

TWO WOMEN'S JOURNEYS: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AFTER SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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1 INTRODUCTION

For more than 40 years I have worked in the field of sexual violence, and while not exclusively so for all of this time, it has nonetheless always been there. Sexual violence in all its multidimensions has always been part of my professional life – to a greater or lesser extent – and that does not seem to want to end any time soon. From my first child sexual abuse ‘case’ as a young Irish social worker in Brixton in 1976 to issues involving sexual harassment on campus and online child exploitation, with which I am concerned today, my professional life has involved almost every aspect of sexual violence – legal, social, therapeutic, organisational, research and policy – and for most of that time from all perspectives simultaneously. The work has also involved the full 360 degrees concerning multiple parties all together: victims, perpetrators, both sets of families, criminal justice systems and professionals, media, politicians, policy makers, communities, the Catholic Church (Keenan, 2012) and more latterly the film industry (www.themeeting.org). Sexual violence in its many dimensions seems to seek me out, and it is in this context too that I also first came to work with Ivo Aertsen when he supervised a Daphne-funded research project on *Integrated Approaches to Sexual Violence: the Role of Restorative Justice*, led by Estelle Zinsstag and myself (Zinsstag and Keenan, 2017).

In this tribute article to the work of Ivo Aertsen, we will begin by outlining Marie’s work in the area of sexual violence and illustrate developments in Marie’s thought over this time. We will conclude by offering the perspective of Ailbhe, a young woman who suffered a sexual assault and her journey towards restorative justice and getting her life back.

2 FIRST-WAVE THINKING: THERAPY AND REHABILITATION FOR VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS

We all have our individual trajectories in how we come to know what we know and privileged what we do, and my professional journey in the sexual violence field was no different. When I first got involved in the work of responding to sexual violence, I believed that once the safety and protection of children was secured through the mechanism

of state legislation and child protection procedures, what was next in the order of importance was to establish therapy and advocacy services for victims. In the 1970s and 1980s, this is where I focused my energy: helping victim survivors to heal (Bass and Davison, 1988; Herman, 1992). I offered individual, group and family therapy sessions for victims and ran bioenergetic workshops and residential healing weekends for them, in which all could be said and 'discharged' in the safety of a supportive group and all could be reclaimed. That was the theory. Gestalt techniques using 'the empty chair' to 'confront' offenders also formed part of the methodology.

In doing this work it didn't take long before I realised that most perpetrators of sexual violence and abuse have multiple victims, and it soon occurred to me that in order to avoid more victims, we needed to stop perpetrators from re-offending, and to stop potential perpetrators from becoming such in the first instance. It was clear that the best way to do this was through a combination of therapeutic interventions and criminal justice mechanisms, and I became an advocate for the 'Stop It Now' campaign (www.stopitnow.org.uk). In the late 1980s and 1990s this became the focus of my work.

In the late 1980s I worked in an Irish prison and developed interventions for sex offenders, based on the work of Groth and Birnbaum (1979) and Marshall, Anderson and Fernandez (2000). I did a study on men who rape and therapeutic conversations with them (Keenan, 1994, unpublished). In the early 1990s I was one of three people who developed a community-based treatment programme for sex offenders in Ireland (The Granada Institute), also influenced by the work of many researchers and practitioners in the sex offender field (Marshall et al., 2000; Ward & Stewart, 2003) but with a narrative and systemic overlay, influenced by the work of Michael White in Australia (White & Epston, 1990) and Art Fisher in Nova Scotia, both of whom helped with my narrative training (Keenan, 1998). I visited sex offender programmes in the United States, Canada, Australia, Nova Scotia and the UK and became an active member of the American Association for the Treatment of Sex Offenders (ATSA) and the International Association for the Treatment of Sex Offenders (IATSO), attending their annual conferences and learning from international colleagues. At 'The Granada', as it came to be known, we offered group and individual therapy for sex offenders as core, therapy for victims who wished for this, testimony and witness to courts as required, accountability meetings for the accused clients,¹ family therapy for families, victim meetings with the offender and support groups for family members and friends. We did residential workshops for clients and the women in their lives on multiple themes.

1 Accountability meetings were based on the idea that all members of a particular client system needed to be accountable; clients in treatment needed to be accountable to the people in their lives, their support people; in the case of clergy, their bishops needed to be accountable for the actions they were taking and therapists needed to be accountable to the client and client system. Accountability meetings took place every few months, in which all came together to 'be accountable' in dialogue and action.

As coordinator of the treatment programme, I took the position that therapists working with men who had perpetrated sexual violence and abuse had also to work with victims as part of their work too – to keep us ‘honest’ and ‘grounded’ – and lessen the risk of ‘forgetting’ or minimising the horrors of sexual violence when we were largely engaging with men who had sexually offended who were truly otherwise kind and ordinary men. When working with victims, the opposite did not apply, but I always ensured that therapists working with victims were fully knowledgeable of the strategies that sex offenders employ when sexually offending as well as the dynamics of sexual violence and the impact of trauma, in order to work effectively with victims. This is what I continue to teach students today (Keenan, 2018).

An interesting feature of the work of ‘The Granada’ was our work with Catholic clergy who had sexually offended. This work also involved therapeutic engagement with victims of clergy, Church leaders and hierarchy and a myriad of canonical lawyers and theologians, extending right to the Vatican. The work was both global and local, historical and contemporary and it was as long as it was broad. Sexual abuse by Catholic clergy was firmly on the social, political and moral agenda in Ireland in the mid-1990s, and we at ‘The Granada’ were in the thick of it. Historically while offending clergy had been moved to a new parish or sent out of the country to the United States or the United Kingdom for treatment, now they were sent to us. The ‘cover-up’ by Church leaders was also beginning to emerge, and they came to ‘The Granada’ too. The media camped outside the treatment centre, hoping to photograph accused clergy coming in and out. We were on every talk show in the country trying to make sense of what we knew and what we were learning. We wrote policy documents, best practice guides and gave workshops on everything from celibacy to secrecy. We walked a narrow cliff-edge of legal and ethical surveillance. I undertook a study on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, a gender, power and organisational cultural perspective, and wrote everything I knew (Keenan, 2012). Tragically we buried clergy and victims who took their own lives as the intensity of the situation was unbearable for them. Today from Chile to Hungary as this problem reveals itself in these countries too, the work and research of the Irish girl in the land that was formerly referred to as the most Catholic Country in the world (Blanchard, 1954) continues to be called upon.

3 SECOND-WAVE REFLECTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF JUSTICE

In the early 2000s, as my work became primarily focused on research and teaching (with a small amount of continuing practice with victims and perpetrators of sexual violence and their families), the question of justice and how it is experienced by victims and offenders (Keenan, 2014) and how it can be measured by academics became a key concern. This theme of course was also on the minds of other theorists and practitioners (see

for example Daly, 2017; Koss, 2006; McGlynn, Downes & Westmarland, 2017). Daly in particular argued for the need to build a body of evidence that could assess and compare different justice mechanisms in response to sexual violence and offered one way of doing this in the case of victims, using a Victimisation and Justice Model, which she had developed (Daly, 2011, 2017). She argued convincingly for me that different victims have differing justice needs and interests and no one approach will satisfy all. Thus, she suggested we needed to understand victims' justice interests more specifically so that we could develop tailor-made justice solutions for them rather than offering a one-size-fits-all justice remedy. The same could be considered in the case of offenders.

The Victimisation and Justice Model proposed by Daly comprises three components that must be analysed when trying to respond adequately to victims of sexual crime: (1) the context of the victimisation, (2) the possible range of justice mechanisms that could be made available to them and (3) victims' justice needs and interests. All three can be computed in a sophisticated template to arrive at the most suitable approach or approaches to justice for individual victims. A similar template could be applied to offenders. While the model is somewhat complex and requires a paper all on its own (Daly, 2017) here I will briefly summarise it in relation to victims.

First the context in which the sexual victimisation occurs needs to be specified and charted, on the assumption that the context of the crime may influence the victim's experience and the resultant needs that will arise. These contexts extend from a stranger offending alone to individuals using their position of authority in a family, or in an institution to offend, to offending by well organised groups or gangs. The second column of the Model identifies the range of justice mechanisms including those associated with *conventional* criminal justice (such as criminal prosecution, trial, sentencing, giving a victim impact statement) as well as those now with *innovative* criminal justice (such as victim offender mediation, restorative conferences, restorative circles or reparation agreements). Some victims will require access to a number of these justice mechanisms depending on the third column in the Model; their justice needs and interests of which Daly and others (Keenan, 2014, 2017, Koss, 2006) identify six: participation, voice, validation, vindication, offender accountability and child and adult protection. These terms and concepts need to be explicitly specified in detail in order to advance the evidence base for empirically comparing and demonstrating the potential of the different mechanisms in different circumstances and situations.

I was and am totally persuaded by this argument and have been working away in this vein for the past number of years. However, as the gulf between what the conventional criminal justice system seemed to promise and what it could actually deliver for victims continued to emerge, my interest in additional justice mechanisms for victims continued to grow.

I began to see that at its core, the criminal justice system was established to ensure a fair trial for an accused, to gather and test the state's evidence against an accused, to

punish wrongdoing and to rehabilitate offenders (CIJ, 2014; Keenan, 2014). Like a slow dawning, I began to realise that the criminal justice system was not established to directly address the harm caused to victims. This became very clear the more cases I experienced. So did the realisation that the underlying concerns of the criminal justice system for due process and a fair trial for accused persons result in a criminal trial format that is highly adversarial, extremely strict on the kinds of evidence that can be adduced by the prosecution against the accused and the evidential threshold on the prosecution is to prove guilt 'beyond reasonable doubt'. It became increasingly clear that despite many improvements in the criminal justice system that were being applied in cases involving sexual violence, the fact remained that the criminal justice system was not directly about doing right by the victim, particularly victims of sexual crime, but rather about prosecuting the offender and protecting the community. The needs and views of victims were largely irrelevant to this core dynamic, and for many victims of sexual crime, the criminal process was an abstract, institutionalised and depersonalised procedure that failed to take their interests into account as they became a witness in the state's case and their role being limited to simply that (Christie, 1977: 5).

I wondered if the criminal trial format as we experienced it in Ireland was fit for purpose at all and I continue to wonder this. It leaves little space for the personal account of the victim's experience and his or her trauma as a result of the assault albeit that the victim impact statement offers victims some direct input into the process, if somewhat limited. With the hostile environment of courts, the gruelling cross examination of witnesses that occur and the myriad of rape myths that victims endure (see Gillen, 2018), it is little wonder that some scholars talk about 'secondary victimisation' by the criminal justice process itself (McDonald & Tinsley 2011: 63) and that some victims have described it as a form of 'secondary rape' (Parkinson, 2010: 3). Apart from the longer-term goal of campaigning for significant changes in how criminal justice applies in cases of sexual violence, something else had to be done. This is where restorative justice came on the horizon in earnest for me.

4 **THIRD-WAVE COMMITMENT: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**

In 2011 I began a research study on restorative justice after sexual violence in an Irish context (Keenan, 2014) and in 2012 I undertook a Daphne-funded project on restorative justice after sexual violence with Ivo Aertsen as supervisor and Estelle Zinsstag as co-principal investigator (Zinsstag & Keenan, 2017). I also began to get requests to facilitate restorative justice meetings and restorative circles during this time, and I continued to undertake additional specific training for this work. However, one extraordinary event also occurred about this time, which I will briefly share.

I received an email at the university on a day in 2013 from a young woman who requested a meeting with me. She told me that I didn't know her but that I had trained her sister as a social worker. She said when she told her sister what she wanted to do her sister suggested she contact me. Her name is Ailbhe Griffith. We met on the evening before I went to Leuven to begin the Daphne-funded restorative justice research with Ivo Aertsen and Estelle Zinsstag. I told them about this amazing woman when I arrived in Leuven. This is Ailbhe Griffith's story in her own words.

5 SHE DIDN'T WANT AN APOLOGY; SHE WANTED HER LIFE BACK

There is one man alive in this world today that I have met only twice in my life in the most opposing of circumstances – once, when he violently sexually assaulted me and the other, when we sat on opposite sides of a round table wishing each other a successful future. This is why I am writing here – to tell you about this journey, to inform you of how I got from point A to point B. Above all, however, to let you know why it was so important for me to go back to where it all began, and it all began with him, in order to really gain the closure that I desired for so very long.

I would consider the journey that I have undertaken to be a cycle of healing. It began several years ago on one particularly fateful night when a man followed me, physically attacked me, sexually assaulted me, repeatedly choked me and threatened to kill me. Within those moments, that felt like an eternity, I believed that there was a significant chance my life was about to end. The following months and indeed years I was submerged in the depths of post-traumatic stress. I was deeply depressed, and I kept repeating and repeating and repeating the assault in my mind. I couldn't stop it. After all, what was the point of thinking about anything else? My mind couldn't process the information; my body couldn't process the sensations, so I was just stuck there. I cannot even begin to convey the hell what that is. I don't use the term *hell* lightly, but I couldn't imagine a more hellish place than post-traumatic stress disorder. Every aspect of my life, from my physical and mental health to my personal relationships, was affected. It had consumed me in my entirety.

Considering how the criminal justice system operates, certainly in Ireland, it would be fair to say that the outcome of this case in which I was the 'witness' was positive in terms of the sentence he received. Additionally, I found it therapeutic to read my victim impact statement out in court where I could say directly to him, as he was present in the courtroom, just how difficult it was for me to live with this experience. I recall feeling intensely satisfied that this man, who had taken away my power and personal autonomy would now, for the first time, hear my voice and what I had to say about his actions, regardless of whether he actually cared or not. As the sentence was passed, I felt that the state was acknowledging that I had been wronged by this man and I can certainly say that this was

a good and a necessary feeling. It appeared to me that as far as the judge, the police, the barristers, the solicitors and even those close to me were concerned – justice had been done. For me however, the full extent of justice, in the manner I consider it to be, was a long way off – although I didn't know it then.

When I really reflect on it, my desire to speak to this man began even before he was sentenced. I attended every court appearance there was prior to the actual sentencing much to the surprise of the police involved who didn't think I needed to be there, and they told me this. For me, it was essential to be there as my mind and life was consumed by what had taken place and I needed to witness something happening that would validate this. At one particular court appearance, I recall seeing him afterwards in the carpark as I sat in my car. He was standing on the road speaking to his solicitor. I honestly couldn't believe that he was able to do this – speak to another human being. But I then realised something quite important, the reason he could do this was because he was actually a human. I began to think that if he was capable of speaking to another human being, then why could I not speak to him?

Although my life progressed and I had new life experiences totally unrelated to this one, the desire I felt to confront this man did not diminish; in fact, it grew and became more prevalent in my mind. When I moved back to Ireland following a period of living abroad, it was approaching the time when I knew he was going to be released from prison. Although I had a young child to look after, which occupied much of my time and energy, I would still imagine encountering him somewhere outside when he was going to be released. I pictured running up to him and letting him see how I was, to show him that I was not defeated and that

I understood now what he was, and to tell him that I want to hear an explanation from his own mouth. When he was released from prison, I tried to cover up this desire by playing the fearful victim. I wasn't completely playing the role, as I did still have fear but I wasn't being authentic. I knew then that this hadn't ended for me, although he was out of prison; I needed for something to manifest. I needed for something additional to happen.

Slowly, I began to imagine sitting face-to-face with him, the human that had impacted so enormously on my life and my perception of reality. Could I ever accept that he was a human? I began to think that I just might. An interesting thing about humans is that they are much less scary than monsters. Monsters are things that we fear greatly from a very young age. Fear of monsters can control us; fear of humans is much less likely to.

To say that most of my family were confused by and dismissive of this fantasy that I had of meeting this man when I very occasionally 'confessed' it would be a vast understatement. However, I was very fortunate to have one sister who confessed to understanding why I might be talking about doing such a thing. My sister studied to become a social worker and one day during one of my 'moments of fantasy' she mentioned that she had attended a few lectures of Marie Keenan's in University College Dublin. At one of

these lectures she recalled seeing a documentary of a woman in England who had been raped by a man and this woman had discussed her motivations for engaging in a restorative justice programme with him. My sister was somewhat surprised that our feelings and motivations overlapped quite significantly. This was the first time I had considered that perhaps it was, after all, restorative justice that I was seeking. She suggested that I contact Marie to see if I could potentially attend some counselling sessions with her on the basis that she may understand why I would wish to meet with him. At that stage, I didn't believe that it would be in any way possible for me to engage in such a process, as I had never heard, or considered, that it was even on the agenda of any of the state agencies involved in criminal justice for victims of sexual violence. Back then, the best I hoped for was that I would finally meet a therapist with an understanding ear, who perhaps would be able to assist me more than by suggesting that I imagine this man in the room with me and talk to 'an empty chair'. For me, that was never enough.

It was a very interesting experience meeting Marie for the first time as I recall that she was attending an international meeting on restorative justice for victims of sexual violence the very next day. She said to me the purpose of the meeting was to raise questions about whether even after a conviction and a prison sentence there is something else that a victim might need or look for in order to heal. I indicated that I was living proof that in some instances the answer is most definitely yes. I told her about my own situation and I felt, for the first time, very comfortable in disclosing my motivations with another person. To my ultimate surprise, we ended the meeting by her indicating that she would assist me in seeking a meeting with this man. I recall having a physical reaction to what she said, as I felt something heavy on top of me suddenly begin to lift.

To summarise the next year and a half of my life is somewhat challenging as it entailed much effort to even initiate a process with the offender in my case before any actual preparation work took place. There was no dedicated restorative justice organisation or agency that we could approach so Marie contacted the Probation Service as it seemed to be the most logical step to take due to the fact that we thought he might under their post-release supervision, which he was. They agreed to take this process forward and after several months the offender was finally asked whether he was willing to participate. There is no doubt that this period was a rollercoaster of emotions for me as he had initially agreed and then retracted his agreement. By sheer luck, this man had another change of heart and agreed to hear more about the process. My case was then passed on to an organisation that the Probation Service use to outsource their restorative justice cases to. Before the facilitators met with the offender to explain this process to him, they of course, wanted to hear about my motivations. It would be fair to say that dealing with sexual crimes in the context of a restorative justice meeting was new even to them, so I explained what was motivating me to seek a meeting as the following:

The point for me in meeting with this man was to seek an end to my suffering, to seek an end to my perpetual state of disempowerment and to seek closure from all of the negativity that had blighted my life for many years.

I wanted to see and experience this man as a human, simply because I knew at a mental level that he was one. How could I ever stop fearing him if he was this monster? How could I ever let go of my anger, my seething anger for him if I could not see his humanity? If I had permitted myself to live the rest of my life fearing a 'monster' who existed out there, ready to attack and kill me at any time, then I felt that I was just engaging in, what I deem to be, self-victimisation. Obviously, it didn't take much to identify at an intellectual level that, based on the crime he had committed, he must have been a deeply flawed or damaged human being, and if I could witness this myself then perhaps I would be able to match this cognitive understanding with my emotional state. In this way, I would be in a position to switch my feelings of fear and the residue of anger into something much more positive for me. Additionally I had come to the realisation that all of the negative feelings that I had for such a long time, when I thought back to what occurred, were completely useless and in fact a burden on me. I began to understand that if I retained these negative feelings then I could never have the closure that I wanted. I needed to see him as a human to let go of my negativity towards him because I know that it is impossible to forgive a monster.

I wanted him to see that I was a human too. I knew that if he sat opposite me, seeing me in this light would be unavoidable. I didn't believe that, in his mind, he had ever seen me as a human and in order to move on from this event, I needed him to acknowledge that I am not just a representation of something that he hates or that angers him, but a real live person with a past and future. It was also vital for me that he knew that I was not permitting my fear to control me any longer – and therefore he would realise, at some level, that he had no control any longer.

Thirdly, I wanted to let this man know how I had experienced his assault on me and the full implications of this event on my life. I knew he had been physically present when I described the effects in the courtroom less than one year after the incident, but I knew he had not heard the overarching impacts and, as he was staring at the floor for the whole duration of that court session, he wasn't seeing me, the human, saying it. I wanted him to hear about the fear and shock I felt as he assaulted me; I needed him to know how confused I was about his rage towards me; I felt it was necessary for him to know that he never succeeded in humiliating me – not for one second, by his sexual assault of me. I wanted him to be aware of how a victim of sexual violence becomes a piece of physical evidence after such an assault and how de-humanising that experience is. I wanted him to hear me speak about the post-traumatic stress disorder, the depression, the eating disorders, the shift in my perception of reality – all of it. I was never concerned about whether he empathised with me in terms of this impact; all I wanted was for him to hear me say those words and that the knowledge of this impact was stored somewhere

within his brain, even if he was emotionally unaffected by it. For me, this was vital, as I truly believed that I could only let go if I honoured my suffering in this way, by ensuring that the person who triggered it, at the very least, knew what he had done.

Fourthly, I felt compelled to let this man know how I had made a decision some time back to take the most positive out of this experience. This is not because I wanted him to feel that he had helped me in some way, but rather I hoped that he would see that I had chosen not to be defeated. For me, it was just as important to convey these positives to him as it was to describe the negatives.

Finally, I had an acute need to complete that fragmented picture in my mind with the remaining jigsaw-pieces of understanding. If I could place these final bits of understanding down and see the full picture, I knew that only then could I really move on from this event because I would be in a position to see it for what it was. On that basis, I needed to ask him some questions. These were questions that only this man could answer.

First, I needed to know, truthfully, whether he did intend to kill me, and second, I wished to ask him the question that I believe a victim of any crime would ask the person that offended against them – why did you do it, and why did you do it to me?

The preparation work involved in these meetings was vital. I met with the facilitators numerous times and Marie, my support person, was present. We discussed in depth what I might be able to expect from the meeting. I was very fortunate with the facilitators in my case, who I truly feel managed to balance being incredibly warm, understanding and considerate at one level with being highly professional at another. They were very truthful and honest about the reality of meeting with the offender from the outset while still being able to maintain the confidential nature of each of their meetings with him. At no point, right up until the very day that I met him, did the offender explicitly agree to meeting me, but my hope grew each time I found out that he had shown up for the next meeting. As time went on, it became clear to me that the man I was hoping to meet had very little empathy for me, if any at all. Additionally, it became clear that an apology from him was out of the question. Finally, I was made aware that he was willing to answer my questions about why he did it, but that he would only speak the full truth and would only be ‘real’ about it. All of this was acceptable for me, because I knew that I wasn’t looking for empathy from him; I didn’t need an apology and all I wanted was the truth – in whatever form it came. Finally the date was set, the 31st of October – Halloween, which is as good a day as any I suppose!

On the morning of the meeting I was anxious, as I expected to be. However, I was incredibly fortunate to have Marie as my support person and her encouragement and steadfast nature proved to be invaluable to me.

As I walked into that room I was met with a sheepish, and a very human half-smile. I can’t deny that I was deeply surprised by this awkward smile from a man who had occupied so much space, in the recesses of my mind and memory, as a person choking me and threatening to kill me. My fear of this man suddenly began to evaporate. I sat

down and tried to calm my nerves. As I was given my opportunity to speak, he commented that I was brave to be doing this. I told him I was just about to say the same thing to him. I thanked him for agreeing to participate, because even if he was doing it only to gain something for himself, I was also benefitting from it. I told him that he was courageous – because I will honestly always believe that he was, to be able to listen to what I was about to tell him. I told him that I knew it was all a long time ago but I explained that this was why it was so important to do have this meeting now so that there can be closure – finally.

I did not hold back in telling this man what it felt like to me during his assault of me. I did not gloss over the aftermath or how it changed my perception of reality. I am not sure whether he understood all of what I said, but I do know that he has heard it. All the while I was able to look directly at him with no real fear. Sometimes he would look down but I knew he could hear me and for me that was enough.

As much as this crime has caused me to suffer, as I already mentioned, I have also managed to salvage some positives from the experience. Part of the positives that I disclosed to him, and as I have already described to you, was that I had identified a need to see him as a human so that I could let go of the remaining negativity that I felt towards him. I let him know that sitting in front of him, hearing him speak to me, in his own voice explaining his reasons to me was causing this to actually manifest. I told him that I hoped he was now in a position to see me as a human and that perhaps he might remember this moment in the future and realise that others are human like me too. I had planned to wish him success in building a new life for himself as I wanted to convey to him at some level that I had forgiven him so that I could let go of the past. However, as I sat there in that room listening to him speak, I began to feel that I really fully meant it.

Finally, I was given the opportunity to ask the remaining questions that had been lingering in my mind for all these years. I asked him whether he did intend to kill me. The answer I got I will always feel was very truthful. He told me 'no', but it could have happened accidentally when he was choking me. To conclude, I asked him the 'why' question. Again, the answer I received was truthful, forthright and as understandable as it could ever be coming from behaviour that is so deeply irrational. I thanked him and told him that it helped because I could now put all of those jig-saw pieces together and that left me with a full and clear picture of things. I believe that I could never have let go until I could see this for myself.

As the meeting came to an end, after 1 hour 20 minutes I believe, I said goodbye. The moment I stepped outside that room I couldn't help but smile. I felt physically lighter but above all, I felt good. Although I had not explicitly stated the words 'I forgive you' during the course of that meeting, it would be fair to say that it was implied. I have been conscious not to disclose too much of what this person said to me during the course of the meeting, as I would always honour the confidential nature of and context in which he said them. However, within a relatively short number of days following our meeting, I

received a message through one of the facilitators indicating that this person wanted to say that he was very sorry for the pain he caused me. To be honest, I could never have imagined that happening, but because I have met him, I do believe that he means it.

I am continually processing the enormous impact that this meeting has had on me and as time goes on I am sure there are many more conclusions I will be able to draw from it. I can honestly say that I'm still just in awe of the powerful nature of restorative justice. But what I can say is that, to date, I have come to the following realisations:

I have concluded that the man I met in that room is more than just the person from my memories. The person I met is a human rather than a monster. The man I met is no angel, but he's also not a devil. The man I encountered did not really wish to be the way he was, and he had a strong desire to do something 'good' by meeting with me. If you asked me how I feel about him now, well I can say that I feel nothing but compassion and pity for him at a very human level and truly I wish him all the best in his future life. I can't deny that it is a very profound experience to be transported from intensely fearing a person to having a strong desire to help them.

For me, this experience has been invaluable. I know that I will not regret a second of it for the rest of my life because with such a simple act of sitting face-to-face with this person at a round table, it has single-handedly changed the reaction I have when I think of the violence of that night all those years ago. When I think back now I am automatically catapulted into my restorative justice meeting with him, and therefore when I think back to this event, it actually generates a feeling of contentment. This is a dynamic that I could never have imagined occurring. For me, before this meeting, the memories I had equalled emotional pain, a strong feeling of disempowerment, fear, de-humanisation and an intense hatred for the offender. But now, when I think back to that night, the memories of it generate a strong feeling of empowerment, fulfilment and compassion for this man. I know that for me, no amount of therapy could ever have achieved that.

Restorative justice for me was always about my quality of life, it was about my liberation from this crime, and it was about healing. I do feel that it did all that.

For this man, I can only hope that it may have impacted him even half as much as it has me. I'm not sure whether this impact will help to reduce the probability of him ever re-offending, but I do know that he was a man who didn't feel he could ever say sorry to me, and yet he did. If you have ever been to Dublin you will know what a small city it is. Although I won't be looking for this person everywhere I go now, I know that there is a chance I may pass him by on the street one day. After having this meeting I know that I will be able to hold my head high and without any fear pass by, because what I lost has now been restored.

6 CONCLUSION

Ailbhe and I have made a film of the meeting (see www.themeeting.org) and we are engaged in consciousness-raising work in relation to restorative justice. We benefit in doing this work from what Ivo Aertsen has brought to our lives through his compassionate mind and dogged determination to help the world become a better place. We are honoured to have been welcomed into his world and to have witnessed that awesome wisdom.

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