

Ireland

Stardust: 'I am the mother of William McDermott, Marcella and George who I loved very much'

Brigid McDermott (86) told the inquest about losing three of her children in the February 1981 nightclub fire



The relatives of Stardust fire victims Willie, George and Marcella McDermott, from left to right: Selina McDermott, Louise McDermott, June McDermott, Brigid McDermott, and Bríd McDermott. Photograph: Leah Farrell/RollingNews.ie

Kitty Holland Social Affairs Correspondent

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Linking arms with her granddaughter and leaning on a walking stick, Brigid McDermott (86) told the Stardust inquest on Thursday: “I am the mother of William McDermott, Marcella and George who I loved very much”. In a frail voice she said: “They went out that night, and they never came home to me. And I miss them. And I love them. God bless them.”

Speaking only briefly to the packed Pillar Room, on the grounds of the Rotunda hospital, Dublin – location of the inquests into the death of 48 young people in the Stardust fire in February 1981 – her words were greeted by audible crying from some, as many wiped tears from their faces

Her words had come after pen portraits of her late children were read by three of their siblings. June McDermott, Mrs McDermott’s oldest child, read the portrait of Willie (22); Louise Leech read that of Georgie (18) and Selina McDermott, her youngest child, read that of Marcella (16).

Their deaths in the nightclub inferno represented the largest loss of children by one mother to the fire. Nothing could have prepared the Raheny-based family for the “the crying, the wailing, the fighting, the blaming [and] most of all the emptiness” in their home following the night of February 13th/14th, said Selina, who went on to describe the enduring impact of their loss on the McDermott family.

“We went to bed as a family of eight siblings and woke up as five ... It wasn’t until we went to the funeral home and saw the three coffins laid out we understood what was really happening. My mother was banging on the coffins ‘let me see my children’, which wasn’t an option given to our family.”

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Echoing many of the 31 pen portraits read so far, Ms McDermott set out how the family was “torn apart by unimaginable grief” and offered little to no support.

“I remember sitting on the stairs and the crowds of people in the house.”

Clasping her hand to her chest, she said: “I have known death, sorrow, pain and loss from the age of 11. I didn’t speak for a very long time. I couldn’t.

Justice has to be done, and I hope it will be now. They were three beautiful children

“In the church that day we had lost Willie, George and Marcella but we also lost our mother. She kept saying, ‘Why did he take three?’

“Her life after the Stardust fire has been one of the most unimaginable grief. How do you wake up from a nightmare like this? Although there was still five of us left our mother really struggled. There were occasions where we would find her in the [laneway by the house] with her packets of sleeping tablets ready to end it all.”

She thanked Dublin Fire Brigade, where their late father had worked as a fireman, on ‘D’ watch. He was not on duty that night and was “haunted” by guilt and the knowledge of the death his children would have had. He retired early.

“The fire brigade were very, very good to him and our family and we could never thank them enough,” she said.

The four women received a standing ovation as they returned to their seats. So too had Samantha Curran who earlier on Thursday delivered a harrowing account of the impact losing her mother Helena Mangan (22) had had on her when she was aged four.

“I just want to know what happened that night and why my mammy never came home,” Ms Curran told the jury of eight men and seven women.

Speaking outside the court after the day’s proceedings, Mrs McDermott said the reading of the pen-portraits of her children into the record had been “very, very important” to her.

“Justice has to be done, and I hope it will be now. They were three beautiful children.”

Man paralysed when mechanical claw lifted his tent in Dublin feels 'lucky to be alive'

Elias Adane (33) came to Ireland as an unaccompanied minor in the early 2000s



Elias Adane, at his home at Peter McVerry Trust, Newtown, Dublin. Photograph: Dara Mac Dónaill



[Kitty Holland](#)

Mon Apr 3 2023 - 05:00

Elias Adane does not like to dwell on the moment, three years ago, when the claws of a vehicle's mechanical arm broke through his tent, leaving him with catastrophic, life-changing injuries.

Now using a wheelchair, the slight, bright-eyed man describes the incident in only in brief terms and says a number of times how "lucky to be alive" and "safe" he now feels.

Originally from Eritrea, the 33-year-old came to Ireland as an unaccompanied minor in the early 2000s. Recognised as a refugee – he fled his home country, he says, because he was facing military conscription. He says he "liked Ireland when I came".

"I was staying in a hostel – I got breakfast, dinner, lunch. I became homeless after," he says.

Adane began smoking marijuana and later heroin. By the time he was injured, he was "sometimes injecting" heroin too.

He was asleep in his tent, near Leeson Street bridge by the Grand Canal in Dublin, on the morning of January 14th, 2020. A clean-up operation by Waterways Ireland was taking place, clearing numerous tents from the canal bank, some of which had been there for months.

“I was staying there nearly three months when the ‘attack’ came,” he says. “I used to take drugs, heroin, so I liked this hiding place I found. You know, if you take drugs you have to hide. I had some heroin and was asleep. I heard nothing,” he says of the moments before the claw started to lift his tent.

My bone is broken and now I have metal to be able to stand. Without metal I am down. My body is down

Reports at the time said personnel from the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) were checking the tents before they were lifted, so they could provide advice and support on the accommodation services available to any occupants. The tent clearance, however, was a Waterways Ireland initiative.

It is understood that Adane’s tent was not opened but “checked verbally” and there was no response. The worker operating the vehicle was given the go-ahead to lift the tent. When it was lifted, however, Adane screamed and moved, and his tent was returned immediately to the ground.



Gardaí at the scene where Adane's tent was moved on the banks of the Grand Canal in Dublin. Photograph: Gareth Chaney/Collins

An ambulance was called.

Describing the incident, he says: “When (it) hit me two times, they shout. It was very quick, it broke a bone. It was definitely ... like a big knife, like a machine. It went in my body, the skin break, the bone break,” he says.

“I was not picked up. I shouted. A social worker came and someone called the ambulance and I went to the hospital.”

He spent five months in St Vincent’s University Hospital, having a number of surgeries to insert screws and plates into his spine to stabilise it.

“My bone is broken and now I have metal to be able to stand. Without metal I am down. My body is down. I was lucky the weapon did not break my head, but now I am paralysed from here [his waist] down.”

After being discharged from hospital, he spent three months in the National Rehabilitation Centre in Dún Laoghaire and from there was placed in a flat in Ballybough, owned and managed by the Peter McVerry Trust under its Housing First programme. This provides housing and wraparound, continual supports to people who have been sleeping rough for extended periods of time.



Elias Adane: 'I liked it in the city, but it was noisy and a lot of visitors. Some were good, but some bad.'

Photograph: Dara Mac Dónaill

Francis Doherty, director of housing with the trust, explains its outreach team was asked by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive to support Elias and they

began this work two days after the incident – building a relationship with, and explaining to him what Housing First was and how he could be supported.

It is understood that Adane found his tenancy in Ballybough difficult to manage. Drug users who knew him were frequent, unwelcome visitors.

“I liked it in the city, but it was noisy and a lot of visitors. Some were good, but some bad. It was difficult. They come a lot and one guy brought three or four visitors and I don’t like it. I tell him to go out.”

He had come off heroin in hospital and was on methadone but abstinence was difficult to maintain in such circumstances.

He also has high, ongoing care needs. He cannot go to the toilet and needs regular enemas and a catheter bag. He needs assistance with self-care such as dressing and is highly vulnerable to infections. He develops wounds related to the incident, around his lower back, which he cannot feel and which can become badly infected as a result, sometimes requiring hospitalisation.

It was decided, says Doherty, that Adane would be better cared for, and safer, at a Housing First complex in north Co Dublin.

The sickness is terrible. I can't sleep. I want to quit it

Sitting in his bright, warm apartment, Adane says there are staff on-site 24 hours a day and he has groceries and meals brought daily. He dislikes the meals but has discovered Weetabix and has “four plates” of the cereal a day.

“I like it here. It is quiet,” he says of the complex.

Asked how he feels about the incident now, he says again he is “lucky” that the claw did not more seriously paralyse or kill him.

“My family was not happy. I call them. I tell them I had crash. They were not happy.”

His family, he says, are his younger sister Masresha, whom he has not seen since 2004, her husband and their two children. His parents are not alive, he says.

“My sister, she was working in Dubai, cleaning the house for three years. She lives in Addis Ababa. So I think maybe if I get money, I want to go to visit quickly and come back,” he says. “I speak to her on the phone on WhatsApp.” He shows a photograph of Masresha with her children. “She looks like me, no?”

He says later he would like to move to Addis Ababa. “I have no legs so it is better to be with family. I need to get money and yes, yes I would like to go to Ethiopia.”

Adane is still taking methadone – 80ml a day – and would like to get off it. “The sickness is terrible. I can’t sleep. I want to quit it.”

He is hoping to start a course in computers in the summer.

He has a long scar across one side of his face, from the front and down past his jaw. Asked if this was related to the canal incident, he says it was not. “That happened in Burgh Quay. Some alcoholic people came and went on my face by knife. I am lucky, they didn’t get my throat. They tried to kill me.”

Doherty agrees Adane’s experiences during several years sleeping rough underline just how vulnerable people in such situations are.

“We say it again and again – the vulnerability of sleeping in a tent. We have always encouraged people to come into shelter, at least so we can get them on a pathway to housing. We know people have their own valid reasons for resisting that, but they will be more secure and there are far better outcomes.”

Reflecting on what Ireland has offered a former child refugee, who ended up homeless and ultimately severely disabled, Adane is perhaps more forgiving than many would be.

“Ireland is a good place if you work, get job. I made a mistake. I took the drugs, the heroin and that is what happened to me.”

He says, however, that “someone should have checked [his tent] more”.

His civil case against Waterways Ireland and Dublin City Council is ongoing. Neither would provide a comment.

Social Affairs

Men with dogs, sticks and baseball bat attack Dublin migrant camp

Threats circulated on social media in recent days concerning camp where up to eight men have lived in tents since August



One of homeless men pictured beside the tents in a wooded area beside Ashtown, Dublin, before Saturday afternoon's attack. Photograph: Dara Mac Dónaill

Kitty Holland

Sat Jan 28 2023 - 18:32

A number of men with dogs, sticks and a baseball bat attacked a migrant camp in Ashtown, north Dublin, on Saturday.

The group of men arrived at about 12.45pm at the encampment, comprised of about 15 tents in a forest area, on the bank of the Tolka river on River Road, near the Ashtown pound.

They shouted, “Get out. Get out” and “Pack up and get out now. Now.” Four had dogs, including a German shepherd and an American pit-bull terrier. One wore a black balaclava, while another carried a baseball bat and allegedly used it to assault a young Croatian* man who has been camping at the site since last year.

When interrupted by The Irish Times and asked why they were attacking the camp, the men – all white, Irish – alleged the residents had been involved in an assault locally.

Between six and eight men – Polish, Croatian, Hungarian, Portuguese, Indian and Scottish – have been living at the camp since August, without incident they say. In recent days, however, video footage of the camp has circulated on social media, with one posting video on Twitter, saying: “It’s like a little village. They say they’re Irish? They’re not f**king Irish.”

A similar video posted on Facebook on Wednesday has comments underneath including: “Come down. My dog ready to go”; “Bottle of petrol and that’s it good luck”, and, “They need to be transported to Dalkey!”.

Gardaí arrived at the camp shortly after the men and dogs left, and spoke to those living there. One, a Croatian* man (20) told The Irish Times he had been hit several times with a baseball bat. Visibly distressed, he said his arm was not broken. “I have strong bones, but the tendons are sore”.

Another man in his 30s, from Portugal, said they would leave the camp and most of their belongings and go to the city centre.

“This is serious. They mean business. We will just have to pack up and go, that’s it and not come back here. I will bring my documents and my bags and that’s all I need. It’s going to get worse if we stay,” he said.



Occupants of a makeshift migrant camp in Ashtown, Dublin have abandoned it after an attack by a group of men with dogs and wielding sticks and a baseball bat.

A third man, from Hungary, was angry. Rolling a cigarette, he said he didn’t know how to feel after the attack.

“I came to this country to work. I became homeless because I got f**ked over. This is the last thing we want, to be homeless. We are here in this place seven months, very peaceful. Nobody notice we are here and then somebody puts up something.

“I would really gladly go back to my own country but this country owes me a bit of money. I like Irish people but when they start being racist, I cannot take it. That was scary. I never experienced anything like that, never.”

An Indian man (30), who had spoken to The Irish Times earlier about how he had come to live at the camp, would not speak after the incident. He dismantled his tent in silence and packed up his belongings.



Some homeless men live in the tents in a wooded area beside Ashtown, Dublin. Photograph: Dara Mac Dónaill

Before the attack the men showed The Irish Times around the camp and explained how they had come to be living here. The Indian man said he had arrived in Ireland in April to work as a cook. His initial job fell through and he couldn't keep up the €550 a month he was paying to share a room. He became homeless in June and was sleeping rough. Since then, he got work for 25 hours a week serving food in a well-known tech company – a job he has held since.

The Portuguese man has been in Ireland two years, and lost his job in a city centre hotel after telling a “funny joke” to a Brazilian customer who, he says, reported him to his manager.

“I have been in Ireland two years. I was living in Cabra and I couldn't pay the rent. When I was homeless first I hadn't a clue how to get help. I was staying in a sleeping bag in Smithfield and then some people gave me information about where to get food.

“Then I met these fellas and we decided to come to this place because we thought it would be more peaceful.”

The men lived here without electricity, toilets, running water or cooking facilities. They had fashioned shelter from tarpaulin sheeting, and one had built a shelter with wooden pallets. Each had a tent to sleep in and stored belongings in several more.

They said gardaí checked on them regularly, while rough-sleeper outreach teams brought food, sleeping bags and advice. They charged phones, washed clothes and showered in city-centre charities, including the Lighthouse, Mendicity Institution and the Capuchin Day Centre.

On Saturday afternoon they abandoned the camp. They did not know where they would sleep and were reluctant to go to hostels. The Hungarian man showed a large scar on his neck he said he had got in a hostel when “someone tried to murder” him.

“I didn’t come to Ireland for this situation,” the Portuguese man said. “I want better and when things get to this, we don’t want things to escalate. Portuguese people are very peaceful. We don’t want to fight with Irish people.”

A Garda spokesman confirmed there had been an “incident on River Road. Gardaí responded quickly and engaged with those present. There was no report of any injuries and no formal complaints made at this time.”

*The nationality of this man was amended based on new information:
02/02/2023