

# Project Children offers a summer of peace without fear

By Teresa A. Parsons

Nothing in his appearance suggests that he is different from the four other children cheerfully crowding the O'Bryan kitchen to make French toast. He's so quiet and soft-spoken that even his brogue doesn't give him away immediately. And unless you find the key to his trust, you'll never have a clue to what it's like growing up in the war zone known as Belfast.

Eleven-year-old Damien Austin is one of 12 children from Northern Ireland who visited the homes of Elmira residents for six weeks this summer through Project Children. The non-profit organization sponsors children for six weeks from Northern Ireland in three categories: Catholic, Protestant and those with parents who are political prisoners. Based in Greenwood Lake, N.Y., Project Children has given more than 1,800 children from Belfast and nearby areas an experience of living in peace without fear since 1975.

Terry and Margaret O'Bryan and their five children (Ed, 23, Nancy, 20, Tim, 17, Linda, 19, and Larry, 12) became involved for simple reasons. "We like kids. We're of Irish descent. It seemed like the right thing to do to get them away from the fighting for a while," Margaret explained. Through a local Irish Catholic fraternal organization, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, they learned about Project Children and have become chairpersons of the the organization's Elmira branch.

The O'Bryans' belief in the value of what Project Children does stretches far beyond an idealistic endorsement or the six summertime weeks when the children are actually here. They and other members work on fundraising all year long to help Project Children pay the airfare for each child's first visit. To bring a child back for a second time,

as is the case with Damien this year, the family must bear the \$500 cost.

Although this is his second visit, Damien's life at home has been revealed to the O'Bryans mostly through chance remarks and second-hand by reading they've done about conditions there. A natural defensiveness is apparent when he's inevitably asked "what's it like there" about Belfast. At the same time, Americans' interest in the conflict must be difficult for him to understand. Growing up in those conditions makes it seem commonplace.

"He doesn't share an awful lot," Margaret admitted. But the purpose behind his visit is not to pump him for information or lecture him or try to affect him in any radical way. Rather, she said, sponsors hope that some of the barriers the children have grown up with may begin to weaken and crumble.

The O'Bryans have seen evidence that their aim is being accomplished. During his first visit, Damien was shocked to learn that the reason Ed's girlfriend didn't bless herself during grace at meals was that she is Protestant. This summer, as the family planned the couple's wedding, Damien seemed to accept the idea without further question. Likewise, at least during his visits Damien has learned to disregard religion in choosing his playmates.

Terry also remembered a Protestant girl who didn't want to attend Project Children's annual picnic because Catholic kids would be there. Once persuaded to go, she joined in the fun wholeheartedly. Later Terry asked her whether she knew the two girls she enjoyed so much were Catholic. "I wasn't really playing with them," she pointed out carefully, "I was playing by them."

The changes are nothing earthshaking. Rather quietly the seed of an idea is planted



The O'Bryan family posed with their guest outside their home. Damien returned to Belfast on Tuesday, August 6. From left front, they are: Nancy, Damien, Terry, Margaret and Larry. Bringing up the rear at right are (left to right) Tim, Ed and Linda. Ed and Linda celebrated their wedding during Damien's visit.

— if living together in the same family or playing together are possible here, why not in Northern Ireland as well?

As individuals and as a family, the O'Bryans have also learned from their guests. Project Children tries to place each visitor with a family that includes a peer of his/her own age. In the O'Bryan household, it's Larry who throughout the six-week visit is Damien's primary companion. Rather than discussing the Protestant vs. Catholic conflict or living conditions in Belfast, Larry and Damien's conversations center around the international issues faced by pre-teen boys — food, school and girls. But beyond the upfront, external comparisons between Irish and American cultures, Terry and Margaret believe that Larry and their other children are gaining an important awareness that the peace and freedom they enjoy should not be taken for granted.

On a lighter note, the O'Bryans have also collected plenty of humorous stories throughout the course of their involvement with Project Children. In past years, the Irish children flew into a New York City airport, where they were picked up and driven to Rochester. While driving back one year, the O'Bryans stopped with their eight charges at a fast-food restaurant right outside New York City. The restaurant was staffed by

Hispanic youths.

Margaret recalled the hilarious scene that resulted when the Irish kids, with their brogues and slang expressions, tried to communicate their orders, understand the Hispanic accents and slang, and meanwhile figure out the unfamiliar currency.

"Somehow we got out of there, but I have no idea who came out ahead," Margaret remembered.

More typically, everyone in Project Children comes out ahead. If he had stayed at home, what would Damien's summer have been like? He'd stay mostly in the back yard of his parents' row house, playing games like hide-n-seek with his four younger brothers and sisters during the day and be called indoors before dark. The family would go on holiday to the sea at Red Bay for a week or two. And with the noncommittal shrug of an 11-year-old, he dismissed everything else that the news reveals as summer in Belfast, known as the "marching season" — soldiers in the streets, the sounds of gunfire, angry shouting, rioting.

"Thank you" is not a commonly used expression in Ireland, so Damien's gratitude is revealed only subtly. Like in his reply when Margaret told him she couldn't find his passport. "Good," he said.

## Tensions Peak in Northern Ireland During Annual 'Marching Season'

By Austin Carley

Portadown, Northern Ireland (NC) — Northern Ireland's traditional summer "marching season," which displays Catholic and Protestant frictions surrounding commemoration of a key 17th-century battle, has begun with higher-than-usual tension.

Behind the tensions are Protestant fears of talks between Britain and the Irish Republic over the continuing sectarian violence in the mostly Protestant British province.

In Portadown, 25 miles southwest of Belfast, Northern Ireland, the Royal Ulster Constabulary this year ordered pro-British Protestants to change their traditional parade route through mainly Catholic areas. The parades celebrate the victory in 1690 of King William of Orange, a Protestant, over Catholic King James II in the Battle of the Boyne. They are part of more than 2,000 such events which occur every marching season.

The re-routing order resulted in a few violent clashes between the police force, which is mostly Protestant, and marchers.

One tearful Protestant mother, watching marchers with their orange sashes, flags, hard-hats and drums, said she was "shattered to see our policemen attacking law-abiding citizens exercising their rights." The Constabulary is considered by most northern Irish to favor the Loyalist viewpoint.

"There's an Anglo-Irish process developing with talks going on behind our backs to which we are not privy," a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly told National Catholic News Service in a July interview.

Britain has made no known concessions to the supporters of a united Ireland and has rejected proposals of a Catholic-dominated Forum for unity.

But every concession to the northern Irish Catholic community, which has suffered economic and political discrimination, and each involvement with the Republic's leaders is seen by Loyalists as advancing the Unionist cause.

A follower of the staunchly pro-British Rev. Ian Paisley said "The British are gradually selling us out. Sinn Fein (the political wing of the outlawed Irish Republican Army) has been allowed by the government to develop their ballot-box" strength.

Protestants and moderate Catholics who spurn terrorism were shocked last spring when Sinn Fein won significant support in local Council elections.

The killing of 22 policemen in terrorist attacks since April — the greatest number in a three-month period since the current unrest began 16 years ago — is another element of this year's tensions. Frustrated Protestants say they fear the violence may increase.

One Loyalist member of Parliament says the fear of terrorist violence is behind the insistence on sending "Orange" parades through Catholic areas.

"In the past these parades were designed to ensure that all areas" were kept open, he added.


But those favoring union, primarily Catholics, regard the Orange parades as provocative and intimidating.

"They're not just folk dress parades passing through a historic area in normal society," said one resident of a Catholic area. "These marches have always been seen by both marchers and residents as an expression of the triumphalist domination of the majority community, whose forefathers won the Battle of the Boyne."

"They feel they have a right to invade the territory of the losers of 1690 where today's mainly Catholic Nationalists live," he said.

But a Loyalist politician said that the marches "are no longer provocative or triumphalist, whatever they may have been in the past."

"Orangemen walking to church along a route which they have taken for the past 150 years are no danger to anyone," he said.



**Do you or a Loved One  
Need HOME CARE?**

Let us provide you with nurses, aides, homemakers, companions or live-ins. Our personnel are insured, bonded and prescreened.

Available 24 Hour 7 day Nursing Service  
**# UNLIMITED CARE, INC.**

50 Chestnut Plaza 232-5501

# A stitch in time.

You fall or have a kitchen mishap—and suddenly you've got a nasty cut. Too big for a homemade bandage.

What do you do?

Head for Fast Aid at the Emergency Center of St. Mary's Hospital. There our Express Care unit is ready to provide fast treatment for minor cuts, fractures, or illness. It can save you hours of waiting.

The high-tech Emergency Center is, of course, ready to handle more serious accidents and illnesses on an around-the-clock basis. Express Care. Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Another innovative idea from St. Mary's, serving Rochester since 1857.



**EXPRESS CARE**  
 Emergency Center  
 St. Mary's Hospital / W. Main & Genesee Sts. / 464-3050  
 (Clip and Save)