

Freedom – Our Responsibility Conference

Abstract: Sharing Life Histories – Humanising Relationships

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In the conference lecture I will be drawing on my personal journey and the role of storytelling in my own ongoing transformation. I grew up during the heyday of the system of Apartheid, within a white, Afrikaner family and with former Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd as grandfather. It has taken me (too) many years to truly face up to the systematic dehumanisation of Apartheid, to accept shared responsibility (“response-ability”) and to commit my life to humanisation between those hurt and separated by violent political conflict.

In the conference workshop I will build on this personal journey but draw mostly on my work as a facilitator of storytelling and dialogue between former combatants and survivors involved in the conflict in and about Northern Ireland (between 2001 and 2012). Given a number of problems associated with the language of “reconciliation” and “forgiveness” in that context we increasingly referred to the underlying purpose of this small group, interpersonal work as “humanisation”.

Working closely with Alistair Little - a former loyalist (Protestant) ex-prisoner – we developed a process called *Journey through Conflict*. This is a carefully facilitated process of exploring difference and deepening understanding between former enemies. While we adapt the process we offer to individuals and groups to meet the specific needs of participants there are a number of key, interwoven strands:

- PREPARATION, of individual participants and each group;
- Sharing LIFE HISTORIES (“storytelling”);
- DEEP DIALOGUE around “elephants in the room”, such as the use of violence;

- NATURE-based activities;
- Encouragement of ongoing co-operative relationships and SHARING of LEARNING.

The workshop at the Freedom – Our Responsibility Conference will include:

- An introduction to the *Journey through Conflict* process through the showing of a 25 min video of the process in action in Northern Ireland/North of Ireland;
- Ample opportunity for comments and questions in connection with the above video;
- An interactive exploration of the relevance of this process, and the sharing of life histories in particular, to processes of conciliation and humanisation in other contexts, such as South Africa.

Connection: to theme of Conciliation

Key words: humanisation; storytelling; life histories