody was hurt. But it was only shortly before she died, you know she used to have terrible nightmares, and they basically were held at gunpoint and somebody came into the room and said 'shoot them, [01:59:45:01] that's the easiest way to get rid of them, just shoot them' and they were, they're guilty'. And another detective stood in and said 'no they are not to be shot, they are innocent, you know these people have just come and hijacked them, they lived in an isolated area and they've just been hijacked and they're innocent and we're going to let them go'. [02:00:05:04] But her life was tortured after that, she had to move house, they took the battery out of the car at night, every night, in case somebody would do it again, they didn't put headlights into their car in case somebody wanted to drive the car and would push them to putting in the battery but they had taken the headlights out, their life was just a sheer and utter misery. [02:00:27:18] Total misery.

Q: And were they targeted simply because of where they lived?

**OLIVIA:** [02:00:34:00] They were very, very, it was very easy and very convenient for them to nip across the border, they, they were only a stone's throw from the border, and there was a bridge and that, it was a footbridge and they could run over the footbridge and my sister was held at gunpoint until the bomb was detonated and then they left her lying there and off they went across the bridge. [02:00:59:12]

Q: And at that time there would have been no social services or no posttraumatic services?

**OLIVIA:** [02:01:06:04] Oh no there was absolutely nothing, except to say that y'know they, they were always fearful that the men would come back and shoot them because they didn't know what they had told in the police station. They were held there for 3 days in separate rooms and interrogated, y'know they weren't allowed to sleep or anything, so they were terrified of the men coming back to shoot them in case they had told any stories. [02:01:31:22] So, one hand you had the pull from the police to say 'yes you are guilty and you are definitely guilty', and you had the other pull, 'these men could come back and shoot us', so it was a terrible situation, in that they were in, and 3 years later my sister died with a brain haemorrhage. She just could not cope with the...strain of it and he equally couldn't. I mean he didn't, his life just turned around, he just sat, he just stopped farming and he just sat in the house and did nothing and he was, he was a young man. I mean they were only in their 40's [02:02:09:09] and they

had no family, they were just in their 40's, they were just the prime of their life and it was just... taken away from them y'know, just the aftermath of it was horrendous.  
[02:02:20:15]

SOUND: Could I get that point again, the 3 years later comment?

**OLIVIA:** [02:02:41:24] So it was, it was shortly after that, it was 3 years later actually that my sister passed away, she had a brain haemorrhage. She was with me that day, I was very fond of her, she was the second oldest in the family so she would have bought me my first suit for my interview, and y'know she was like, with mommy dead, she was like my second mother and, she was down with me that day and we were having fun and y'know trying to get our lives back to as normal as it could be [02:03:12:11] and she went back to her house that night - of course you have to remember they had to move house, so they went across the border to a house they had across the border which wasn't far from the other house but you had to walk across the bridge to it and she filled her hot water bottle, she wasn't feeling all that well, she took headaches and she went to bed and died with a brain haemorrhage. So it was, y'know it was very traumatic for all of us, all of us, so. [02:03:41:08]

Q: Did they ever find the guys that did it?

**OLIVIA:** [02:03:46:19] Apparently from what I could gather, they blew themselves up maybe 8 or 9 years, I suppose if truth be told, they did know who they were because they didn't have masks on and whenever they were interviewed by the police they said they had masks on because they did not want to say who they were because then they would have brought them through another. y'know .... Y'know identity programme so they didn't want to. So apparently, from what I could gather, the men blew themselves up in a bomb that they were doing another mission with. . about . . I think it was about 10 years later. [02:04:26:03] So yeah....

Q: As a family were you ever asked, other than that situation, were you ever asked to be involved?

**OLIVIA:** [02:04:35:01] No we weren't, we were never asked to be involved and we weren't really very strongly minded, we, we were reared in a very cross community environment so none of those issues would have ever been, ever have come up, and we were never pushed to do anything, even though. . Like if you had bought a farm of land and you might have got shots through your window for buying it from a Protestant and you now owned it. [02:05:07:05] And even though you may have got your window's shot through. . you, you sort of thought well, it doesn't really affect . . we were, we were very hard working and I suppose my father was a businessman and he didn't see the need to y'know bias, to give us any biases because he really, heavily depended on the Protestant community to sell his strawberries and his soft fruits and his fresh fruits

and his cabbages and all of that, to that section of the community because they were a lot wealthier and they had a lot more money than us, or that's what we perceived y'know. So, we were never encouraged to do anything like that, and then with us all going to boarding school, most of our good years [02:05:52:22] were in boarding school, and then you came out and then you were, go and get educated, so the only ones then that were at home really to run the farm were my 3 brothers and they. . they never, never got involved. [02:06:07:00] We didn't had a real reason to get involved except for we just knew, we just knew that it wasn't right to, we just felt it wasn't our job to do that, it wasn't. But living in that area, it was tricky because y'know, you would see the people that would have been helping you with the hay during the day, maybe with a shotgun that night, maybe planning to shoot you. [02:06:35:15] You know my brother woke up one night and his next door neighbour had a gun and he was about to shoot him, and he saw him, and he ran off, just because of something maybe that happened in the area, y'know like we might have bought land and we might have y'know maybe. . There was one other occasion [02:06:58:02] where my father bought a house and he was told not to, not to buy it and then that night there were shots put through the window, y'know. Or these men stopping you along the road and saying we know who you are and we're going to get you, but it was, it was very difficult, it was very difficult times and you didn't know who to trust so you just, you just kept yourself to yourself and didn't, didn't bother. . didn't.... and y'know ..... you didn't get angry whenever you heard of all the people being shot dead, you just thought when is this ever going to end? [02:07:34:04] Will we be next? We are going to be next. Cos you did feel very vulnerable, even if you were in a car at night and you were driving along a lonely road, they could jump out. And they did jump out 'where are you going, who, who are you?'. You knew exactly, whenever you would say the name, they would say ' and where are you going now? And who are you? And where are you from? And who's your mother? And who's your father? And they would just go on and on and on and you were standing there totally, totally at their mercy [02:08:06:16] and you knew, and the gun wasn't far from you, that they could have shot you. [02:08:14:03]

Q: Would you have felt protected by the British Army when they came?

**OLIVIA:** [02:08:54:09] Right, so when the British Army came, I didn't feel any more protected, you just did not feel protected at all in any manner of means because you were a very vulnerable person, you were as vulnerable walking down the street where a bomb could've gone off as you would have been in a car at night. And where we lived, very lonely roads, y'know, high hedges and you could see them, you could see the Army and the military moving around the area and your heart just stopped whenever you were stopped in the car, and you know it would have happened very, very often, you were continually stopped, [02:09:41:01] searched, get out of the car, where are you going, who are you with? Y'know, who's , who are your . . your back . . who are your passengers in the back? Get out, do the search of the back car, the boot, do the engine, go underneath the car, everything, and that was routine. And then you sort of got into

the swing of it and into the way of it and you just, you just, you just felt yourself very vulnerable. [02:10:08:09] As opposed to being protected.

Q. Now, how have things changed?

**OLIVIA:** [02:10:16:08] So things have changed, probably things have changed for the better in that you don't have the searching, you don't have all the army searches, you don't feel as vulnerable on the road, you don't, you're not scared of. . in the car on your own at night, you're not scared of a car driving behind you and maybe following you for the guts of your journey y'know, and even, so you feel much more at ease... and less vulnerable. [02:10:58:15]

Q: Would you have gone to the 12th celebrations?

**OLIVIA:** [02:11:25:08] I would never have gone to the 12th celebrations, never, simply because I wouldn't, well first of all, fear, because your own side would not support you, and also if the, if the Orangemen had a known you were a catholic you don't know what they would have done with you, it wasn't worth the risk. You wouldn't even watch it on the television, and they used to walk past your house, your door y'know. They used to walk down the road and you just closed the door and you never looked out you just didn't want any interaction with them whatsoever. [02:12:05:15] So that it would not put you in any jeopardy or any fear of them coming around for retaliation, that was definitely a no. [02:12:14:13]

Q: What do you think the future is going to hold for Northern Ireland?

**OLIVIA:** [02:13:32:18] The future for Northern Ireland is... not going to change in my lifetime, very much . . but it's a very, very . . we're going at a snail's pace and that's the way it will go and I think that's the only way it can go because, y'know, you just can't turn it around overnight. Cos there has been so much that has gone on and every now and again whenever it raises its head you sort of say to yourself, you know what, we're not really all that far, far on but we're going at a snail's pace and that snail's pace is for the better and for the future and it's much more positive than it has been. I mean there's a lot of good things have happened and yes, but it'll be at a snail's pace and it won't be in my lifetime. [02:14:28:06] Like for example a united Ireland won't be in my lifetime. [02:14:32:12]

Q: Would you like to see a United Ireland?

**OLIVIA:** [02:14:34:00] I don't see what advantages there going, there would be, to me, a United Ireland, I probably would say maybe, y'know you're maybe stronger as a country going together but we are only such a small piece of that island, I don't, I don't really see any.... I just see we are so small, does it really make a difference whether you are a

united Ireland or not? [02:15:03:12] I don't, don't see any benefit, I don't see any benefit that we would gain from it. [02:15:09:15]

Q; Can you talk a little about the arts and how being involved in drama involved in cross border, cross community stuff?

**OLIVIA:** [02:15:19:23] Well the drama and the cross community stuff, was a great outlet, for myself who had just come back from working in Chester and, to me it was a great opportunity to get into different communities and to be accepted by ALL communities because once certain people hear your name or know who you are or where you're from, then they make the assumptions oh they're. . they box you....they box you off but being in a, by being in the drama facilitation, it sort of releases all those tensions, releases the tensions from the people, the cross community that you're working with. And you all realize, after a while, we're all on the same level, we're all on the same playing field [02:16:14:09] and nobody really wants to upset anybody and everybody has a story to tell. So it has been a great release of, your thinking, it has really helped in your creativity and looking at, at different ways and also not to be as judgmental y'know. You could have been very judgmental if you have been in single, but now that you're sort of working across all disciplines and all nationalities and all. . taking all . . everybody on board, to me it has given a great sense of balance to your own perception of people and makes you less opinionated and gives you a better judge . . less judgmental. [02:17:03:14]

**End file [02:17:12:23]**

**End of Interview**