

The Times, November 2010

The Letter I wish I had written:

Dear Gerry Adams,

I am writing to invite you to be the first subscriber to the Jean McConville Memorial Fund. I have read in the press that you claim to know nothing about her, so here is a quick refresher: Jean, a widow from west Belfast, was killed in 1972, leaving behind ten children aged fourteen and under.

According to her family, Jean was seen giving aid to a wounded British soldier after a gun battle outside her door. As punishment, on the night of 7th December, 1972, a masked gang burst into the house and dragged her into a waiting car. Jean's orphaned children were then subjected to a lifetime of persecution.

At first, the IRA claimed that Jean had abandoned her family in order to run off with a British soldier. But after her body was found by chance in 2003, the story changed. It was alleged that Jean was a secret informer. This has been proven to be lie. But bones do not lie, and Jean's missing fingers tell powerfully of the torture she underwent before being shot in the back of the head.

The late IRA mastermind Brendan 'The Dark' Hughes has named you, Gerry Adams, as the man who ordered Jean's murder, which gives you a very special connection to the case.

We all know that Justice is often denied to those who deserve it the most. As a historian, I see it all the time. But Jean McConville has haunted me since adolescence. Her tragic life, her cruel death, the endless suffering of her children, the certain knowledge that no one will ever be punished – these have weighed on me until I cannot stay silent any more.

I believe that Jean McConville stands for humanity over violence and hatred. In 1972, it made her - the weakest and most vulnerable woman in Belfast - such a threat to the IRA that she was killed and hidden for thirty-one years. Today, I want to honour her memory, and I hope that you, with your special connection, will want to do the same.

Sincerely
Amanda Foreman