

A Life with Claw tells it all: Hundreds at the launch

■ The Peter Clohessy story is told

DONAL O'REGAN

THE FOLLOWING story didn't even make it into A Life With Claw - The Peter Clohessy Story. So if that's anything to go by then the book - launched in front of a crowd of over 350 in Thomond Park - will be on many Christmas wish lists.

Peter was well known for enjoying a sneaky cigarette before matches but he denies smoking at half-time. On one occasion, though, midway through a game, he indulged in something else that dieticians and nutritionists would be aghast at.

The book's author and Peter's wife, Anna Gibson-Steel, takes up the story.

"It was 2001 and they were in Wales for a Munster match. Peter was on the bench. Somebody else was playing for Peter - it wasn't Marcus [Horan] - and they were getting a torrid time at the scrum.

"At half-time Niall [O'Donovan] decided Peter should come on. They couldn't find him anywhere. Niallo eventually found him two from the top of the queue at the burger van.

"So Niall said, 'We need you for the match'. But I'm nearly at the top of the queue!' replied Peter. He waited, got his burger and ate it before going on for the second half," said Anna.

"But I was hungry," said Peter in the Thomond Suite last Thursday night. It certainly didn't do any harm as Munster ran out 61-18 winners over Caerphilly.

"There are loads of great stories. It was a lot more fun in the amateur days. The rugby got better in the professional days but I won't say a lot of

closure was overwhelming. "Phone calls, texts, Facebook, Twitter ... It actually made me worse in a nice way because it was emotional to be getting all the nice messages," said Peter.

What are the possibilities of it reopening, asks the Leader.

"Not at the moment. That will be another chapter," said Peter.

He was approached many times about doing a book after he retired from playing with Young Munsters, Munster and Ireland.

"I had no interest because if I was to do it I would have done it properly and I would have fell out with too many people. I had loads of friendships over the years playing rugby so I didn't want to sacrifice any of that. So I said I would keep it as memories," said Peter.

However, as the years passed the notion of the book was inspired by their youngest son Harry, 8, when he saw a clip of Peter scoring a try.

"He never got to see daddy play," said Anna. The couple have two other children - Jane, 15, and Luke, 21.

"The idea of doing it was to record it for them so that's why it made it so much fun. It was really just for the kids," she adds. And who better than Anna, who has been beside him every step of the way, to write it.

"It is all there. There's no bulls**t. What is in it is facts," said Peter.

"There are some sad stories and some very funny stories in it - it is what happened. It is different from your usual run of the mill book. I hope everybody enjoys it," he said.

Keith Wood, guest speaker, told some great stories, including the first time he met Peter when Carrigrohane were playing



Keith Wood speaking at the launch of Anna Gibson-Steel's book, A Life with Claw, at Thomond Park, while Harry, Peter and Anna enjoy some of the anecdotes



Mary Clohessy, Monaleen; Mags and Megan O'Mara, Annacotty; Niamh Mullane, Bunratty and Kathryn O'Mara, Bruff



Tom Monaghan, president of Young Munster RFC, Gerry Casey, Live 95FM, Johnny Brennan, Hyde Road and Eileen and Gerry O'Shea, Crecora



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PHOTOS: DAVE GAYNOR

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The timing of the book's release was poignant considering the closure of Clohessy's pub in the city centre.

"Limerick and all of our friends have been absolutely phenomenal in their support over the last few weeks. It was quite overwhelming. I think that is what makes Limerick and Munster such a special place to live. I'm mildly amused by the synchronicity of the timing - an iconic business that meant so much to so many closing at the same time that we were hosting a celebration for the launch of the book.

"We obviously did not plan it that way but I came to realise it is a bit of a gift in the midst of a pitfall of life we get to celebrate our health and the absolute wealth of friendship that we have, so for that again thank you so much," said Anna, in her speech. It was greeted by the warmest round of applause of the night.

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Keith Wood, guest speaker, told some great stories, including the first time he met Peter when Garryowen were playing Young Munster. "I was a young fellow. There are an awful lot of the Young Munster pack here tonight and I still actually shy away from them. We hit the first scrum, Young Munsters had a much better pack and were putting us under a little bit of pressure.

"I was 18, 19. I said, 'I'm able to deal with this' until I heard a little whisper, 'Who is going to burst the young fellow's nose?' To which Claw said, 'I'll do it'.

"I got punched straight in the face, blood running from my nose.

"Two minutes later there was another scrum and I heard, 'Who is going to burst the young fellow now?' They kicked the s*** of me so how I am here at all tonight I have no idea!" said Keith.

Staying with club rugby, Peter said the final whistle at the All Ireland League win in 1993 over St Mary's was one of the happiest memories in his career. "It was probably the only thing I ever won playing rugby!" smiled Peter.

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Mick Galwey, Phil Danaher, Ennis Road and Tim Duggan, Ballyclough



Fr Simon Sleeman, Glenstal and Fr Tom Ryan, Murroe



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Johnny and Phil Foley and Deirdre and Kevin Herbert, Lisnagry



Eugene Griffin, Gouldavoher; Joan Griffin, Ashbourne Park; Tommy Greene, Ardnacrusha and Mayor Michael Sheahan, Monaleen



John Hayes and Fiona Steed, Cappamore and Paul O'Connell, Annacotty



Dr Michael and Joan Griffin, Monaleen



John Herbert, Arthur's Quay and Paul Madden, Dooradoyle



Anna Gibson-Steel at the launch of her book, A Life with Claw, at Thomond Park with her husband Peter Clohessy and Keith Wood



Kate Cosgrave, Monaleen, Chloe Tobin, Annacotty and Ciara Neville, Monaleen



Alan Quinlan and Mary Edwards with John Hayes



Mick and Anne McCarthy, Dooradoyle