

Telling Stories

By Sabina Clarke

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Cover Photos/ left to right: 1st row: Jamie Wyeth; James Carroll; Patrick Radden Keefe. 2nd row: Gerry Adams, Brian Whelan; 3rd row: Roy Bourgeois; Senator George Mitchell; former World Heavyweight Champion Joe Frazier

Cover Photo Credits/ Katharine Gilbert; Tom Keenan, Nate Clark
Book Cover Design/ Kristen McCann

ISBN: 978-1-62249-645-7

**Published by
Biblio Publishing
Columbus, Ohio**

Those who tell the stories rule the world

- Hopí



Sabina Clarke a resident of Wayne, Pennsylvania has written for the *Irish Edition*, *Irish American News*, the *Chestnut Hill Local*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Philadelphia Daily News*, *Art Matters* and others. She was the press contact for the first official Philadelphia visit of Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams in October 1994 and March 1995 and the Irish Government

sponsored visit of Mary McAleese the President of Ireland in 1998. From 2012 to 2014 she was the press contact for Ed Moloney Director of the Boston College Belfast Project, an oral history project documenting the period known as ‘The Troubles’ in Northern Ireland that garnered international attention with appeals to the U.S. Supreme Court and the High Court of Belfast. In 2021 her co-authored play *Rendezvous in Bangkok... Who Killed Thomas Merton* made its world premiere at the Commodore John Barry Arts & Cultural Center in Philadelphia

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Introduction

From a young age I have always been fascinated by people and words and images. My favorite toy was a white telephone. I sat talking into it seated on my bedroom windowsill for hours engaged in animated conversations with imaginary people.

When walking in the rain carrying my umbrella sent on an errand to the market where I always forgot something, I imagined I was the Morton Salt Girl—that image was so powerful and appealing.

The same names and words intertwined and with different meanings can be puzzling to a young mind. The reclusive elderly neighbor Mrs. Summer and summer at the seashore and Mrs. Graham the intimidating principal of the elementary school where I attended kindergarten had the same name as our mid-morning snack -- graham crackers and milk.

And my physician Dad's patient Mrs. Inch in reality was Mrs. Welch. And my childhood cat named Alberta had the same name as the last name of my third grade classmate. By this time, I saw these same words with different meanings as merely coincidences not contradictions. But I still bestowed great importance on images and words and their meaning.

In fourth grade, Dawn joined our class and then Gretchen and then Ilona -- none of them stayed very long—but their names made an impression.

My fascination with names and words morphed into my fascination with people. There was Miss Lucy the

woman next door with her dramatic heavy eye make-up, bright red lipstick, red hennaed hair, colorful costumes and leopard skin rug who looked like a silent film star.

Heroes and villains share equal space in my memory. Mrs. King the stern middle-aged wiry grey haired lady with ice-blue eyes and steely manner who ruled her record room like a fiefdom. This is where I started my day that ill-fated summer at Parker & Company. If you were five minutes late you were doomed. She said nothing but pointedly looked at the big clock on the wall.

Ms. Henrietta Kirsch the Director of the Social Service Department at Graduate Hospital in Philadelphia was almost eighty when we met. She had a brilliant mind and old world gentility. She rhapsodized over doctors and was dismissive of nurses believing medical social workers superior. I wondered if her disdain for nurses was class snobbery. She rewarded me with lunchtime discussions on Korsakoff syndrome and the connection between malnutrition and brain development in Guatemala. Yet, despite her training she was fatalistic about a person's ability to change --- an attitude that seemed counterproductive to her profession. Her fascinating pronouncements such as "each organ has its own psyche" are etched in my mind as is her reminder to us at the end of the day "Don't forget your wraps."

As a medical social worker at a teaching hospital, I was able to record some of the lives of patients I worked with as case studies such as Ms. Ell who ran a boarding house and was romantically involved with her boarder John S who lost both legs hopping freight trains. These stories filled with real life drama fascinated the secretaries who typed them. They were always telling me that I should be writing novels.

Little did these two secretaries Florence and Fran suspect but they were stories in themselves. They sat facing each other in the entrance to the hospital's Social Service Department like two bookends commenting on everyone who came through the door.

They were particularly critical of one of their contemporaries--- a blond slightly unkempt middle-aged divorcee whose insecurity and faded beauty reminded me of Blanche Du Bois in Tennessee Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

I think they could not handle that the woman was cut from a different cloth. I felt sorry for Charlotte who volunteered in her spare time at Society Hill Playhouse, a local theatre company. That branded her even more in their eyes. She kept to herself and seemed vulnerable and wounded no doubt aware of their gossiping about her. That she knew it was even more painful to watch.

Some peripheral characters inscribed in my memory are Melba Kost the Damon Runyon of social workers—a 50ish supervisor and her Pall Mall Golds. I copied her—then switched back to Salem 100 Menthols—but never inhaled—it was all for affect and the furtive birdlike Miss Anna M Breneman with her darting eyes, a Wellesley grad near retirement age, you could never tell what she was thinking.

Finally my absorption in the stories of others led to compiling the stories of some of the people I have interviewed. They all have a story to tell.

As my friend Jason Miller the late Pulitzer Prize winning playwright and Oscar nominated actor mentioned to me in conversation- “All the stories are in families.” Perhaps that will be my next venture— fiction wears many disguises.

Ireland Remember...

Gerry Adams and the Rise of Sinn Fein

Foreword: Gerry Adams is an international statesman, former member of Irish Parliament and President of Sinn Fein (1983 to 2018). Due to his leadership Sinn Fein is now the dominant Irish republican political party in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

He was elected to the British House of Commons in 1983 but refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Queen and never took his seat. He represented Belfast West in the Northern Ireland Assembly (1998 to 2010) and in 2007 his Party reached an historic power-sharing agreement with Democratic Unionist Party Leader Ian Paisley. From 2011 to 2020 he was TD, Teachta Dála for County Louth in the Irish Parliament, Dáil Eireann.

Adams is the chief architect of Sinn Féin's shift to seeking a peaceful resolution to the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland and the central figure in brokering the peace culminating in the April 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Following the IRA's August 1994 ceasefire President Bill Clinton extended a visa to Gerry Adams allowing him to enter the country. I was the press contact for the October 1994 weekend of events sponsored by The Federation of Irish American Societies of the Delaware Valley beginning with the Friday morning press conference at Philadelphia International Airport followed by a VIP reception and luncheon at the Doubletree Hotel and ending Sunday afternoon with a huge public rally at the Franklin Wyndham Hotel in center city that was

covered by local, national and international news media including the BBC, British Broadcasting Service—who showed up uninvited,

The weekend was a triumph for Adams and ended with an unannounced stop at the Liberty Bell---at Adams' request ---on the way to the airport prior to his departure home.

This unforgettable chapter marked the beginning of the public face of the Peace Process in the U.S. and began my decades- long journey of enlightenment and reporting on events in Northern Ireland and the key figures in this great enterprise of making peace—Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams and his Chief Negotiator Martin Mc Guinness, the likes of whom we will never see again: *ní fheicfimid a leithéid arís*

I could not have stepped into a more exciting moment in history.

Without Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness there would be no peace.

This interview was conducted in 2010

Peace does not come easily to Northern Ireland and justice is even harder. Sinn Fein President and MP, Member of Parliament, for West Belfast Gerry Adams has been at the center of the Peace Process since its inception. His message of peace and reconciliation is studied by students of social justice the world over and emulated by other countries.

He orchestrated yet another brilliant breakthrough with the historic Hillsborough Agreement reached at the 11th hour. Finally devolution or the transfer of power of policing and justice from London to Belfast will happen after a 12 year delay.



Gerry Adams and Sabina Clarke
Photo/ Tom Keenan

Devolution had been part of the original Good Friday Agreement and later the St. Andrews Agreement but the unionists and the British government always found a way to stall. This time Sinn Fein was ready to walk away.

After Martin McGuinness, Northern Ireland's Deputy First Minister met with the British and Irish governments during a deadlock in the talks—

Adams got to the heart of the matter; *“But let me say this, the governments are not referees in this. The governments are guarantors with responsibilities and obligations. What we are about is fixing the problems and returning to the basis upon which these institutions were established—the Good Friday Agreement and the St. Andrews Agreement. If that is not possible then no self-respecting public representation or party would want to be part of what would be nothing less than a charade. “*

SC How do you feel about the Hillsborough Agreement—were you ready to walk away from the government without devolution?

GA The impasse in the political institutions; their failure to deliver for citizens and the refusal of unionism to agree to a date for the transfer of power on policing and justice meant that the Assembly and Executive system was unsustainable. It was quickly losing credibility. The negotiation with the DUP, Democratic Unionist Party, was a long and difficult one but ultimately it succeeded. Moreover, the agreement reached at Hillsborough is unique in that it is the first which was directly negotiated and agreed between Sinn Fein and the DUP. Previously the governments had acted as negotiators for unionism. This time we refused to travel to London and insisted that any agreement had to be reached directly between Sinn Fein and the DUP. So, this agreement belongs to unionism in a way that previous ones did not. That hopefully makes it stronger.

SC What did you mean when you said the Good Friday Agreement was a ‘staging post’ and why did it upset some of the unionists?

GA Some unionists believe that the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 was a political settlement. It was not. It is an accommodation which creates an all-Ireland political structure within which nationalists and unionists can as equals each promote our respective view of the future. Unionists can argue for the union with Britain. Republicans can promote and argue for a United Ireland. And all of this is done in context in which there is power sharing in the political institutions and measures in place to promote equality and end discrimination. So, for Sinn Fein each negotiation reached is a ‘staging’ post’ –another marker on the road toward a United Ireland.

SC Was devolution your toughest battle—as far as getting that concession from the unionists and the British and Irish governments?

GA Every negotiation is tough. Every issue is generally hard fought over. The length of the negotiation on this occasion gives some sense of the complexity of the negotiation and the difficulties we encountered,

SC Why has the transfer of power been so contentious?

GA In 1972 the British decided to take policing and justice powers away from the then unionist regime. They did so not because the regime was undemocratic and sectarian but because it was incompetent. The British wanted to reshape the security and policing and justice system. This led to greater violence, repression, torture, shoot-to-kill operations and widespread and institutional collusion between the British system and the various unionist death squads like the UDA, Ulster Defense Association and the UVF, Ulster Volunteer Force. The unionists objected and collapsed the government rather than give up these powers. Almost 40 years later, unionists were reluctant to take these powers back. This was for several reasons. They were concerned that republicans would be able to exercise even greater influence over policing and justice—matters which they had long regarded as their sole preserve. They also believe us when we say that part of the process we are engaged in is about taking powers away from London back to Ireland and ensuring that the center of political power and influence is on the island of Ireland and not in London. This is part of the process of making partition irrelevant and moving inexorably toward a United Ireland.

SC What will it take for the Executive and the Assembly at Stormont to function more smoothly and tackle the issues that concern the daily life of their constituents?

GA We have agreed with the DUP on a number of issues within the Hillsborough Agreement to set up working groups, identify outstanding matters and produce programs of work and see these resolved within months. If we succeed in making these changes then by this time next year, people should have witnessed a more efficient and more effective government at work.

SC How difficult has it been to stay on target on this particular issue of devolution when it has been sabotaged for so long?

GA We are very patient and focused. Martin McGuinness made a very interesting observation in the press conference announcing the agreement. He pointed out that our negotiation team has remained largely unchanged in 20 years. British Prime Ministers and Irish Taoiseach and unionist and SDLP, Social Democratic and Labour Party, leaders have come and gone but the Sinn Fein team has remained largely constant. That has helped.

SC Do you think your long history of meetings with the British and Irish governments over the years gave you and your party the upper hand as being the more skilled negotiators?

GA We certainly had lots of experience.

SC As one of the earliest architects of the Peace Process beginning with your efforts with Father Alec Reid which preceded the Hume/ Adams talks and the Joint Declaration for Peace—how do you feel about where you have taken your party?

GA It has been a long and difficult process. But all of us on the Sinn Fein side knew two decades ago when we developed our peace strategy that it would be like this. We are trying to resolve centuries of conflict; repair relationships destroyed by British colonialism and partition and undo the damage of institutional discrimination and repressions. We were never going to turn this around overnight. We still have a way to go. Sinn Fein is an Irish Republican party. We are for a United Ireland. Last year we held two conferences in the USA and one in Canada on this theme. This weekend, we hold a similar conference in London. We are very serious about wanting a United Ireland. Everything we do—the core of our political strategies—is all about this end goal.

SC What can be done to deflect the deep-rooted antagonism that still exists at the grassroots level between Catholics and Protestants?

GA Sectarianism is a major problem. It is as old as the plantations. It will take time to end but the starting point must be to stand foursquare against it. There can be no toleration of sectarianism wherever it raises its head.

SC What is the next step for Sinn Fein, what is next on your agenda?

GA Lots. There will be a Westminster election in the North in the next few months, an Assembly election in May of 2011 in the South. We have a lot of work to do to build political strength; reorganize the party; develop policies and seek new allies. Despite some recent setbacks in the 26 counties, Sinn Fein remains very strong and eager to move forward.

SC Do you think you will see a United Ireland in your lifetime?

GA Yes but only if all of us who want it and who believe in it join together to make it happen.

SC What legislation do you want passed regarding the Irish language?

GA At St. Andrews three years ago, the British Government agreed to An Acht na Gaeilge—an Irish Language Act which would ensure equality of treatment for Irish language speakers. I have written a blog on this topic—this is an important issue for Irish people.

SC Do you ever reflect on the constant demands on you for the past 30 years—including the 1984 assassination attempt made on your life and the torture and imprisonment that you endured?

GA No. Lots of friends and colleagues and family members were killed during that period. I survived. My focus is on the future not the past.

SC The day the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize was announced, you spoke at the Union League in Philadelphia. Many of us thought you would be a recipient and when you were excluded—we felt you were cheated. In your speech that day you said that you “don’t care about prizes”—has this changed?

GA I have to say that I was surprised at how many people in Irish America were annoyed by that decision. For me, it was never an issue. I am involved in a great project—to end British government involvement in my country; to end partition; and to create a new and just society for all Irish people. I believe we can be successful and that we can

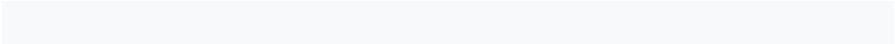
achieve it more quickly the more others join us in this endeavor.

SC How important has Irish America been to you in accomplishing your goals?

GA Very. There would have been no peace process without Irish America. No words can express my thanks to the crucial work for Ireland of all the many organizations and individuals in Irish America and beyond who have remained faithful over the generations.

SC How would you like to be remembered?

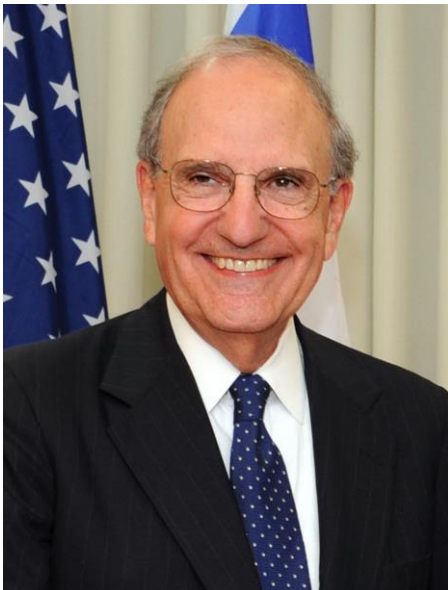
GA Ask me in 20 years



Gentle Persuasion... Crafting Peace Around the World

Foreword: George Mitchell was the Democrat Senator from Maine from 1980 to 1995 and Senate Majority Leader from 1989 to 1995. He was appointed U.S. Special Envoy for Northern Ireland and chaired the Northern Ireland Peace Talks helping secure the historic 1998 Good Friday Agreement. In 1998 he was awarded the Liberty Medal in Philadelphia and nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1999 he was the recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. From 2009 to 2011 he was U.S. Special Envoy for the Middle East Peace Talks appointed by President Barack Obama. He has been awarded more than 50 honorary degrees. His latest book is *The*

Negotiator: A Memoir.



Senator George Mitchell

This interview was
conducted in 2015.

I am on a
transatlantic call with
former Senator George
Mitchell ensconced in
the Meridian Piccadilly
Hotel in London's West
End near Piccadilly
Circus. I want to lapse
into a leisurely
conversation about his

role in bridging the impasse between the warring parties in Northern Ireland and his role in brokering the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and his penetrating and insightful book *Making Peace* (1999) which I devoured. It is a riveting behind the scenes account of his coddling, cajoling and patiently listening to all the dissenting Northern Ireland parties — their ancient grudges, their laundry lists of grievances and their dramatic ‘walkouts’ — while doing a balancing act between the two governments.

It is like having a front row seat to history in the making while illuminating the painstaking task Mitchell undertook as Special Envoy to the North that led, after two and a half years of intense negotiations to the cobbling together of the historic April 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

I want to talk about the public face of the Northern Ireland Peace Process that began with the August 1994 IRA ceasefire and the granting of Gerry Adams’ visa and his October 1994 visit to Philadelphia —but I am here to conduct an interview about Mitchell’s memoir *The Negotiator* which I highly recommend. It is a fascinating mix of the personal and professional filled with entertaining anecdotes and serious reflections on his remarkable life.

I first heard George Mitchell address the World Affairs Council in Philadelphia on March 17th 1998 about the state of the Northern Ireland Peace Process. At the time I wondered why there were no sanctions against the unionists for refusing to talk to Sinn Fein during a particular impasse in the talks. I now understand that he was walking a very delicate tightrope during the entire time of the negotiations. He had to choose his words carefully and wisely as the neutral facilitator. A few

months later he received Philadelphia's prestigious Liberty Medal for his peacemaking. It was then that I had the opportunity to meet him face to face. Despite his amazing portfolio, he struck me as a humble man who just happened to accomplish great things. And in my dreams last night I asked him what was his favorite subject in school — an innocuous non sequitur — obviously this interview was on my mind.

SC You say that your mother was the most influential person in your life — what was her impact on you?

GM She was a very strong forceful person who kept us going through difficult times. She had more common sense and good moral judgment than anyone I have ever known.

SC What is the greatest lesson you learned from your father?

GM Never give up. My father had a tough time. He was the son of Irish immigrants but never knew his parents. Although he didn't have any schooling, he was an avid reader. He left school after the 4th grade to begin a long life of hard work and low wages. His childhood was short.

SC In addition to your parents you are grateful to Elvira Whitten your former English teacher at Waterville High School; how did she influence you?

GM She was a very influential person in my life. She opened me up to a world of books. My big regret was not going back to thank her personally.

SC Your portrait of your brother Robbie and your last conversation with him is poignant. Do you miss him?

GM I miss him every day. He was a great guy. Although I am close with all my brothers and sister, I spent the most time with Robbie. His wife Janet still lives in Waterville. They have seven children. I often see reminders of him in his children.

SC Your three older brothers were all star athletes winning the State Championship and the National Championship — and you were not— did that bother you?

GM I had a massive inferiority complex; I was not in their league and they teased me about that.

SC You say that your father encouraged you to succeed in other ways—what did he say?

GM He urged me to study, to read, and to get the education he never had. He encouraged me without discouraging them. He kept sports in the proper perspective. He said, ‘Someday your brothers will look up to you the way you look up to them.’

SC Did it happen?

GM In a big way on election night in 1982 when I was elected to the Senate. Just as I was about to address the crowd, my brother Johnny, the greatest athlete in the family and one of the best known athletes in Maine history posed with me in a victory photo. He had his arms draped around me mugging for the camera. The next day *The Portland Press* carried the photo of me with Johnny referring to him as my ‘unidentified supporter.’ (laughing). I still tell that story today.

SC You have said that although your parents died penniless they achieved their dream because all their children went to college.

GM My parents were intelligent people but they had no education and so they had an exaggerated sense of belief in education. My father could not imagine us graduating from college and not succeeding in life. In his mind, you could not possibly fail if you had an education.

SC Why do you think they were that successful as parents?

GM I think it was a combination of factors. One was their total dedication to their children and their concept of education. Also, the simple good luck that we were born in America. My father was an FDR Democrat and a very devout religious Maronite Catholic and my mother lived the ideals of the gospel; she did not just recite them. She never had a bad word to say about anybody. Their values were simple: faith, family, work, country.

SC Do you feel you have lived the American Dream?

GM I do. I feel very very lucky in my life and I am very grateful.

SC Do you think the promise of the American Dream is disappearing?

GM Well, I think that a child born today would not have as good a chance as I did.

SC President Bill Clinton nominated you to the Supreme Court—but you turned it down; do you have any regrets about this?

GM Only when I read a decision with which I particularly disagree as in the Citizens United case on campaign finances—one of the worst decisions ever made by any Supreme Court in history. It is already causing problems for our country and its future.

SC As Chair of the Northern Ireland Peace Talks, you made a promise to all parties involved—what was that promise and why was it so important?

GM I told them I would listen to anything they had to say and they could talk as long as they wanted—which I came to regret later (laughing) because I had to listen to the same speeches over and over for hours on end. And at the start of the negotiations, I told them that any agreement would be theirs; that I was not there to impose an agreement on them on behalf of President Clinton or the United States and that every single word in the agreement would be written by them.

SC What was the greatest challenge you faced when chairing the NI peace talks?

GM I think the length and intensity of the conflict hardened the positions on all sides. There was very little inclination to listen to the other side let alone compromise with them. I think that is why it took so long.

SC Did you ever get all 10 political parties representing both governments in the same room at the same time?

GM Never

SC Four months after the April 10th, 1998 Good Friday Agreement a bomb planted by the Real IRA went off in Omagh. Can you describe your feelings meeting with the Omagh victims?

GM It was a very moving meeting. After the bombing, President Clinton asked me if I would accompany him to Northern Ireland for a meeting with the families of those who were killed and the survivors who had been injured. It was a very humid Saturday evening for Northern Ireland and it was jam packed with hundreds of people in a

recreation center. After the President spoke I met with some of the families and some of the victims — one of whom was 15-year-old Claire Gallagher. Claire was an aspiring pianist who lost her sight in both eyes because of the blast. She was quite amazing. She urged me not to give up and to go on.

SC Of all your many awards and honorary degrees—which are you proudest of?

GM I would say my time in Northern Ireland and the honorary degree I received from Queens University in Belfast; and later being asked to be Chancellor of Queens University.

SC The convergence of your Lebanese and Irish ancestry with your appointments as Chair of the Northern Ireland Peace Process and Special Envoy to the Middle East seem preordained; does this amaze you even now?

GM It does and that is why I ended the book with reminiscences about my two parents and the two countries and my dual heritage.

SC The signing of the Good Friday Agreement was an historic event—how were you able to resolve this 800-year-old intractable conflict? What skills did you bring to the table that enabled you to succeed where others failed?

GM It wasn't just me; I think that many people had a lot to do with it. I think the real heroes are the political leaders and the people of Northern Ireland who came together in a crucial moment. In my case, I tried to be patient and fair and to treat everyone with respect and give them a chance to make their case and search for common ground which might serve as a basis for an agreement, ultimately.

SC What are your children doing now?

GM Yesterday my daughter Claire had a kind of graduation ceremony — she goes to the Spence School in New York. When they leave the 8th grade, they have a mini graduation ceremony. My son Andrew goes to Loyola, a Jesuit High School in Manhattan. Right now he is on a college tour visiting Boston College

**The Incredible Journey of Roy
Bourgeois...
From Vietnam to Bolivia
To El Salvador and Beyond**

Foreword: Roy Bourgeois is the leading advocate for women priests in the Roman Catholic Church. In October 2020 *The Friends of Roy Bourgeois* launched a highly successful national billboard campaign advocating for the ordination of women priests.

A Maryknoll priest for 40 years, Roy Bourgeois is the founder of the School of the America's, SOA Watch, a grassroots movement that addresses U.S. Foreign Policy in Latin America.



Roy Bourgeois reacts to Sabina Clarke when he hears he is awarded the Passion for Peace Award by The Episcopal Peace Fellowship
Photo/Tom Keenan

Prior to entering the Maryknolls he spent four years in the military and was awarded the Purple Heart in Vietnam. In 2010 he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize; and in 2012 he was expelled from the priesthood and excommunicated by Pope Benedict because of his public support for the ordination of women priests in the Catholic Church.

In April 2022, his book *Male Supremacy in the Catholic Church...An Insider's View* was released and is now available on the Kindle app and on Amazon.

This interview was conducted in 2010

After my initial introduction to Roy Bourgeois in 2009 via his inspiring biography *Disturbing the Peace* by James Hodge and Linda Cooper, I knew I had to go beyond reviewing their book—I needed to talk to this remarkable man. So, I contacted the publisher and called Father Bourgeois at his home in Georgia.

And since that time and after working with him over the years on several projects —the most recent being the national billboard campaign to ordain women priests in the Roman Catholic Church ---the parallels between Father Roy Bourgeois and Martin Luther are uncanny. Both men boldly confronted the pope and challenged the teaching of the Catholic Church on matters of conscience and paid the ultimate price of excommunication--labeled as heretics.

A Maryknoll for 40 years, Roy worked with the poor in El Salvador and Bolivia until he was driven out of Bolivia by the military for his activism on behalf of those without a voice—the poor and the disenfranchised. When he was in Bolivia, he was told by the Maryknolls that he must leave because the military was after him; they came