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Wife of murdered Northern Ireland policeman: The night Kate's world fell apart

By Margaret Canning
Friday, 13 March 2009

The widow of murdered Constable Stephen Carroll describes the terrible moments when she discovered she had lost the love of her life.

The knock came to the door and that has taken away my life."

Kate Carroll describes how her world, made of a devoted husband of nearly 25 years, a son and grandchildren, came crashing down around her on Monday night.

"Love you. See you tonight," were Constable Carroll's last words as he left his home in Banbridge for work on Monday.

The super-fit grandfather had been in great form. "I said: 'Why are you so happy?' And he says: 'I'm always happy, Kate. I'm happy with my lot and I love you'. 'And I love you too, Mr P,' I said. Mr P stood for Mr Procrastinator, because everything I wanted him to do was just 'leave it, and I'll do it tomorrow'.

"On his way out, as I did every day, I said: 'Steve, take care, just keep your head down and take care.' He said: 'I am working towards my future and I have been through all the worst times. Wouldn't it be ironic if something happened to me now just when I have a year and a half left?'

I said please tell me he's injured. Don't tell me he's dead

"And I said: 'Steve, don't talk like that. I don't want to hear that'. So I said: 'Love you sweetheart, see you tonight'.

"We kissed each other at the door and that was the last I saw of him until tonight."

Mrs Carroll expected his usual phone call or text at around 10pm.

When the phonecall didn't come, she thought he must be working late.

"A car stopped outside, so I looked out and saw a uniform. I thought: 'Steve's home'. I went in to make him a cup of tea. I always put the kettle on for him, then we would go up to bed.

"But then I wondered why he wasn't coming in. So the next thing, when I opened the door, there was a policewoman and a policeman stood there. I just couldn't believe it because Steve always said if there was a policewoman and a policeman that meant something has happened.

"And yes, something had happened to him. I just wanted to know what was wrong and I wanted to know that he was injured. I said, please tell me he's injured. Don't tell me he's dead.

"And Graham the policeman said: 'Just come in and sit down and



Kate Carroll: Widow of murdered Constable

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we'll tell you'. He just told me you husband has been shot dead in Craigavon. And (then) I was on my own and I just paced and paced and they told my mum and my family and I just couldn't believe it. I still don't believe it, how somebody as good as him can just be taken away.

"I just can't believe it."

Her husband was taken home to her in a coffin on Wednesday night. "It was very difficult. I couldn't even wait. I had to go out to the coffin. I couldn't wait until he was inside. I just wanted to see him and be with him. I am absolutely devastated and so is my mother-in-law. No mother wants her son to die before her."

He had many fine qualities: "He was strong. He was a good person. He was competitive. Very, very competitive. He was sporty, kind, loving, caring, romantic — all those things. He was a really, really nice person.

She spoke in the living room of her home, clasping the hand of her mother-in-law Margaret, with a picture of the couple in Paris beaming at a restaurant table.

"We met in the Coach in Banbridge, we got together and after a few times of seeing him, I was hooked. He was so adorable. He was a good man. He was lovable, he was kind, he was considerate. He was romantic.

"He was just everything a good man should be."

He was also dedicated and efficient in everything he did. "He was very proud and took his work very seriously. He was a dedicated man in everything he did, in sport, in everything."

Such was his interest in sport that he planned to do a sports science degree and become a personal trainer once he left the police, around 18 months before dissident republicans destroyed his chances of a future. "He made plans for everything for our future and how we would grow old together and have a fantastic future. Sadly we haven't."

Friends and colleagues have been descending on the house to pay their respects. "He was always smiling," Mrs Carroll said.

"His colleagues have been saying he always had a big cheesy grin. The only thing that's missing from him tonight is a big, cheesy grin."

I hope this is the last time anybody has to suffer what I have suffered

The grieving widow of the PSNI officer murdered by dissident republicans has told how she wants something positive to come out of the killing of the man she loved.

Kate Carroll won't dignify the dissident republican killers of her husband by speculating on their motives. "I don't want to give it any credence because I don't think anything about them. They are a non-entity. I don't care about them."

Life is too short — and she hopes her loss will remind people of that.

"I hope that this is the last time that anybody has to suffer what I have suffered as a result of Steve's death.

"If something positive comes out of this, that would make his death worth it. I hope he hasn't died in vain."

But she does want to convey something to those who threaten to plunge Northern Ireland back into the Troubles.

"I hope these people are listening and if they just realised that we only get one chance at life.

"A piece of land is a piece of land and at the end of the day, on Friday, my husband is only going to get six foot by six foot, and that's all any of us are going to get.

"What don't they realise this and talk to each other? I just can't comprehend the mindset of people. Why not just enjoy your life? It's short. It's very, very short.

"They have robbed my son of his father and my grandkids of their grandfather, my mum (in-law) of her son and me, part of my life has gone.

"At the end of the day, I hope Steve hasn't died in vain."

She always feared her husband could lose his life in the line of duty. "Every time he went out it was 'please God, keep him safe'."

In the living room there is a picture of the constable's graduation day, when he was lauded for his higher national certificate in sports science from Belfast Institute, an interest that was the bedrock of their plans for the future.

"He went through all that for nothing. I don't feel angry. I just feel numb. Just sorry for the people that did this. They're just sick."

Mrs Carroll is aware that her ordeal, though uniquely painful for her, has also been played out

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among thousands of families during the Troubles.

"It's an awful sensation and my heart goes out to so many people who have suffered and who are suffering what I am suffering now."

There was a sense of unease following the murders of Sappers Quinsey and Asimkar in Massereene Barracks.

"I think everybody felt something. We thought all this was over, but obviously not. I can't believe this has all started up again. If Steve's death has made a positive effect, it's a hard lesson for everybody to learn but if something positive comes out of it, then it's fine. It's all I care about.

"I don't want Steve to have died in vain. It's just dreadful.

"I have been robbed of my life, part of my life has gone. I just feel like he was my life. My son and my husband was my life. I just feel now that I am dead inside. It's just devastating news to be told."

Mrs Carroll is being supported by her mother-in-law Margaret. "I will remember him with a great deal of love," the grieving mother said. "I'll always be thinking of him. He'll always be in my thoughts. I love him dearly. I always will."

"He was a happy-go-lucky boy, a lovely boy.

"I love him to bits."



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