Betty Williams is pictured in London having just received the news that she will be awarded the Nobel peace prize with Miss Mairead Corrigan, The prize is worth £75,000 and they are receiving it for their work as women leaders of the Ulster Peace Movement.Keystone/Getty Images

Today, May 22, marks the birthday of Betty Williams, one of the most inspiring figures from the Northern Ireland Peace Process and co-recipient of the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize with Mairead Corrigan.

In the popular imagination, the Nobel Laureates from the island of Ireland are Shaw, Yeats, Heaney, Beckett, Hume and Trimble. We must not overlook Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, who were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1976 for their groundbreaking work on the Northern Ireland Peace Movement (later renamed Community for Peace People), an organization dedicated to finding a peaceful resolution to the Troubles.
Williams was born May 22, 1943, in Belfast to a Catholic mother and a Protestant father - a rarity for the time - and has credited her upbringing with granting her tolerance and perspective.

Her family was no stranger to violence and tragedy. Her paternal grandfather, a Protestant, was attacked because his son married a Catholic. Her cousin was killed by Protestant extremists. Another cousin was killed by an IRA bomb. Williams once said “The Protestants killed one of my cousins, and the Catholics killed the other.”

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Yet it was the death of innocent strangers that would inspire Williams into action. Her peace-building work was inspired by a horrible tragedy Williams witnessed on August 10, 1976, when three children, Joanne, John, and Andrew Maguire, were crushed by an out of control car. The car was being driven by Danny Lennon, a PIRA fugitive, who was shot by British troops while trying to make an escape, leaving the car to roll forward.

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Williams, who was a homemaker and secretary at the time, resolved to do something. She collected thousands of signatures and organized women's march for peace, in which Protestants and Catholics came together. The first march was interrupted with violence. A second march drew thousands more and concluded successfully.

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Mairead Corrigan (nee Maguire), aunt of the Maguire children, partnered with her, and together they founded Community for Peace People.

Williams outlined the following declarations of the Peace People:

- We have a simple message to the world from this movement for Peace.
- We want to live and love and build a just and peaceful society.
- We want for our children, as we want for ourselves, our lives at home, at work, and at play to be lives of joy and Peace.
- We recognize that to build such a society demands dedication, hard work, and courage.
- We recognize that there are many problems in our society which are a source of conflict and violence.
- We recognize that every bullet fired and every exploding bomb makes that work more difficult.
- We reject the use of the bomb and the bullet and all the techniques of violence.
- We dedicate ourselves to working with our neighbors, near and far, day in and day out, to build that peaceful society in which the tragedies we have known are a bad
Williams and Corrigan are two of 48 women to ever win Nobels, and two of 16 women to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

According to the Nobel site, Williams divorced Ralph Williams, married James T. Perkins in 1982, and moved to Florida. She lectured extensively in the United States, and the International Platform Association granted her the Eleanor Roosevelt Award and named her Speaker of the Year in 1984.

As Visiting Professor in Political Science and History, she taught at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, where she worked to unite ethnic and cultural groups on campus and in the local community.

She has since moved back to Ireland but continues to travel the world promoting peace and reconciliation. June 16 - 17, Williams will be in Monaco for the Peacejam Youth Leadership Conference, a two-day Leadership Development event for teens led by a Nobel Peace Prize winner and mentored by university students.

A film titled "Betty Williams: Contagious Courage" delves into her extraordinary work and legacy:

For more information, visit the PeaceJam website.

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