

Truth really is stranger than fiction and Mary Monaghan's story of a husband who was missing for 14 years and then crossed her path has a feeling of 'you-couldn't-make-this-up'. **Lindsay Ord** spoke to her

WHEN Mary Monaghan waved her husband goodbye as he headed off to Australia for a three-month back-packing trip, it never occurred to her that he would not come back.

He'd been stressed at work, with his business floundering, but Mary had no reason to believe he was walking out on her.

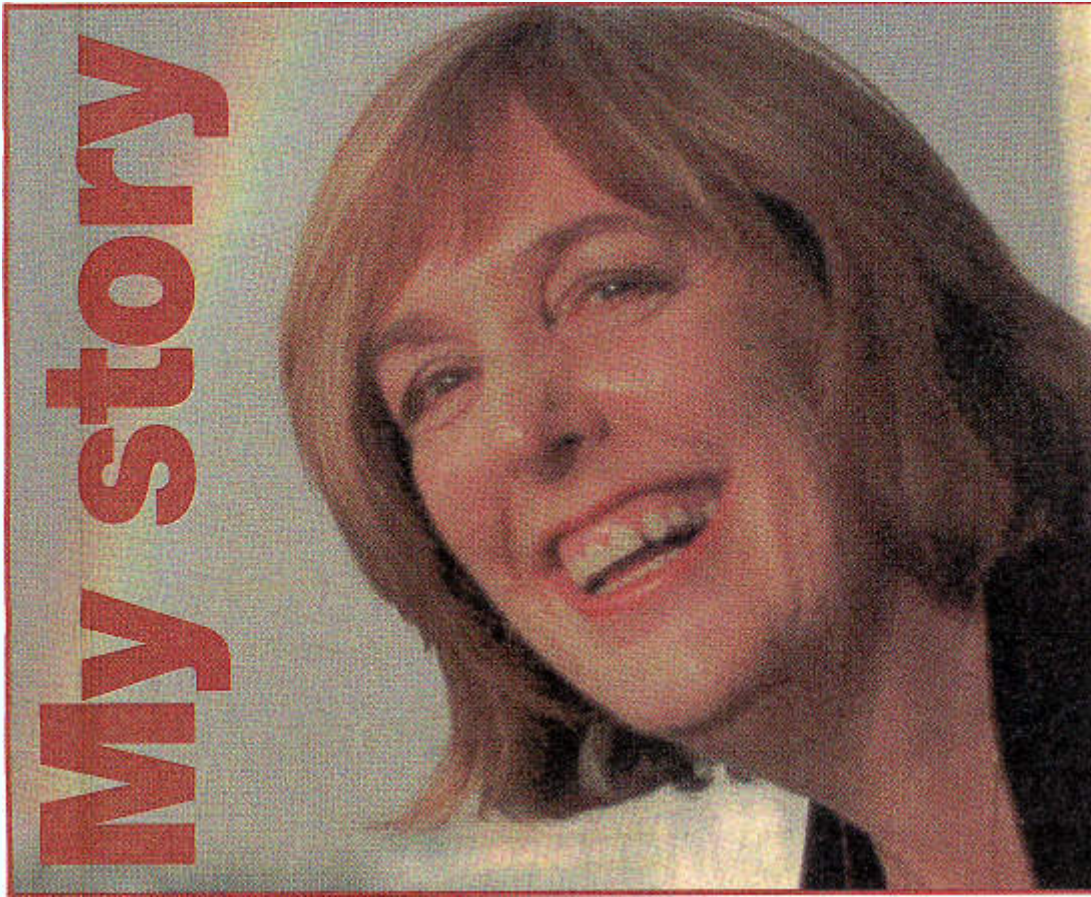
"John had booked an open-ended ticket, but I expected him to come home when the three months were up," she says. "We lived an idyllic life in Johannesburg."

Mary had expected limited contact - he'd be backpacking in remote areas. She could keep tabs on his safety through the activity on his Diner's Club card, he'd said.

Then his card expired and Mary had no clue where he was - or whether he was safe.

"There had been murders of hitchhikers in Australia and I was worried about him," she says. "As time went on, I became increasingly concerned, but I always gave him the benefit of the doubt. I had no reason to think he would not come back."

She contacted Interpol and a private investigator, spending four years and thousands of rands on the



A TURN UP FOR THE BOOKS: Mary Monaghan's epic search for her missing husband opened a new chapter in her life, inspiring two books: *Remember me?* and *Who do you belong to?*.

search - all in vain.

Slowly it dawned on her that he would not be coming home. It was time to move on. She had their marriage annulled in the Catholic Church and got a divorce.

"It took me a while to get to that point. Because of his financial troubles, we had lost our house, I was battling financially and I needed to restart my life. I would have appreciated even a postcard with no return address, but there was never anything from him. It was so strange. We had what everyone thought was the perfect marriage, but it turned out to be not so perfect."

John had moved to South Africa from his native Ireland in 1980 and Mary, also of Irish descent - and his girlfriend at the time - followed him a year later. They were married in Johannesburg and set about building a life together.

An industrial paint

specialist, John started his own company and Mary worked as a customer financial services manager for a large liquor company. They appeared to have it all.

Mary was in contact with John's family in Ireland and they were also clueless as to his whereabouts. After three years, he did, however, make contact with them, unbeknown to Mary.

"I found out where he was living through his aunt, though it took me another year to find him," she says.

Finally she traced his cellphone number, dialled it and said: "Remember me?" (which subsequently became the title of her book).

After a stilted conversation, the phone went dead. Mary tried again and a woman answered. Then John phoned back. He had left South Africa with a woman and had settled with her in Australia.

As time went by, Mary moved on with her life and decided to write a book, telling her story.

It was better received than she expected and soon she was heading off to her home town of Ballinrobe, Ireland, to promote it. The press picked up on a great story and within

days she was doing interviews with Irish and British newspapers and appearing on radio and television talk shows. She found herself in bookstores signing piles of copies of *Remember Me?* for admiring readers.

Then the unthinkable happened. As she was about to meet John's aunt, Elizabeth, at a coffee shop in his home town of Ballyshannon, John stepped across her path - a complete coincidence - 14 years after his disappearance.

Her reaction, the effect it had on her, and the path her life took are covered in her second book *Who Do You Belong To?*

"Truth really is stranger than fiction and if my story had been a novel, it would have sounded improbable," laughs Mary, now 53.

Has the experience shattered her faith in men?

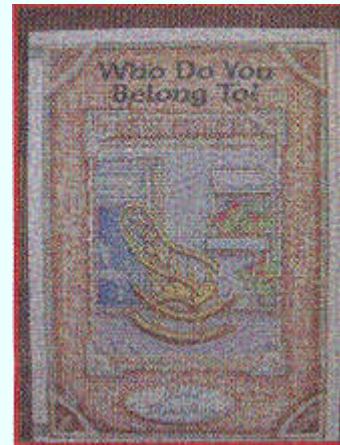
"No, it hasn't put me off men. The worst thing would be for me to have become bitter and twisted and for the experience to have damaged me to the point where I could not get involved with anyone.

"I am not in a relationship but I lead a busy and fulfilled life. I write, I travel, I hike, I do boot camp, I read. Life is good."

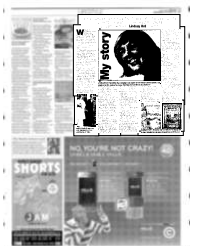
Mary has written a screenplay of her story and hopes it will be snapped up by a film-maker. With love, betrayal and intrigue, it has all the ingredients of a box-office success.

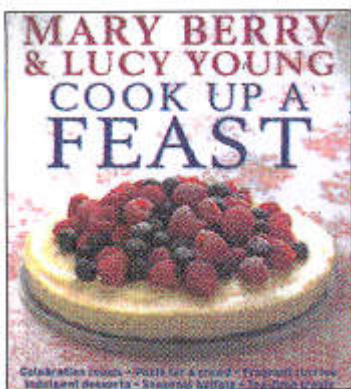


HAPPY COUPLE: Mary and John Monaghan on their wedding day in 1985.



'A GREAT STORY': *Remember Me?* and *Who Do You Belong To?* by Mary Monaghan are available at bookstores for R130 each.





Cook Up a Feast by Mary Berry and Lucy Young (Dorling Kindersley, about R220)

I AM SURE anyone who has held a party has wondered how much food to prepare and worried as to whether there will be enough.

With 70 cookbooks to her name, Mary Berry needs no introduction. She has also recently been voted Britain's third most popular chef after Jamie Oliver and Delia Smith. In this book she takes all the guesswork out of cooking for a crowd.

Recipes are given to serve 6 and 12 (which can also be doubled) and some to serve 20 to 40. Berry gives recipes for popular starters and finger foods and explains what can be done ahead of time and whether it can be frozen and for how long, and what needs to be done on the day.

She does the same for the mains and in this section recipes include meat, fish, chicken and vegetarian options. Pasta is given a chapter all of its own as she sees pasta as a most versatile food when catering for a crowd.

Puddings suitable for a crowd are also catered for, with special emphasis on ones that can be prepared ahead of time and frozen and then finished off on the day – with an impressive Pavlova the pièce de résistance.

Traditional English tea takes up a whole chapter and covers sandwiches, tray bakes, cupcakes and a divine carrot cake that can be made and frozen and then iced the day before you need it.

The book includes menus for all sorts of parties, how to set the scene and the table, shortcuts you can take and the details of what to do on the day. A book worth having on hand for anyone who enjoys entertaining. – Olga Accolla

How To Cook The Perfect...
by Marcus Wareing
(Dorling Kindersley, about R165)

HAVE you ever wished you had a chef on hand for advice when experimenting in the kitchen or when you realise you've done something wrong and you're not quite sure how to put it tight?

Marcus Wareing does just that in this book.

He has chosen 80 popular recipes and offers clear step-by-step instructions as well as a "Key to Perfection" warning giving that all-important step which ensures success.

He also has "All is not Lost" advice to rescue you from mistakes.

Too much seasoning in the soup? Overcooked the poached eggs? Your crackling is not quite crisp at the end of roasting? Your chocolate cake mixture starts to curdle?

Marcus tells you "All is not Lost" and explains how to save it, or use it in some other way.

The recipes include various soups, meat dishes (from roasts to pork chops), chicken, different ways with eggs, out-of-the-ordinary vegetable combinations and

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Food From Many Greek Kitchens
by Tessa Kiros (Murdoch Books, R345)

LET me start with the positives about this cookbook. The pictures are stunning, beautifully styled and unmistakably Greek.

The recipes are many and varied (as the title of this book suggests) and cover most of the traditional and better known Greek dishes, from mezes, soups, meat dishes, Easter foods, baked items, including pita bread, to fish, seafood, rabbit and sweets.

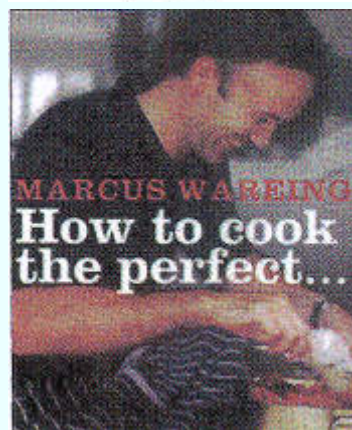
I also like the way the book is interspersed with brief accounts of Greek traditions and festivities and which traditional dishes are prepared for various feast days.

This helps to see the dishes in the context of Greek life.

The short note at the beginning of each recipe, with hints and alternative ingredients to use if the original ingredients are not available, works well.

However, in spite of the

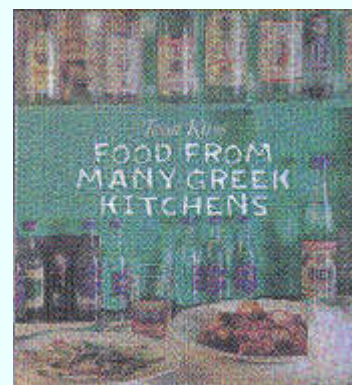
Book Shelf



salads and a selection of puddings, bakes and even Irish soda bread.

Even a beginner should achieve success with the way the recipes are structured because Marcus's "Key to Perfection" gives you insight into that one element to get it right, for good if not outstanding results.

This book would make a useful gift for someone who is taking his or her first steps into cooking at home or for any cook who strives for perfection. – Olga Accolla



above, I did not find this book user friendly.

The choice of pale green and the cursive font is unfortunate as both are a strain on the eye. The only part of the recipe which is easy to read is the list of ingredients. I imagine that trying to cook and follow the instructions would be quite a challenge.

If one is prepared to work with this drawback, the book is not only a wealth of much-loved handed-down family dishes, but also a window into Greek lifestyle and traditions. – Olga Accolla

Win Nigella Lawson's book

Nigella Express is a book about fast food for those who like eating and those who have little time to cook. Domestic Goddess Nigella Lawson's popular book contains fabulous fast foods, ingenious short cuts and terrific time-saving ideas for entertaining and simple family meals. We have two copies of the book to give away. Just SMS the word 'Nigella' to 34831 before 8am tomorrow. SMSes cost R2 and winners will be phoned.

