

A witness to violence teaches peace

At the age of 5, **Hugh O'Doherty** was already a veteran of religious conflict. For a Catholic in Northern Ireland, it was hard not to be.

O'Doherty recalls how childhood squabbles would turn into profanity-laced shouting matches about the pope and the queen.

When he was a young adult, two brothers of a friend were ambushed, one killed and the other blinded. Another time a bomb went off in his hometown, injuring 30 people, including the father of a Protestant neighbor with whom he had grown up.

"He lost his arms and legs, but didn't die instantly," said O'Doherty. "They brought him home and he sat in the window for a number of months."

While the dying man was in plain sight every day, O'Doherty and his neighbors went on with their lives. "No one knew how to talk about this," he said.

Now O'Doherty makes it his business to talk about conflict. The 58-year-old Natick resident advises a number of groups as a consultant for Cambridge Leadership Associates in Cambridge.

Over the course of O'Doherty's career, his work has taken him to such far-flung places as Bosnia, Vietnam, and Switzerland. He has served as director of the Ireland-US Public Leadership Program and as program director at the Glencree Center for Peace and Reconciliation in Ireland, which brought Catholics and Protestants together to discuss issues dividing them. He now manages a project with the Irish Civil Service, training future public servants.

He came to the United States in 1985 to earn a master's degree at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and then taught a course on intractable conflict and leadership at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government for three years.

O'Doherty's clients say he has

changed their approach to solving problems.

"A lot of the training is looking at challenges in a different way and allowing yourself to see things so that you do *not* avoid conflict," said client Rachel Weiss, an executive with the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago. Now, she said, "I find I am choosing to exercise leadership rather than exert my authority more frequently."

Closer to home, O'Doherty is working with the Assabet Valley Collaborative, a group of educators from a dozen or so school districts. Todd Curtis, principal of Floral Street Elementary School in Shrewsbury, said O'Doherty taught him that being a leader does not mean knowing all the

answers.

"As a person in a position of authority," Curtis said, it can be tempting "to just go in and fix things, but that's not going to solve the long-term issue of how we work together."

O'Doherty contrasts how he now tunes in to conflict with the way he tuned it out when he lived in Ireland. People became accustomed to violence, he said, and

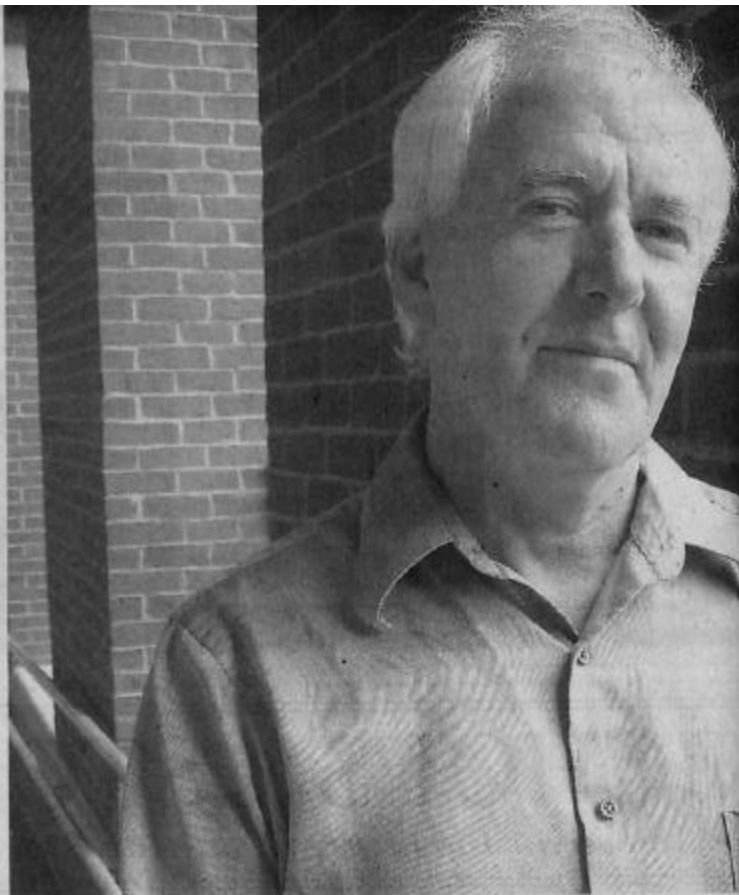
he likened their behavior to that of a frog placed in water over a flame. It acclimates itself to the rising temperature, staying put as it is boiled to death.

A turning point came for him while he was a young high school teacher.

"One night a group of men arrived at the home of a 15-year-old girl that I'd taught the year before. They shot her mother, sister, aunts, and left her with one brother," O'Doherty said. "That was the environment I was living in."

In 1976, he helped draw up the curriculum for a school program that addressed the turmoil, and thus set his career on the course it would take for the next 30 years.

On Tuesday, O'Doherty will be in Ireland, speaking with government officials about how they can bring the lessons they have learned about peace-making to the rest of the world.



Natick resident Hugh O'Doherty, who was a first-hand witness to sectarian violence growing up in Northern Ireland, has traveled the world as a specialist providing training in conflict resolution.

"The killing has stopped in Ireland and energy has been freed up," he said.

A lot has changed since O'Doherty was 5.

More information on Cambridge Leadership Associates is available at www.cambridge-leadership.com.

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RACHEL WEISS
On the leadership training provided by Hugh O'Doherty