

'I still have nightmares about my mother's murder': Son of IRA victim Jean McConville says her violent abduction - which he witnessed - still torments him 40 years on

- Michael McConville was speaking in BBC documentary *The Disappeared*
- His mother Jean was just 38 when she was murdered by the IRA in 1972
- She was believed to be an informer and spy for the British
- Her children say this is untrue and the allegations have never been proven

By [Ruth Styles](#)

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The son of IRA victim Jean McConville has revealed that his mother's death in 1972 still haunts him - more than four decades after her murder.

Michael McConville says he still suffers nightmares about the day Mrs McConville, a 38-year-old mother of ten, was abducted by Irish Republican paramilitaries and executed.

Speaking in BBC documentary *The Disappeared*, Mr McConville also talked of his life after his mother's murder, which orphaned her children and condemned them to a childhood in care.



Nightmares: Michael McConville says he has never been able to overcome seeing his mother dragged away

Mr McConville and his sister Agnes also remembered the harrowing events of the day their mother was taken and offered memories of the family life that was denied them.

'There were ten of us all in one bedroom, like ten wee rats,' remembers Mr McConville of his childhood. 'At that point of life, we hadn't got much but we had each other.'

But all that was to change. His mother, a Protestant widow who had been married to a Catholic man and who lived in the staunchly Republican Lower Falls Road in West Belfast, took pity on an British soldier injured during one of the street battles that characterised the Troubles.

'My ma put a cushion under his head,' says Mr McConville. 'My ma would have helped anyone, that's just the kind of person she was.'

'That's where it all started to go wrong for us.'

Just days after the incident, the IRA came calling. Jean was enjoying a game of bingo when she was called out and told that one of her children had been injured. A car was waiting outside to take her to hospital.

But it was a trap. In the early hours of the following morning, Jean was found wandering the streets, badly beaten and disoriented.



Family: Jean McConville poses for a picture with three of her ten children the year before she was killed



Lonely: The remote spot on Templetown Beach in County Louth where Jean's body was finally found

'There was a lot of blood on her and her face was all swollen and everything. Black and blue,' remembers

daughter Agnes.

'We got her a cup of tea and her cigarettes... and she must have smoked the cigarettes one after the other as she drank her tea, and she started to get sick, sick with her nerves.'

Later that day, the IRA came back for Jean, but this time there would be no return home.

Mr McConville remembers: 'Around teatime, a rap came on the door.

'She was in the bathroom getting washed and they were shouting "Where is she? Where is she?".

Jean herself was distraught. 'She was screaming,' says Agnes. 'She was screaming her head off. She was shouting: "help me", "help me". But no one came.

Mr McConville adds: 'All of us [children] was wrapped round her. All of us was crying and squealing. I remember one of the [paramilitary] girls talking and I remember [her] because she hadn't got a mask on, and she used to be a neighbour of ours.

'They kept trying to calm us down because they knew us, and they knew us by name.'



Going home: 31 years after her terrible death, the body of Jean McConville was finally recovered

Eventually, Jean was forced out of the house and down into the road. Agnes and Michael's older brother Archie attempted to follow their mother but the IRA men put a gun to his head and ordered him away

'We could hear her screaming, still screaming, and we looked over the bannister down from the block of flats, and there she was, getting thrown into the back of a red van and that was the last time I actually saw her,' says Agnes.

Later that day, a single shot to the back of the head ended Jean's life and her body was buried in a shallow, unmarked grave. Her 10 children were now orphans.

Mr McConville said: 'I think it was about five days later, an IRA man came to the door, rapped on the door, and handed over my mother's purse and her wedding rings.'

'I asked him where my mother was and he said, "Look, I was just told to bring these rings to you. I know nothing about it" and that was it, [he] walked away.'

Agnes adds: 'I knew she wasn't going to come back. I knew straight away when the first knock came through. I knew then, no return.'

With their mother gone, the children were left isolated. Neighbours and the local priest were unwilling to help and unsympathetic to their plight, as official documents that date from the time reveal.



Inquest: Mr McConville addresses the media after an inquest found that his mother was not a British spy



At rest: Mr McConville (left) and his brothers carry their mother's coffin at her funeral in 2003

WHO WERE THE 'DISAPPEARED'?

Between 1972 and 1982, 'disappearing' people thought to be British informers or spies became a key part of IRA activities.

Prior to 1972, alleged informers had been killed and dumped by the roadside. After, their bodies were hidden in shallow graves, their families left to wonder about their fate.

Along with Jean McConville, 15 people were 'disappeared' during the Troubles, among them 17-year-old John McClory, 22-year-old Brian McKinney and 19-year-old Columba McVeigh.

In the run-up to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1999, the IRA admitted responsibility for the killings and pledged to help the victim's families find their remains.

Although nine have been found, another seven are still lost, including McVeigh.

The 'Disappeared' whose remains are yet to be discovered include alleged informers Kevin McKee, Brendan McGraw, Seamus Wright, Seamus Ruddy, SAS officer Captain Robert Nairac and former monk Joe Lynskey.

The family was split up, the children scattered into care homes around Northern Ireland while Jean's remains were left where they fell, the location known only to the men who murdered her.

It wasn't until 31 years after Jean was taken that her children were finally given the chance to grieve and bury their mother.

In 2003, her remains were discovered close to a beach by a local man, and Jean's nine surviving children came together again for her funeral. Afterwards, her coffin was placed in the grave of her husband Arthur, who had died early in 1972 from cancer.

But although they, in a sense, have their mother back; for the McConvilles, the pain of losing her and having their lives turned upside down will never go away.

Mr McConville says: 'I always wondered what was going through my mother's head, coming down [to the beach] to her death.

'I just can't get my head round how a human being can do this to another human being. When they killed our mother, they knew we were going to be orphans and we'd have to find someone else to look after us.

'They knew what they were doing and they knew what they were leaving behind. I just can't get my head round that. I have the same nightmares about her all the time. Seeing them [the IRA men] coming in.

'It never goes away and the hurt is always there too.'