

By her own admission Roisin Fitzpatrick wasn't one for tales of 'divine interventions' or 'miracles'. "Early in my life that just wouldn't have been part of my reality," she says.

Facts were her stock in trade at the United Nations, the European Commission and the European bank where she worked in the area of Economic development.

But the day after her 35th birthday in 2004 her world and belief system was turned upside down by a near-death experience (NDE) in the intensive care unit of Beaumont Hospital in Dublin.

Roisin was at home on the seafront in Bray, where she'd set up her own homeopathy clinic, when severe, 'almost paralyzing' headaches arrived in waves that afternoon.

"They just came out of the blue but immediately I knew this was serious. I knew I'd have to stay calm or else I'd pass out and that could have been the end for me," she says.

Bouts of nausea quickly followed but somehow she managed to call an ambulance and make her way to the front door of her home waiting for the paramedics to arrive.

When they did they found Roisin on her knees fighting to maintain consciousness.

"I'd learned how to meditate and so was doing that because I knew I was having a brain haemorrhage. If I panicked the increased flow of blood to my brain could have resulted in death or a stroke so by staying calm I managed to slow the flow down and give myself a chance."

Roisin was transferred from Loughlinstown hospital to Beaumont later that evening and plans were made for a vital life-saving operation the following morning.

It was during the night as she waited for her surgery that she says something extraordinary happened.

"I felt myself being drawn out of my body and could see a sparkling light, which grew in intensity. The light came in waves and the feeling was one of pure bliss and total serenity. I felt so at ease with the energy I could feel, the peace of it all. It was bizarre as I also knew that I still existed."

Roisin says that while it was difficult to put a timescale on how long her near-death experience lasted it came and went during the night.

"In the end I made the decision to come back. My parents were alive at the time and I couldn't have gone before them. They did everything they could for me and I wasn't prepared to leave them behind."

The experience transformed Roisin's life to the point that she now says she was 'lucky' to have had such an experience.

"It changed my perspective. I have no fear of dying now. What's the worst that can happen to me? I've been there and it was absolutely brilliant so why would I be afraid?"

'I felt myself being drawn out of my body. It was pure bliss'

Roisin Fitzpatrick says her near death experience has changed her life for the better, writes **Graham Clifford**



At peace: Roisin Fitzpatrick now produces art based on the light she saw during her near death experience.

Dave Meehan

Inset, right, author Colm Keane has interviewed 70 Irish men and women about their own experiences



"I feel blessed to have had experienced such a feeling of complete elation and such a vast expanse of bliss. Since my NDE I think my friends would say I'm a lot calmer — I feel I have a lot more freedom."

Roisin decided to use the inspiration of her experience to launch her career as a contemporary artist focusing on the light that was so powerful in her NDE.

"I wanted to share the beauty of the light I'd accessed," she told the *Irish Independent*.

Particularly successful in the USA, she skilfully uses fine crystals and natural silks to create the reflection and refraction of light, and her pieces have been snapped up by the likes of tycoon Richard Branson.

Last month scientists at the University of Michigan claimed to have finally discovered the reasoning behind the vivid experiences described by near-death survivors.

A study of dying rats found high levels of brainwaves at the point of the animal's demise — could it be that near-death experiences are as a result of this increased brain activity rather than anything spiritual?

"The problem with findings like these is that it supposes that consciousness can only exist when the brain is active," says Roisin.

"Through my experience I've realised that energy exists beyond this point."

Author Colm Keane, who has spent years collecting accounts of near-death experiences in Ireland, agrees that the most recent findings tell us nothing new.

"We already knew that there is increased brain activity as the point of death nears. As you can't ask someone who is dead about the experience it's impossible to draw any definite conclusions," he says.

One of the common misconceptions in the west is that NDEs

are linked to religious beliefs.

But Keane points out that studies have shown similar experiences amongst those of all different religions and none.

"Whether religious, atheist or agnostic the common recollections of sensing peace and tranquility, heading towards a bright light, encountering a person who has already passed on and being faced with a decision to go or remain almost always exist."

Keane, who wrote *The Distant Shore*, where he interviewed 70 Irish men and women about their near-death journeys, visions and premonitions, says that he sticks to the facts when writing rather than trying to answer the big question about what happens to us after we die.

"I deal with what's recognisable rather than the spiritual.

What's clear though is that NDE's have always occurred in human history. The first recorded was during Plato's time in Ancient Greece when a soldier named Er gave an account exactly the same as that of those who experience NDEs today."

Over the years numerous studies have tried to explain the phenomena, but Keane believes if there is to be an exact scientific explanation it won't come any time soon.

"None of these studies established a reason for them. If there is to be an answer scientifically it's thousands of years away."

In a previous book, Colm recounts the story of Meath man named 'Eddie' who had an NDE after being shot twice during an armed robbery at his home.

"The two bullets went in the front, just below the heart, and went out the back, beside my spine," explained Eddie.

Eddie had a haemorrhage during his recovery at a Dublin hospital and during a life-saving operation had an NDE.

"I was in this tunnel. I was going on a sort of a conveyor belt. You know where the cases go through at the airport, there's a cover there where your suitcases go. It's like a flap. You can't see the other side of it because there is darkness there.

"I was lying with my arms outstretched and I was heading for this flap. There was no light, just darkness beyond the opening. I couldn't see beyond but it was like some kind of a void. To me it was just a dark place. I don't know. It certainly didn't feel like Heaven. I was moving along this tunnel and I was quite contented. But when I came to the entrance to go in, my arms stopped me and I came to a halt."

Nuala, from Dublin, told of her experience when pregnant in London many years ago.

She had been prescribed incorrect medication at a clinic and her condition quickly deteriorated.

"The poison had gone through my whole system. I ended up being anointed twice. Unfortunately the child — a boy who was baptised Seán — died having lived for an hour.

"At one stage, while I was out of it I suddenly went through darkness like a tunnel.

Then I came from the blackness into a large area where there was a lovely brightness. It was like a most unusual sky, coloured blue. It was the most beautiful blue you ever saw, very light in colour, even lighter than sky-blue. The brightness was fantastic."

She told how she met a figure dressed in bright garments.

"I knew it was Jesus and, much later on, I recognised from a picture that it was like the Divine Mercy, with the hands out. The blue sky was behind him. There was someone else there in the background but I wasn't able to recognise who it was. The figure in the front seemed gentle and lovely but I didn't want to go. I asked him not to take me yet. I told him there were some things I hadn't finished doing."

