

robbed my mind

It sounds like the plot for the Jack Nicholson movie *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. But it was a real-life horror story for an Irish granny who had a terrifying ordeal in a psychiatric hospital.

Mary Maddock (63) was given electric shock treatment and a cocktail of drugs which gave her hallucinations and panic attacks for more than 15 years.

The former nun, who has written a book about her experience and holds weekly meetings with survivors, is now campaigning for the controversial electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) treatment to be abolished in Irish mental hospitals.

Shockingly, the treatment is still "quite common" Mary told the *Sunday World*.

"Seventy people have come to our meetings in Cork and I've heard of a lot more".

And she said it was all the more harrowing for her as it came after a seven-year stint in an enclosed religious order – an experience which describes as "like joining the Moonies".

Mary was 26, had left the convent, and had just given birth when she was sent to a psychiatric institute.

Doctors at St Finbarr's Hospital in Cork sent her to St Stephen's Psychiatric Institute after she had a bout of psychosis during labour – which she believes was caused by an allergic reaction to nitrous oxide.

"It was as if I was drunk. I was saying things out of character and I was very giddy. I had a lot of quick thoughts – it was like a bad dream where you feel out of control.

"Three days later I was sent to the psychiatric hospital. They put two electrodes on your temples. They jolt your brain. I didn't feel it because they gave me an anaesthetic, and the treatment completely blotted out my memory. I didn't remember anything – what I ate, where I slept, even though I was there for eight weeks.

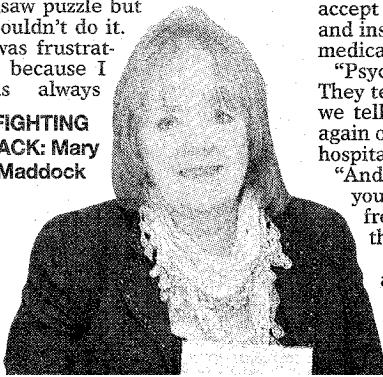
"All I can remember is it was a terrible place."

Her husband, Jim, noticed the change in her when he visited.

"Jim brought me in a jigsaw puzzle but I couldn't do it.

I was frustrated because I was always

FIGHTING BACK: Mary Maddock



This woman's harrowing experience of being bullied by the psychiatric profession almost destroyed her life. Her terrifying story should be read by everybody. **By Geraldine Comiskey**



SUPPORT: Mary and hubby Jim

able to do jigsaw puzzles and that was a simple one.

"Jim was 25 or 26 at the time, and he didn't understand what was going on, but he knew there was something wrong with me."

After she left the psychiatric institute, she attended a psychiatrist for a further 15 years, who gave her a cocktail of drugs which, she believes caused hallucinations, nightmares and panic attacks.

"I was a prisoner in my own home. I couldn't drive, I couldn't think properly. I was clinically lobotomised. It was a bit like when you take the contraceptive pill, you can't have a child – when you take the pill for the brain, you can't think."

She even had to give up teaching music – her first career after leaving the convent.

"I used to teach piano, guitar and violin. I knew pieces of music off by heart. But I couldn't remember them any more."

She realised it was the medication, and not her mental breakdown, were to blame, when the doctor took her off one of the three drugs she was taking, the anti-depressant Fermontil.

"Before I came off it, I used to wake up at night in a frenzy, my mind going from me. When I stopped the Fermontil, that stopped."

But the psychiatrist refused to accept that the drug was to blame and insisted she continue to take medication.

"Psychiatry is a strong force. They tell you if you don't to what we tell you, you'll be back here again or we'll send you to a worse hospital.

"And once you're given a label, your rights are taken away from you. You've less rights than a criminal has.

"An awful lot of women are treated really badly by the psychiatric profession. Twice as many women as men are given electric shock treatment. They



WARNING: Mary's experience was so hard on her family
Pics: Billy MacGill

analyse things whereas men get angry." It was only when her psychiatrist died that she stopped taking the medication. "I went off one of the other drugs very slowly. I'm 10 years drug-free now and I've never felt better."

Just months after leaving the convent at 24, she met her husband through her sister.

"They were both teachers, working in the same school. He was from Wexford. I got married at 26 and soon I was pregnant.

mare began." Today Mary's happily settled in Cork with her husband, close to her daughter and three-year-old granddaughter.

She recently held a protest demo in Cork City and has set up an organisation, Mindfreedom, to campaign against the use of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).

☐ Mindfreedom support group meets every Wednesday from 3-6pm at the Costa coffee shop in