



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

A brief record of some of the victims of the recent times of IRA terrorism  
*Compiled by a Christian brother*



**"If one be found slain in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him: Then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure unto the cities which are round about him that is slain: And it shall be, that the city which is next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take an heifer, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke; And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley, which is neither eared nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer's neck there in the valley: And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them the LORD thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the LORD; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried: And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley: And they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Be merciful, O LORD, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them. So shalt thou put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the LORD," Deuteronomy 21:1-9.**

### **Norah Bradford, June 1984 - wife of Rev Robert Bradford MP.**

"Terrorists were now murdering at least one member of the security forces each day. The death toll was rising at an unbelievable rate. There was a funeral to be attended practically every day.

'If I have to go to one more bereaved home and get asked once again what the Government is doing and not be able to say anything helpful, I think I'll crack', Robert said as he took off his black light-weight wool overcoat that I called his funeral coat, for he rarely wore it anywhere else.

The effect of walking behind yet another coffin with the police band playing the 'Death Knoll' or attending again a UDR Military funeral, was devastating for Robert.

But the news the next day was the same, and so too the day after.

He had yet another funeral to go to that Saturday morning. He took his light grey suit out of the wardrobe.

"You've Mr Bell's funeral this morning, don't forget." 'My overcoat will cover it. I don't want to walk around in black all day'. "Are you wearing clerics or your black tie?"

He didn't answer as he proceeded to take his favourite spotted maroon tie out of the drawer. It was the one that Claire had bought for him.



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I jumped anxiously out of bed to search for his black tie. He took it from me without speaking and looked at it for a minute. Then he rolled it up and put it in his pocket.

'I'll put it on after the advice centre'.

Robert called 'Bye love' from the garage door and I hastened out to get the dogs in in case the departing car should hit them.

The estate surrounding the community centre where the advice centre was being held was being painted, so two men in boiler suits carrying a short plank didn't attract much attention until they were close beside David and Ken Campbell standing in the doorway. Pulling guns from behind the plank, they made both lie face down and then shot Ken. One stayed there while two others raced into the building where a children's disco was in full swing, and some people were queued up to see Robert.

The elderly couple with Robert didn't have time to turn as before their eyes he was assassinated in his chair. The first shot rendered him instantly unconscious and the next six were presumably for good measure.

The phone rang and a close friend told me there had been some trouble at the advice centre.

'Please stay there, I'll be straight over', Bill said.

I gathered Claire on to my knee and told her she was going to have to be very brave, but I thought that Daddy had been hurt. We put on our coats and were just about to leave in some vain attempt to get to Robert when David arrived.

'Which hospital have they taken him to?' I called as I raced up the driveway.

'Come inside a minute', he pleaded, pulling me towards the door.

'You're wasting time', I thought. 'I need to get to him', I said aloud.

He shook his head and tears welled into his eyes as he continued to pull me towards the house. I shook my head, my knees were giving way but I fought to stand. The words wouldn't come out. I managed,

'You mean . . . gone', I sobbed.

He nodded, tears streaming down his face.

A month later when I finally came out of shock, I hit rock bottom. But even at the bottom of that deep, deep pit I found Jesus Christ. He had been there before me. Again He sent help in my dark hours of need.



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### **Eddie Magill 1/9/02.**

"My youngest son, Edward, had expressed a desire to join the RUC Reserve. My wife wasn't happy about that, but we decided to let him go ahead. Lovely young fellow he was. All my children sang in the Shankill Baptist Testimony Choir - my youngest son as well.

Well, you know, he joined, and away he went. Used to come home every day. Didn't like to stay in the Station.

But I remember February 20th 1983. He'd gone to work on the Saturday morning, on a 12-hour shift. Rang his mammy, as he did every day, rang his mammy to say that he would be staying over on Sunday, as the Sergeant wanted him to do another shift.

On Sunday morning my youngest daughter was singing in a little Christian Endeavour choir. My wife and oldest daughter went to hear her, and I went as usual to my own Assembly.

I came out of my own Assembly after the morning meeting, and the pastor and one of the other Oversight, they were driving me up home. They were in the car with me. And as I got to Glencairn Crescent where I lived - we had just turned round to stop - and I saw a police car coming up the other side, I knew there was something badly wrong.

My youngest lad was in Warrenpoint, and it seemed to be all right.

But when I started shouting at the Inspector not to ring the bell, I couldn't get out of the car quick enough because I'd a belt on and the door was locked. But when I got out of the car I heard the same cries that I'd heard from that wee woman all them years ago. Those cries that I never forgot. Those cries that I thought I would never hear again, and hoped I would never hear again. Only this time it was my wife and wee girl.

It turned out that my son was - my youngest son was walking over to the shop for something to eat because, as I said, he had to stay overnight down there. He was getting something for his lunch.

And as he walked across the street there was - the Provisional IRA had planted a man above a garage across the street from the Station, who pulled the curtain across as soon as my son left the Station - there was a car sitting just round the corner with three men in it, a driver and two others. And they began to shoot, and my lad had no time to draw a gun or nothing, and when they started shooting he tried to get away

You know, at the inquest we discovered that they had shot seventy-three bullets at him. He was hit thirteen times - top of his head to soles of his feet. And I had to identify him.



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And you know, what a terrible time it was. He was shot like a dog - in the middle of Warrenpoint town square, on a beautiful Sunday afternoon.

Well, you know, we - when I saw the lad and knew how my wife was - we never went to bed until after the funeral. Just sat, when everybody went out, and put our arms round each other to comfort each other.

After the funeral service, my wife never recovered from that. For six years she cried every day. If I hadn't had the job I had in Mackies it would have been worse. But she was able to ring me after the youngest girl went to school. And I was able to come out - working flexi hours - and come up and comfort her. That's the way life went on for six years.

You know my friends, as I've said, she never got over it.

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### **John McConville, a devout Christian and only 20, was working to save up his fees for Bible College when he was gunned down on a cold, dark winter's day in January 1976, along with 10 other Protestant workmen**

The McConville family, Tommy and Esther, with their four children, John, Karen, Mandy and Tania, lived about two miles from the village of Bessbrook.

John became a Christian at the age of 16 and sometime following his conversion he became a member of Newry Baptist church. John's only desire was to go to Bible College to prepare for missionary work in South Africa, to which he believed God was calling him.

He enrolled and completed various Bible correspondence courses in which he gained distinctions.

At the age of 20, John was accepted at a Bible College in Scotland where he was to commence full time study in the autumn of 1976. He was delighted and shared with the family how he felt so sure that this was God's plan for his life.

To save up for the college fees, John had taken a job at Compton's Spinning Mill at Glennanne, about four miles from Bessbrook, where he had been working for about two years.

On January 5, 1976, the Mill's minibus set off to return 12 workers to their homes. John McConville was among the passengers on that minibus. As the vehicle wended its way along the dark, lonely country roads of South Armagh, its happy occupants were having a very normal conversation about a recent football match.

The conversation also turned to the tragic events of the previous night when two Roman Catholic brothers had been shot and killed at their home in nearby Whitecross.



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As the minibus approached the brow of a hill near the Kingsmill crossroads, a red torchlight was spotted by the driver, who slowed down and stopped, believing this to be a routine Army check. Men wearing combat jackets, with their faces blackened, immediately joined the man waving the torch.

The occupants were ordered out of the minibus and were asked to state their religion. Initially, the one Roman Catholic passenger was thought to be the intended target, but when the gang ordered him to run, it was quickly realised by the Protestant passengers that only his life was to be spared.

The remaining 11 workmen were then lined up at gunpoint along the side of the minibus, and 10 of them were slain in a hail of gunfire. One man, though badly wounded, survived the attack and was able later to relate the horrific event that saw his colleagues murdered.

Tommy went over to break the news to Esther's mother, then brought her over to the house where, overcome by grief, she took a turn'. The intensity of the family's grief was at times uncontrollable. Karen at times screamed, such was her anguish.

Mrs McConville was in such shock that she did not know the details of how her son had been killed and thought that it had been a road accident involving the minibus. She later had to be told of how her son had actually died.

A policeman who arrived first at the scene described it as an "indescribable scene of carnage". The survivor had been shot 18 times.

The funeral service for John McConville was held jointly with five other massacre victims in Bessbrook Presbyterian church on January 8 amid driving rain, and his body laid to rest in the adjoining graveyard.

Mrs McConville became a Christian at the time of the murder and believes that only by God's grace and her faith in Christ was she able to cope and to keep going.

After the tragedy, Mandy and Tania, the younger children, experienced nervous reactions as a result of their grief and had to attend the hospital.

The following June, the McConville's moved house to Bessbrook. as they felt it impossible to stay in their home.

Mrs McConville returned to work just two weeks after the murder, but was on anti-depressants. "It was a terrible time, it was awful, I wouldn't wish it on anybody", she said. "I just had to go on. Only by God's help did I get through it".

The McConville's have found the strength to go on, but still keenly feel a great sense of pain and loss.



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Like dozens of murders in Co Armagh, no one has been brought to the courts or convicted of the Kingsmill Massacre.

Karen said: "Evil men had in the most brutal and inhuman way extinguished the life of John in his prime and I am going to miss him for the rest of my life".

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**Constable Allen Baird, a 28-year-old married father of two, died alongside three colleagues when a 200lb van bomb exploded on the Millvale Road, Bessbrook, in 1979.** He left a widow, Alwyn, and two children, Gordon and Judith, then aged seven and three. His father Leslie Baird (83) recalls the events of Easter Tuesday, April 17, 1979. Leslie lives in Scarva and is married to Anna Elizabeth (81), his wife of 46 years. He says:

"The sun was shining the day Allen died. It was a beautiful day. My wife, Anna Elizabeth, was in the house along with Allen's wife, Alwyn, and our daughter, Pauline. For some reason, I decided to turn the radio on. The headlines at one o'clock came on and the voice said there had been an explosion in Bessbrook . . . that was where Allen was stationed. He had been travelling along the Millvale Road in an RUC Land Rover with his colleagues and there was a parked van at the side of the road. It had a 200lb bomb in it. The murderers lay in wait in a field with a remote control device and triggered the bomb when the Land Rover was going by. I never heard the explosion that day, although other people did. I was told it was heard up to three miles away. The Land Rover disintegrated and they had no chance of surviving.

My wife reacted very badly. I had to call out the doctor to prescribe something for the shock . . . there was such hysteria in the house. What was thought to be Allen was brought back to his wife. The coffin was kept closed. He was unrecognisable.

The last time I saw my son alive was just before 7am that morning on his way to work - he walked by our window and waved in on his way past. He only lived a few doors down from me with his wife and two young children, Gordon (7) and Judith (3). They moved house some time after his death.

I knew all the people who were killed in the explosion . . . Paul Gray, from Belfast, Noel Webb, from Lurgan, and Robert Lockhart, who lived in South Armagh, not far from the Kingsmill massacre in which 10 men had been killed only a few years earlier.

I attended every one of their funerals.

I tried my best to keep going. My faith has helped me a lot. We had to get on with our lives, but it was very, very hard.

To me, the people that did this are murderers. Alan was only doing his job.



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I think it was an awful shame and pity that Allen died and it saddens me to think that murderers get to walk the streets because of the Good Friday Agreement.

It's not right that murderers should be walking free - no matter what side they are on.

Sadly, Allen's death was not the last. The violence continued on long after his death - other families were experiencing the grief that we have experienced. Over 100 RUC men died in the Troubles and what for?

Allen did his job and he loved it. He believed he was trying to keep law and order in the country.

I don't think Tony Blair would allow murderers into his government in Westminster so why allow them into the Assembly here?

There were a lot of RUC casualties around the Bessbrook area during the Troubles. Many of the men who died left young wives with families, and those women had to struggle to raise their children and keep a roof over their heads.

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**Kenneth Graham (46), the owner of J Graham and Sons, a building suppliers in Kilkeel, Co Down, was killed by an IRA bomb underneath his car on April 27, 1990.** The IRA said it was because he supplied building materials to the security forces. His daughter Manya was 13 and her sister Ashley was 10. Manya is now 30 and married to Kilkeel fisherman Gary Dickinson (34), with two daughters of her own, Kenzie (7) and three-year-old Heidi. Here she tells about that fateful day

This April, dad will be dead and buried 17 years, but I still feel we're left picking up the pieces, with no one ever held accountable.

Everyone thinks It's all over now, but it's nowhere near over for the innocent families left behind. It will never be over for us. People ask me if it gets easier over time - it doesn't. The pain never goes away, you just learn to live with it.

Dad was the owner of a family business in Kilkeel supplying building materials. Mum and Dad always kept it from Ashley and me, but the IRA had been threatening dad because he supplied building materials to the security forces. Dad's attitude was that he wasn't going to let them beat him, but on April 27, 1990, he was killed when a bomb exploded under his car outside his house.

I remember shortly after his funeral mum, Ashley and I were in Kilkeel when a carload of lads drove past. They wound down the window, spat at us and cheered We got him.



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Dad built houses for both sides of the community. It was very hard for me to understand why a republican would want to kill a Protestant just because he was supplying building materials. After his death, the firm stopped supplying the security forces - dad would have hated that.

I still feel very angry and I'm getting more angry as time goes on.

It's insulting to hear Gerry Adams talking about a new beginning. I disagreed with prisoners being let out under the Good Friday Agreement. No one who killed innocent people should have been let out of prison.

My parents divorced when I was nine because the threats dad was getting put their marriage under pressure.

I suffered from anorexia and bulimia for 10 years and only recovered quite recently. My family were very worried about me, but counselling helped me realise that it was my way of dealing with the trauma of dad's death. I now work part-time with *Families Acting for Innocent Relatives* (FAIR).

Everybody keeps saying 'You must move forward', but most of us can't do that. It feels like now the IRA have supposedly decommissioned, the victims don't count anymore.

Realistically, I know there will probably never be people behind bars for killing dad, but if I could even get the names of the people who did it and make those names public, it would be something.

I would rather have justice than a cheque. My family and I now live in the house that dad built for my mother when they got married. Sometimes it's difficult, because every room is a memory. There are times I look out the window and I can see his car there.

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### **Ronnie and Kathleen Finlay from Castlederg, Co Tyrone, had been married for 14 years when he was shot dead on August 15, 1991.**

Ronnie (47), was a former corporal in the UDR, having served part time for 18 years. Kathleen (55) has lived in Baronscourt, Co Fermanagh, for the past 10 years with her sons Andrew (18), a pupil at Strabane Grammar, and Bryan (25), who works for an import/export business in Dundee. She tells about the enduring horror of witnessing her husband's murder.

"We buried Ronnie on August 17, 1991. Our youngest son, Andrew, turned three just a few days later. He says he remembers his dad, but he was so young that I'm not sure he can.



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Ronnie was gunned down by three men as I left him off to work on the morning of Thursday, August 15. I was dropping him at the gate of the farm where he worked in Sion Mills when I heard a burst of automatic gunfire and saw him fall to the ground. When I ran round to him there was another burst of gunfire and I knew he'd been killed.

I got the boys out of the back of the car and, lifting Andrew and walking Bryan, I tried to walk towards the farmhouse, thinking it would be a place of safety, but one of the gunmen had a gun trained on me and told me to get back to the car.

I tried to shield the boys as the man shot out my tyres before they escaped in the farmer's car. I had no way of getting away and when I went inside the farmhouse the farmer had been tied up and the phone lines were cut. I walked with the boys to the nearest house three-quarters of a mile away to raise the alarm.

Bryan was hysterical and kept asking would dad be ok and shouldn't we get a doctor . . . It's strange, but the whole time I never felt hysterical. I just knew Ronnie was dead.

Ronnie had been in the forces when I met him. He was a corporal based part-time with the Ulster Defence Regiment in St Lucia barracks in Omagh. He served for almost 19 years, but he had been out of the regiment a little over two years when he was killed. He'd left because we both had full-time jobs and wanted to have more time together as a family.

As far as I know, Ronnie never received any threats either before or after leaving the UDR, but I suppose I didn't think he would be in the same danger as he had been in when actively serving.

There was never any reason given for why Ronnie was killed and no one ever claimed responsibility. That tortured me for a long time. It was clear that the gunmen had been watching us and knew our movements, so the timing of Ronnie's death was cold and calculated.

I don't know how anyone can kill another human being, especially in front of his young family. It's difficult to imagine a more psychologically damaging event, and we all needed support through counselling after it happened.

Bryan became my shadow for about 18 months afterwards. He didn't like to leave my side.

I don't know if what happened ever really sank in with me. If I zoom in on it too much, it makes me feel physically sick. I can't bring myself to forgive the people who killed Ronnie, but I really don't think about them any more. Ultimately, I think forgiveness comes from God, so it's between them and God.

I think you learn to live with your pain and walk with it a bit easier as time passes, but I can't pretend Ronnie never existed. He was my husband and there's not one day goes by when I don't think about him. I feel we've been cheated out of so much. The boys were cheated out of a father.



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We can't just forget the sacrifice people have made or the pain and suffering of people injured. I feel the politicians who are trying to build a peace settlement are pretending everything is fine, but most terrorist organisations are insatiable in their demands and I think agreements have been built on deceit. I think a lot of things have been swept under the carpet in pursuit of political expediency.

Nothing can change what has gone before, but it would be something if we could live in a normal, peaceful society where the law held people accountable for their actions.

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### **Norman had been shot dead in Newry. He was shot as he was getting out of his car outside his work at the Vehicle Testing Centre on the Rathfriland Road.**

He kissed his wife Sandra goodbye, then his four-year-old daughter Gail. As he opened his car, a gunman opened fire. He fell to the ground . . . more bullets were pumped into him. He died instantly - he didn't stand a chance. Gail was crying for her daddy . . .

Sandra and Norman had been married for five years or so. Sandra was in her late teens when they wed. Her family, the Croziers, owned a pub in Newry, and that's how she met Norman.

Our doctor came to the house and broke the news to my mother, Doreen. She had heart trouble and he was concerned about the effect the news would have on her.

She never got over it and passed away last year without seeing Norman's killers brought to justice.

My father, Isaac, was a coalman and was at work when he was contacted about Norman's death. He never said a word about it and to this day has yet to talk about it.

Norman's coffin was taken straight to the church; Sandra didn't want Norman waked at their home. They had left it that morning as a family and she didn't want to return to it without him alive. She never set foot in the house again. Anything she needed from it, relatives went in and got for her. The contents of the house were eventually auctioned off.

My mother took a turn during the funeral service - if the doctor hadn't been there, I don't know what would have happened.

We were an ordinary family and our parents didn't hold extreme political views. Norman would have gone to local pubs with mixed crowds. Everyone knew he wasn't in the UDR anymore.



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I read about Norman's murder and how it was planned in Eamon Collins' book, ***Killing Rage***. He was an IRA man who lifted the lid on what he had done.

In the book, he names his cousin Mickey as the gunman chosen to murder Norman. Mickey worked in the Housing Executive and had access to housing files for the Newry area. That is how these people operated - they were able to trace people's movements and watch them, thanks to informers they placed in all sorts of jobs.

One of the hardest parts about Norman's murder was that he had left the UDR six years previously. Sandra wanted him to leave. She thought his job was far too dangerous.

Norman and I thought we were fighting for a cause by joining the UDR - we wanted to stop terrorism and bring peace to this country.

I fully support peace, but I don't agree with the Good Friday Agreement because I have problems with the early release of prisoners. A terrorist is a terrorist, no matter who you are or what side you are on. The people who commit these sort of crimes should do time for what they have done.

Its sickening that this government is letting murderers out early and giving them money to rebuild their lives. They are not victims - they broke the law. Yet they are being treated better than the victims ever were. Nobody makes you go out and murder.

It seems to me that the British Government are giving everything to these terrorists-turned-politicians, just to get the Assembly up and running. They let the prisoners out and straight into government.

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### **The events of that night will always stay with me . . . Friday, February 17, 1978.**

Elizabeth was an only child. She had beautiful blue eyes. We were attending the dinner dance of the Irish Collies Club. I was club secretary.

The event was an annual one and we went to a different hotel every year. That year, 1978, we chose the La Mon House Hotel, near Comber, Co Down.

Elizabeth really did look very pretty that night; she was wearing a peach chiffon dress with a fur bolero. Her husband of 18 months, Ian, had bought her the dress as a present.

Ian's mother, Peggy, was sitting at a table with Ernie and myself, while Elizabeth and Ian sat at a table close by with another young couple. Ernie had wanted us all to sit together, but there wasn't enough room at either of the tables.



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We were served our first course around 8.45pm and the waiting staff were lifting our dishes at around 9pm when the fire bomb exploded.

It was like the sun had exploded in front of my very eyes - a huge, bright fireball of light and the most deafening noise. Then, the flames came . . . They kept rising higher and higher. People were on fire. They were rolling around on the floor trying to put the flames out

Nobody knew what was happening. The lights had gone out and we couldn't see. People were getting up out of their seats, squealing and panicking. But, Ernie and I were glued to the spot. We didn't know what to make of it - or what to do. Someone pushed us forward and kept pushing us out through the kitchen. It was full of broken crockery. Everything was smashed and ruined. A man grabbed a pair of curtains to wrap around his wife because she was on fire.

Then, we were outside, but Elizabeth and Ian were nowhere to be found. I thought they were coming behind me - they weren't sitting that far away from us so they should have made it outside shortly after us. I kept saying, Elizabeth, Elizabeth . . . I want Elizabeth. Where is she? I can't find her . . .'

We searched everywhere that night in a blind panic. There were few telephones in those days, so we searched all the hospitals in Belfast and different police stations.

We were at Dundonald police station around 5.30am when we found out the remains of Elizabeth and Ian had been discovered. They were lying incinerated inside.

Elizabeth was identified by dental records and her jewellery - a watch, her wedding ring, a sovereign ring and a charm bracelet. Her engagement ring was never found.

Ian was identified by his dental records, and by a pin that had been placed in his toe as the result of surgery.

Elizabeth was such a lovely kind person. She was a pretty wee girl with golden brown hair, wee chubby cheeks, and of course, her bright, blue eyes.

Her wedding day was a dream come true. She met her husband Ian at work - they were both employed by NIE.

Elizabeth didn't deserve to meet her death like that - no one did. Just the charred remains of those 12 people who died that night were given back to their families, and so many others received horrific burns as well as mental trauma. That night still haunts me and I had some very dark days afterwards.

A friend, Lily McDowell, had been sitting opposite Elizabeth at another table with her back to her. Lily received burns all over her body - only her face was spared. I went to visit her six months after the bomb; it took me a long time to pluck up the courage. She spent a full



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year in the Ulster Hospital with a fan at her feet, one at her head and two on either side of her body. She had to undergo various skin graft operations.

She told me that Elizabeth's beautiful dress had been on fire. She had tried to put it out, but she couldn't.

There was no reason for "La Mon Hotel" to be attacked that night. People were simply out enjoying themselves. It later emerged that the IRA had issued a warning a few minutes before the bomb exploded. When the police contacted La Mon to notify them, they were told that it was too late. The bomb had already exploded and the emergency services were required immediately.

When our daughter's charred remains were released by the Northern Ireland Office, neither Ernie nor I had anything to do with the organising of the funeral; we weren't fit for it.

I've been asked on numerous occasions how I feel about the people that did this. In order to receive forgiveness they must ask for it.

There have been evil men on both sides of the conflict here. They might get away with it in this world, but they won't in the next.

Elizabeth and I spoke to each other every day. No words can describe the emptiness I feel at her loss.

In the aftermath, we were just existing. We were lost without her. Ernie and I decided to move away to England in 1980 for a few years. We had to get away from here. We thought it would help us . . . it wasn't the answer.

Ernie's wish was to be buried beside Elizabeth when he died, and I fulfilled his wish.

It is my wish, also . . . at last, we will be a family again.

***And He said, What have you done? the voice of your brother's blood cries unto Me from the ground, Genesis 4:10.***

***And surely your blood of your lives will I require; . . . at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man, Genesis 9:5.-6.***