

Hide your love away

WHEN Martin Gordon pitched his life story to publishers he was told, "Sorry, we don't publish fiction". It was understandably frustrating for the Irish author – as every experience his synopsis detailed was indeed his own.

Undeterred, the writer continued in his attempts to complete the task he set about more than 20 years ago, of committing his biography to paper and seeing it on bookshelves in homes and stores across England and Ireland.

Today, finally, his challenge is complete. Earlier this year the 82-year-old took matters into his own hands and self-published his tumultuous tale, *No Love Here*. And what a gripping read it proves to be – outlining the man as a child growing up in wartime Glasgow, a priest who chose to speak out against the "man-made rule" of celibacy and a publisher fleeced twice by unscrupulous business partners, who left him and his young family on the brink of destitution.

"As a daughter reading your father's most personal stories is not always easy," admits his proud child Victoria Kinmouth-Gordon, the eldest of three.

"There are of course bits that my friends love but I don't want to read, but that is the nature of an honest biography I suppose. Ultimately my father's story needed to be told and I am so proud of him for doing it and for publishing it – it's been more than 20 years in the making."

Born in 1931 in the Glasgow Shipbuilding district of Govan, Martin Gordon was the son of an Irishman from Co. Sligo and a Scotswoman, who converted to Catholicism.

The oldest of five children, he soon found himself back in his father's homeland when his mother died following a back street abortion when he was just 10 years old.

That incident proved the catalyst for a life-long love he holds for Ireland – where he currently lives in Cork – as he moved to his aunt's farm in Enniscrone, Co. Sligo at the age of 13.

But life took many a twist and turn before he found himself back there, where he

has now retired with his wife Louise, while two of his children live nearby. First he was to join the priesthood.

At the tender age of 16, Martin joined a seminary and spent many years learning the ways of the cloth before being ordained and taking up a position as a priest in London – where he would become something of a favourite among London's celebrity crowds.

"Dad's first parish was in Clerkenwell," Ms Kinmouth-Gordon remembers. "He was a chaplain at Saddlers Wells, the Royal Free Hospital and even unofficial chaplain to Chelsea Football Club. He was known as the Football Priest by many, as he always talked about it in his sermons."

She added: "He loved football, it was his passion and he became long-term friends with Terry Venables, George Graham and Alex Ferguson. He was also friendly with boxer Henry

Martin Gordon's extraordinary story took him out of the priesthood and into an enduring footballing friendship with Alex Ferguson. Words: Fiona Audley



Cooper – they were very close."

But despite having friends in interesting places and his happiness tending a parish flock, Martin found himself struggling with the loneliness of the priesthood and questioning the celibacy that was imposed upon them. Ultimately it would be the catalyst for

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his decision to leave the church – a decision he gives an understandable number of pages to in his book. "When I took that vow of celibacy I really didn't know what it would mean in terms of human relationships," he explains. "I was forbidden to have sex, that I realised. But not the loneliness of the celibate life, that was something I didn't expect, that was something new – especially when one is feeling low and depressed. There's no one to turn to, is there. No shoulder to cry on, so to speak."

He added: "I doubt very much if there is a priest who really knew what the vow entailed when they took it. We all got dragged along by the consoling idea that once we were priests somehow we wouldn't need any human companionship; especially of a woman."

"After all, we had crisis in our celibate lives. Somehow we were expected to discard our manhood and become as angels. But it's not like that. What we priests are asked to do – to be celibate – has nothing to do with loving God; it's a man-made rule.

"God did not say, 'Martin Gordon, you cannot be a priest unless you give up the natural love for a woman'. It's a man who made this decision and for what a price, as is evidenced by the untold numbers of priests addicted to drink and illicit sex."

After much time deliberating his decision and the life choices of many fellow St Patrick's seminarians, Martin gave up his robes after six years serving as a priest.

"I thought of my classmates at St Patrick's Seminary," he explains. "One went to America and ran off with his parish secretary within 12 months of ordination. And what was really bizarre, another St. Pat's man had

dressed up as a woman and entered a woman's toilet in America. Later another St. Patrick's man left the priesthood and became manager of an abortion clinic. Another one on the eve of his becoming a bishop left his parish with the secretary."

It took very little time for him to realise he had made the right decision. Shortly after, he met a woman named Louise at the former Irish Club in London's Eaton Square – now his wife of 40 years and the mother of their three adult children.

However he never forgot his flock or his faith. "Although I had ceased to be active in the priesthood I had not given up on religion," he explains. "Each Sunday saw me present at

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Mass. I still pray a great deal, but do I miss the priesthood? The honest answer is no. I did miss the people and serving them in some capacity, but not as a celibate. I could never envisage myself living again in an all-male environment, where more of the men were ill with what Fr Bernard Haring has given the name Ecclesiogenic Pathology."

For his daughter, he has never really stopped caring for others: "He treats everybody as his flock," she told us. "He talks to anyone and everyone and gives everybody his time. You can take the man out of the priesthood, as they say."

"People really like that about dad – he's also a great storyteller of course and great fun to be around."

And now those great tales and interesting stories are available to us all in *No Love Here*.

Here, which is currently available to purchase at online bookstores.

"Everyone who has read the book has loved it," Ms Kinmouth-Gordon added. "The way it flows and all the elements to it. It's a significant story for so many reasons, not least its historical ones. It had to be noted and we are so proud that dad undertook and completed that 20-year journey to record it."

■ No Love Here: A Priest's Journey is out now and available through Amazon or www.authormartingordon.com

FRIENDS: Former priest Martin Gordon with outgoing Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson.

LIFE LESS ORDINARY (opposite, clockwise from top left): Martin and his wife Louise on their wedding day in 1971; playing in goal for Eamonn Andrews' Sports Paraders, clearing the ball from actor Brian Blessed; with wife Louise and daughters Victoria and Katherine; and during his time in the priesthood.