

AUTHOR Mary McCARTHY never dreamt her life would read exactly like one of her books and, if she'd had a choice, she would never have picked the one where her main character was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

However, that has become the reality. The 60-year-old Dubliner, who taught in St. Mary's Holy Faith Convent, Glasnevin in Dublin for 34 years, has had four successful novels published with Poolbeg Press: *Remember Me*, *And No Bird Sang*, *Crescendo* and *Shame the Devil*.

Mary has a son, Dara, who is a Vatican tour guide. He hopes to return to Ireland this autumn.

The mum-of-one, who never married, was originally diagnosed with ovarian cancer but was recently told she had secondary cancer cells in her lungs.

Here, in her irreverent style, Mary describes how she lives her life, knowing she has a terminal disease.

I'M SAVING FOR MY COFFIN BUT I WON'T BUY THE DEAREST ONE AS IT WILL JUST BE GOING UP IN FLAMES

OK, I hear you – this is not the best news one might ever get, but maybe it isn't the worst either. I'm going to share some of the reasons I am very grateful for, and not angry or depressed about, my diagnosis.

Admittedly, I'm 60 years of age and therefore have led a life, whereas when young people or children are struck down, it's an entirely different matter. As for me, diagnosed this March, it's fine.

I've been given about two years to live but it could be soon-

er or later depending on how I react to the "maintenance" of chemotherapy. I'm very relieved that I won't live long enough to get Alzheimer's like my mum did. It was an horrific 17 years for her and for us, her family.

Also, I'm with a fabulous oncology team in the Bon Secours Hospital in Glasnevin, just down the road from my house. I'm so lucky I don't have to travel for treatment. I taught many who work in the hospital and I know locals who work there too and mothers of girls I

taught so it's a lovely friendly place for me to visit.

The staff are angels and so is my oncologist, who must put up with my weird sense of humour.

After my last scan he was very pleased and told me I could live longer than they had first supposed. I replied that I had to die sooner because I'd written articles all about it and if it's in the paper it must be true.

What's especially bizarre though is that I started my novel, *After the Rain*, eight years ago about a woman dealing with ter-

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FAMILY: Mary pictured with her son Dara and dog Benni

minal cancer. I sometimes wonder why the hell didn't I write about winning the Lotto or meeting a sexy millionaire on a Caribbean Cruise.

I'm planning my own funeral and picking out uplifting hymns. It will be a joyous affair, I can assure you. I know people will be upset – they tell me that anyhow – but, in all honesty, if I'm handling it so can they. It sounds a bit callous, I suppose, but seriously people, let's get on with it.

I always knew I had terrific family and friends but their goodness and kindness to me has been superb. Their support is outstanding, practical, emotional and moral. I am in their debt.

OK, I am worried about my lovely son, Dara. He will miss me a lot but, as I keep telling him, he'll be getting a mortgage-free house in these recessionary times and that's a bonus. How he'll pay the outrageous bills is another thing – doesn't it just get worse and worse?

I'm saving for my coffin. I won't buy the dearest one as it will be going up in flames. Incidentally, I asked my dentist would my crowns burn in the crematorium but, without flinching as he's used to me, he assured me they wouldn't. Porcelain doesn't burn apparently.

That's good as I'm glad that I didn't waste all those thousands of euros. A good bargain when you think about it as it ensured immortality for my crowns. I must remind Dara to check the urn for a rattle.

There's a downside to all this too and I'm not underestimating it. It's not about me, it's about others. I worry about how my friends and family will react when the time comes.

'If I do arrive somewhere in spirit I want to meet George Harrison and compose a song with him'

Dara is uppermost in my mind. My older brother, Des, is finding it hard, I know. So is P and my other close pals. I worry about my little dog, Benni, too. When I say he is attached to me, he really is and even follows me to the loo.

Recently on Today FM, Matt Cooper asked me if I believed in an afterlife. No, I told him, I didn't. If I did, I'd be terrified. I'm hoping for oblivion and peace, perfect peace.

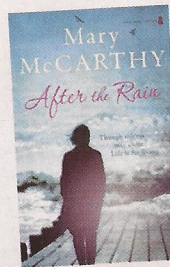
I hope I'm not offending people's sensibilities but we must all be allowed to believe or not. If I do arrive somewhere in spirit I want to meet George Harrison and compose a song with him about every cloud etc as opposed to Cloud Nine.

I have already been granted one of my two last wishes – my book is finally published and I'm enjoying the

buzz immensely. After the Rain is emotional and reflective but it is not depressing. It's not all about death either.

My second wish was to have a grandchild. Hurry up Dara, we're running out of time here but maybe, just maybe, I'll live to see that happy day.

Life is good folks, enjoy it while you can. Her fifth novel *After the Rain* is in shops now. ●



POSITIVE
OUTLOOK: Mary
McCarthy