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Local & National

Sorry Mr Paisley, but you HAVE let me down so badly

Rita Morrison lost her daughter and son-in-law when the IRA bombed the La Mon House Hotel on February 17, 1978. She tells Crime Correspondent DEBORAH McALEESE why she can't support the DUP's power-sharing deal

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

It has been almost 30 years since Rita Morrison last saw her daughter Elizabeth. They were enjoying an evening together at the La Mon House Hotel when the IRA detonated a fire bomb.

With terrifying screams resonating through the hotel and flames engulfing the room, Rita and her late husband Ernie Crawford were pushed out of the hotel to safety, assuming their 24-year-old daughter and son-in-law Ian McCracken were behind them.

Rita and Ernie never saw Elizabeth or Ian again. The young couple had been married for just 18 months.

Now, 83-year-old Rita bravely hides the heartache she has lived with for three decades as she cheerfully greets fellow holidaymakers at the seaside resort of Newcastle where she is enjoying a short break with her new husband Evan.

It is not until she reads a Belfast Telegraph interview with Ian Paisley that she becomes slightly agitated.

In the interview Mr Paisley stated that he has received support from IRA victims who back his decision to enter into power with Sinn Fein.

"In this interview Mr Paisley says that he has received support from IRA victims but he doesn't mention all those like me who cannot support him because we believe he has done a deal with terrorists, not with Roman Catholics, nationalists or republicans, but with terrorists," said Mrs Morrison.

She added: "I am one of many victims that does not agree with what Mr Paisley has done.

"My husband and I lost everything. In the interview Mr Paisley talks about his grandchildren. That is something my husband and I were robbed of. He doesn't have to live with the heartbreak that I do. All I have left of my daughter is a little package of gold that was taken from her body. The package contains an incinerated gold watch. Every time I look at that it is a heartbreak.

"Mr Paisley should come and see that package. If that watch was incinerated what must my daughter's body have been like? What about her husband's body? They couldn't be identified. Elizabeth was identified by dental records and the gold jewellery taken off her body.

"Ian was identified by a pin in his toe that was there for medical reasons.

"I wonder if he (Mr Paisley) had have been in my position would he have entered into the agreement?"

Mrs Morrison pauses for a moment. When she speaks again her voice is defiant.

"If he was in my position would he have made the same decision? I want him to listen to what happened to my daughter and son-in-law and then tell me, face to face, what his reasons were for entering into the agreement. I want him to explain why, after for so many years of saying never, never, never, he suddenly said yes, yes, yes."

Without raising her eyes from the photograph of First Minister Paisley, Mrs Morrison describes the torment she has suffered since that horrifying night in 1978.

"That night still haunts me. I had some very dark days afterwards. Why did we get out unharmed while Elizabeth and Ian perished? My life was completely ruined and my husband died of a broken heart.

"We were robbed of our only child. If God had have taken her in natural circumstances we may have been able to accept it."

THE smiling face that greeted passers-by just 30 minutes before has now become sad and troubled-looking as she adds: "I do want a way forward for Northern Ireland but this is not it. I can't see a way forward unless there is a big change in government. The government needs cleaned up."

She wearily adds: "I am angry at the terrorists who took my daughter from me, I would not be human if I said I was not.

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"I always say I don't hate them because I don't want to hate anybody. But as a Christian, if the Lord Jesus has the power to forgive these men if they repent then so must I.

"But have they repented? Does Mr Paisley think they have repented?"

"Nobody has ever apologised for what they did to my daughter and her husband, or to the families of the other 10 victims that night. Apologies won't bring Elizabeth or Ian back but I still would like one. That is all I want to say, I want Mr Paisley to know why I, and so many other victims feel so let down by him."

Pausing for a few moments Mrs Morrison folds the newspaper and casts it onto the table. She then smiles warmly at her new husband and says: "After a long time I have sunshine in my life again. The last bit of sunshine I have is Evan who came into my life."

Rita Morrison's interview, and Ian Paisley's original interview, can both be viewed in full at www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk

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