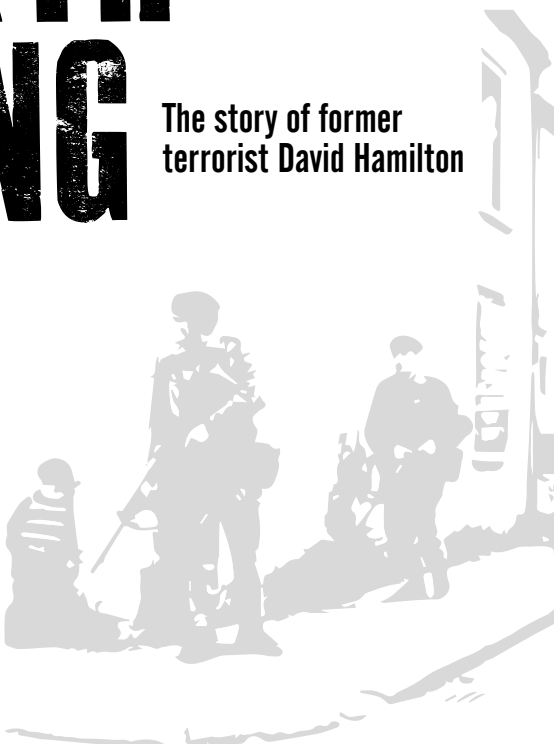
A CAUSE WORTH LIVING FOR

The story of former terrorist David Hamilton

DAVID T HAMILTON



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CONTENTS

1.	Born a Protestant	13
2.	Rathcoole KAI	21
3.	Joining the Ranks	33
4.	Crumlin Road Jail	41
5.	Behind the Wire	49
6.	Davey the Prisoner	63
7.	Back on the Streets	77
8.	Back in Prison	93
9.	In the H-Blocks	103
10.	Into the Light	111
11.	A Prison Christian	123
12.	The Hunger Strike	139
13.	The Old Man and the New Man	149
14.	Davey the Preacher	157
15.	Making a Stand	171
16.	Called to the Ministry	181
17.	Stepping out in Faith	193
18.	Postscript	205
19.	A Cause Worth Living For	207

PREFACE

It is now over 25 years since I first published by book, telling the story of how God broke into my life while lying in a prison cell. I thank God my little book has enjoyed a wide circulation across Europe as well as the United Kingdom.

I am delighted a fresh printing – the fourth – of the British edition has been undertaken by 10ofthose.com, to whose ministry so many are indebted. We share the same goal for many to be made aware how God can change lives and to show there is no such thing as a hopeless case.

About the author

Since prison, David has worked for Prison Fellowship (5 years) and then directed the work of Teen Challenge in N. Ireland (2 Years). He was asked to become the national Evangelist for Teen Challenge in the UK and moved to Wales to set up the Teen Challenge School of Evangelism. While living there he was ordained as an Evangelist with the Apostolic Church in Great Britain. He next spent ten years of extensive travel around Europe as an international evangelist with Eurasia Teen Challenge before settling in Manchester in 1998. He founded a charity, "Life Challenge" and opened a drug rehabilitation centre, dealing with teens and young adults addressing their life-controlling problems. Through this ministry many young men and women have been successfully delivered from drugs and alcohol addiction. In 2004 he took up a full-time pastorate at a church in Stockport, Manchester. Since retiring from the pastorate (2014) he continues to have an itinerant ministry across the U.K.

David and his wife Sharon continue to live in Manchester, he may be contacted through his publisher, 10ofthose.com.

Chapter One

BORN A PROTESTANT

I was born on a cold frosty morning, in the winter of 1956, in Cookstown, Co. Tyrone. As the midwife tended to my mother, my father was busy outside in the yard trying to thaw out the pump to draw some water. It was frozen solid, and what little water he got was quickly brought inside and placed on the stove. Even though the delivery went well, there was still much concern. I was six weeks premature, and weighed in at just 3 lb 8 oz. I was quickly bundled up in warm blankets to keep out the bitter cold and rushed off to the hospital. There I stayed for the next three weeks, and only when I reached the grand weight of 5 lb was it deemed safe to allow me home.

My earliest recollection of childhood was my first day at school. I can recall playing in the sand-pit, and as I looked up I saw my mother's worried face looking through the window of the door. Only when I smiled at her did she turn to walk away, while wiping a tear away from her eye. Perhaps my fondest memory of those early days were my regular visits to my uncle's workshop. He was the town shoemaker. After school, I would run the hundred yards to his workshop, which was situated at the back of the main shop. When I entered through the gate, I was always aware of the smell of the leather. Most times I would find him sitting on a wooden

stool, with a boot or shoe held between his knees. He would look up to see who had come in, and as always, he would greet me with a smile.

Usually he would have a mouthful of small nails and a hammer in his hand. I would watch him swing the hammer to his mouth, pick up a single nail and drive it home into the sole of the shoe. As always, the nails were in perfect alignment, equally spaced apart. I was always amazed and wondered why he never hit himself with the hammer.

"Can I have a try?" I would ask, but he would just smile and give me a pat on the head, "Maybe when you're older." From that time on I had a desire to work with leather, but little did I know then, where I would later learn my leather-craft; it would be in Belfast jail.

Like any young family we got up to all kinds of mischief. I remember once my oldest sister Joy, who was nine years old at the time, decided to make toffee for us when my mother was not at home. She went into the kitchen and poured sugar into a pan and put it on the cooker. I do not know what else she added but whatever it was, the toffee tasted nothing like the toffee I bought; it was awful. I did not want to eat it, but my big sister insisted I did. My mother arrived home to find me in tears, complaining of a sore tummy.

My mother arrived home to find me in tears, complaining of a sore tummy.

"It must have been something you've eaten," she said as she rubbed my tummy. I hadn't the nerve to tell her. I knew that look in my big sister's eye; if I dared to tell Mum I would

have been in worse trouble when I went to bed later on.

When I was eight years old, our family moved to another town called Omagh, but I do not recall having many memories from living there. One year later we moved home again because of my father's work. This time it was to a large housing estate on the outskirts of Belfast called Rathcoole. Back then it had a population of 14,000, and was believed to be one of the largest housing projects in all of Europe. In our street, which consisted of ten houses, half were occupied by Roman Catholic families, many of whom were my friends. I can recall playing football together on the field opposite our house. One of the boys playing at that time was called Bobby Sands. Little did any of us know then that we would all be affected by the Troubles that were shortly to break out in Northern Ireland, that we would be no longer friends, and some of us would even become enemies. Nor did we know then that both Bobby and I, and quite a few others there would end up in prison as political prisoners, some as Republicans and others like me as Loyalists. Bobby went on to lead the hunger strike protest in the Maze prison, in which he was the first to die.

Northern Ireland has been embroiled in deadly political fighting for 300 years. There are two separate Irelands. The Republic of Ireland consists of 26 counties. More than 90 percent of its people are Catholic. Northern Ireland is made up of six counties in north-eastern Ireland. Most of the inhabitants of the counties, which cover two-thirds of the ancient province of Ulster, are Protestants because of colonisation by England in the seventeenth century. The English confiscated the land of Ulster from local chieftains and divided the acreage among thousands of Protestant

English and Scottish settlers who regarded the "native" Irishmen with a mixture of contempt, fear, and desire for their manual labour. The immigration of Protestants into a mostly Catholic land created a lasting division between Protestants and Catholics, and it aggravated the natural conflict between rich and poor and landowners and tenants.

Some Catholics in Northern Ireland still fight for political union with the rest of Ireland. In a united Ireland, Catholics would comprise the vast majority. For that reason, Protestants in the north continue to resist the reunification of the country.

The bitter division between Protestants and Catholics escalated this century. In 1921, five years after the Easter uprising in Dublin, Britain recognised the two separate Irelands. Armed irregulars of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) threatened raids into the north to force the six counties to join the Republic. Northern Ireland resisted strongly and stepped up efforts to guarantee Protestant rule. The government passed laws that made it legal to arrest people on simple suspicion of belonging to illegal organisations, and laws that established curfews and barred the entry of any undesirable person into the six counties. A heavily armed special part-time police force, called the B Specials, was created to assist the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in keeping the peace.

Protestants ruled the parliament and controlled every aspect of daily life. They were given preference in jobs and housing. Such inequalities kept alive the spirit of rebellion among Republicans who maintained close ties with the IRA in the south. From the 1930s to the 1950s the IRA carried out many

sporadic attacks on police barracks and other targets in the north.

A serious assault on Protestant rule of the north came in 1969 when Protestant extremists attacked 500 demonstrators marching from Belfast to Londonderry. IRA recruitment soared as Republicans feared Protestant attacks in all counties. The British government was forced to send 3,000 soldiers to Northern Ireland in July 1969 on a peacekeeping mission. Widespread rioting, brutal raids and the now familiar cycle of terrorism, reprisal, and more terrorism took a heavy toll on both civil liberties and lives. The Catholic Nationalists saw the British army as an occupational force, and the IRA was fighting a war on two sides now, not only against the British army but also the Protestant paramilitary organisations that had been born in the conflict.

One of the incidents instrumental in discolouring my view of Roman Catholics, happened when I was about nine or ten years of age.

One of the incidents I believe that was instrumental in discolouring my view of Roman Catholics, happened when I was about nine or ten years of age. I had a Catholic friend called Jim, and his father had a car. Occasionally I would walk down to the Roman Catholic chapel to meet them coming out just to get a ride home in their car. I remember a particular Sunday as I was standing waiting.

My friend came out alone, "We have to walk home," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"My Father has to go to an IRA meeting," was his reply.

Then it meant nothing to me as I had never heard of the IRA before. But years later that conversation came back to me when I was involved in the tartan gang KAI. I went back to that Catholic chapel again, this time with the gang, around seventy of us, to burn the place down. Only when the police arrived in force and a full-scale riot began, was the chapel saved.

My first awareness of the political difference between Protestant and Roman Catholics happened when I was fourteen years of age. That day I had been skiving off school and was with a group of other boys, who were all Catholics. We were down in the glen, where amongst the trees we had a swing made from a rope attached to a branch that jutted out over the river. I stood there listening as they began to discuss among themselves what they should do to me. They then beat me up and threw me into the river. As I climbed back out of the water, I was still trying to figure out what it was I had done to deserve this beating.

I stood there listening as they began to discuss among themselves what they should do to me.

I had to ask them why they did this, and one of them gave me the reason. It was because I was a Protestant and they were all Catholics. Until then I did not know what a Loyalist or a Republican was, or that there was a difference between Protestants and Catholics.

That day was a turning point in my young life, sadly in the wrong direction. I decided never again would I have a Catholic friend, only Protestant. I also made another decision to join a gang – it was much safer to be a gang member.

So it was that day David Hamilton, like so many others among the youth, became a victim of The Troubles in Northern Ireland. He was too young then to ever imagine the price he would pay or the consequences he would suffer for making that choice. But back then he thought it was the wisest and safest thing to do.