

• Almost living the good life

A NEW LIFE

Gordon Green left the high life for the good life – and he hasn't looked back

MICHAEL KELLY

MOST PEOPLE who have abandoned the rat race for a gentler pace of life had a defining moment that acted as the catalyst for their change.

Gordon Green and his wife, Maria, didn't have that sort of grand epiphany, but they were relentlessly bothered by the fact that their frenetic corporate lives in London didn't even allow them the luxury of a daily sit-down meal with their children.

"We had this crazy life," says Green. "I was working in the IT department in JP Morgan and Maria was with Accenture and at that stage we had two kids who were in a creche for eight hours a day.

"Meal times were done in shifts, basically. We would take turn feeding the kids when we got home, and worry about feeding ourselves later."

Erratic meal times weren't their only concerns. "We hated the fact that the children were in a creche, and it was only after we took them out that we realised how unhappy they had been. I think creches present an image to you for the time you are there with your kids but you have no idea how things are when you're not there."

As they negotiated life in the fast lane, the couple dreamed of country living in Maria's native Monaghan. Perhaps to soften the blow for Green, who hails from Essex, and admits that he has lived most of his life within the confines of London's M25, they opted for a gradual move – first stop, Dublin.

Maria was able to relocate to her company's Dublin office, and Green continued to do part-time contract work from home,

while looking after their children. While he toyed with the idea of looking for a full-time job in Dublin, the impact that having one parent at home had on the quality of their lives forced a rethink.

Above all else, they revelled in sitting down to a home-cooked dinner each evening, a daily routine which has become the focal point of their family life.

After two years in Dublin the family moved to Carrickmacross, with Maria continuing to work in Dublin and Green becoming a full-time house-husband.

A third child had arrived on the scene, to be followed shortly afterwards by a fourth. "Maria has a 20-minute drive to the train station in Dundalk and gets the train to Dublin so it's an hour and a half each way.

"She doesn't like the commute, obviously, and would prefer not to have to do it. It's tough. Every now and then I ask if she wants to swap – I'll go back to work, and she could stay at home, and she says 'no, of course not'."

So how has he coped with being a stay-at-home dad?

"My dad always did the cooking and washing up when we were young so I didn't have that macho thing in my head about the man having to be out working. It doesn't bother me. I don't have my own money anymore but I am happy to make that sacrifice. I've had to say goodbye to all those impulsive CD and book purchases, so it's a little like saying goodbye to my youth."

Meanwhile, as he busied himself with that most important of parental duties – repeated readings of children's books to his ti-

ny tots – he was struck by a thought that surely has occurred to many a parent: I could write that.

"I had a basic outline of a children's story in my head and, when I had some free time, I wrote it down and drew some pictures to go along with it. I had it in a binder and would take it out occasionally for our kids and they would clamour for it, which I took as a good sign.

"I would be comparing it with other kids' stories, thinking, 'mine's better'. There is that perception with children's books that anyone can do it, but, like any book, it's a case of actually sitting down and writing it."

The story, *Buzz Off*, is aimed at pre-school children and tells the tale of a tired, homeless fly seeking refuge on a farm, and the array of colourful characters he meets along the way.

Convinced he was on to something, Green made the brave decision to publish the book himself. "I had a very specific idea in my head as to how the characters needed to be illustrated and I felt that if I sent it off to a publisher, I would have no say in how they would turn out.

"I found an illustrator in Britain who drew the insects exactly how I imagined them, so I went with him."

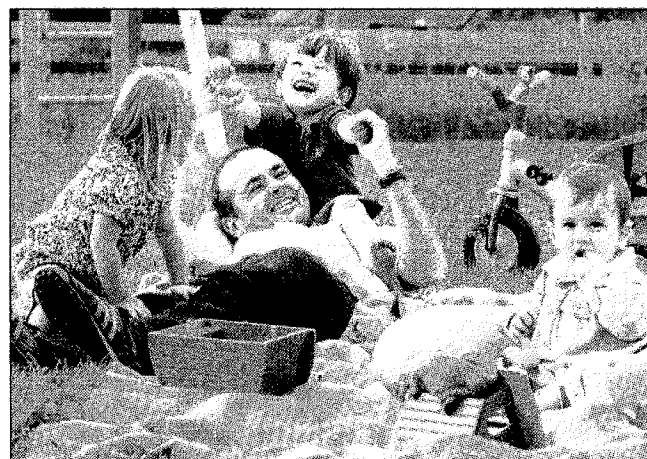
The process of self-publishing a book, he tells me, has been somewhat of an eye-opener. "I think the hardest part is yet to come, and that's getting the book out there. Most of the distributors won't take it unless there's a huge marketing spend behind it, which obviously I can't do.

"So, for the moment, the book is only available on the internet. It will probably come

down to me going door to door around bookshops trying to get them to take it on.”

With half an acre at his disposal, Green has also taken to growing his own vegetables – the city-slicker lifestyle, it seems, is permanently abandoned. “It’s great, I love it. Any bit of spare time I have, I’m out there. I suppose we’re on the way to the good life.”

■ *Buzz Off* by Gordon Green, (2Plus4 Publishing), €7.99, is available from www.2plus4publishing.com



Main photograph, Gordon Green in Carrickmacross, and, above, Green pictured with three of his four children: Maud, Harry and Freddie. Photographs: Alan Betson