



Video Story Transcript

In Belfast

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7dVtHJQHHQ>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

This is Loren Niemi.

In 2005 and 2007, every time I go to Belfast, and I've been to Belfast a couple of times, it's always the same thing. I'm always introduced the same way. I'm introduced as, "This is our American friend." And the first time it happened, I was kind of curious about why, or why that particular greeting. And they said, "Well, it's a way of sidestepping the dance." And I realized that, when upon observation, that in fact, in every conversation in Belfast, the first few minutes, there's this gentle probing. No one really wants to ask directly. But there's this little probing about, where do you live or where did you go to school? Or, you know, and it's all about geography. What they really want to know is, are you Catholic or Protestant? And geography tells you whether you're Catholic or Protestant, most of the time. And what they really want to know is, not only are you Catholic or Protestant, but, but where you are in relationship to the history and the nuance of the troubles?

Thirty-seven years of war based on religion and, as they say, 10 years of waging peace. And that's what they call it, "waging peace." And still no government they trust. And every conversation is about the same thing. It all begins the same way. Are you Catholic or Protestant? Now, me, I'm standing there and I'm looking at the city. And what I'm seeing is a city that pretty much looks the same regardless of where you are. And people who very much look the same, you know. They sound the same. They, they do the same jobs. They, they wear the same clothes. I cannot tell the difference between Protestant and Catholic.

But it's interesting. I'm looking at a street. And on each side of the street, there are three story brick, row houses. Now, in some neighborhoods, it's real clear because there are murals on the walls, right. Bobby Sands

and the Hunger Strikers. Well, that's an IRA, Catholic neighborhood. Or the end of a row of flats, you, you get, um, the Provos with their rifles and their masks. And you go, oh, this is a Protestant neighborhood. But most of the time it's more subtle. You have to look at things like the curbs. Orange curbs in the Protestant neighborhoods and, and green curbs in the Papist neighborhoods, you know. And what I mean, is one side of the street is orange and the other side of the street is green. And these are not wide streets. So, sometimes when I would be asked, directly, eventually someone would say, ""Well, are you Catholic are or you Protestant?"

You know, I would say, "I'm Buddhist."

And one guy he looks at me and there's a pause. And then he says, "Well, would that be a Catholic Buddhist or Protestant Buddhist?" And we would laugh and it would be funny. It would be funny...except for the suffering and the death. Because that's what I had come to Belfast for was to, you know, work on the reconciliation. To work on hearing the stories of suffering and death. And it made no difference whether you are Catholic or Protestant. There was suffering and death on both sides.

And when you hear the stories, when they all come out, when you've got a roomful of people and you get down to, "How did you survive? What did you do?" You know, we find the common humanity. Every story might begin, or every introduction, might begin with, "Are you a Protestant or a Catholic?" But if there's any hope for the future, if there's any hope for reconciliation, it can't end there.