

Dropping the Habit, Marion Dante's story

By ANNE SHERIDAN

A LIMERICK nun who wrote to the Pope asking to be released from her life as a nun has just released her first book, *Dropping the Habit*, in which she documents her fall-out with the Church and living life without the veil.

Marion Dante 62, from Rosbrien, reveals a journey of discovery and questions if she is to cope without her Salesian Order. "My book has gone through various stages. It was written primarily for therapeutic reasons. It's grown from a set of vignettes and memories to a biography and now to an autobiography," she said.

She suffered a nervous breakdown after serving 32 years as a Salesian nun, recovered from cancer and climbed Machu Picchu three years ago to raise funds for cancer patients. "But having had breast cancer has taught me many a lesson. You can't survive with anger in your heart," she said. She also started writing poetry once she was diagnosed with the condition: "Cancer! Horror of horrors! Fewer tomorrows. How did it happen? Questions and answers, anger and blame".

Born in Limerick in 1944, Marion Dante conceived out of wedlock and her mother consequently forced her to enter the Salesian Sisters Convent in Surrey to "absolve her of this sin. The dollops of guilt the Church plonked on my mother affected many lives. When I became conscious of this I wanted out and I wrote to the Pope," she states in the opening paragraph.



Author and former nun, Marion Dante, with her mother and her sister Bernadette, at Adare Castle

On January 6 1991, in her petition to Pope John Paul II, she wrote: "I have tried hard during the three years granted to me to consider whether or not I should renew my vows and have come to the conclusion that I find it too difficult to continue living in the convent. I therefore feel that, for the good of my health, I want to be released from the commitment of being a Sister in the Salesian Order". Five months later she received a reply from the Vatican releasing her from her vows.

This biography, she says, has helped her to deal with a number of issues that have troubled her since leaving the convent, especially the anger and injustice she felt at the hands of the Church.

The publishers, Poolbeg, have described her story as one of hardship and courage. "After a lifetime of service she left the convent with practically nothing and with no concept of the outside world," said a spokesperson for the company.

Dropping the Habit by Marion Dante is available to buy at all good bookshops from April 2 and is priced at €14.99.

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