

From the couple who got engaged in St Stephen's Green to a man who fell from the Cliffs of Moher

The guy who finds the stories behind the faces



Picture: FRAN VEALE

filter coffee. ('Can you feel the coffee?' he asks, hand to his chest in ecstasy, half-way through our chat.)

He is a people person — of course — who is warm and chatty in his heavily accented English. Slight and boyish, he listens keenly, smiles easily and holds eye contact.

No wonder random strangers find him engaging enough to reveal their innermost thoughts.

'There are so many people in Dublin who are feeling lonely and who have no one to talk to,' he says. 'Depression is a very big thing in Ireland and there are lots of people that need to be just listened to.'

'And they have very interesting stories, they have meaningful conversations. They just don't have anyone to share it with.'

Varga hasn't had it easy — his builder father walked out on the family when he was just three years old. His mother juggled raising two sons with working in a creche.

'My mother is the kind of person that has no enemies. She has a very easy-going personality, very friendly. Probably I got this from her,' he

muses. Meanwhile, his fiancée is 'the kind of girl that if you are going to a party you don't have to take care of her. She's not the kind of girl who is holding your hand when you are talking to someone.'

'She's going away and she's finding friends, chatting away. She's just a very independent girl and this is exactly what I need from her. She is very positive, always smiling, always full with new ideas. I'm feeling very lucky that I found her.'

Souza was working in HR but left recently to become Varga's project manager after the work began bringing in money. And recently, Vodafone paid Varga to take pictures with their Platinum 7 phone.

He has also worked with Google, taking photographs for a Simon Community fundraising catalogue.

'Whenever I am able to work with big companies that keeps me afloat. Then on the side I'm photographing events, for example, I work a lot for Dublin City Council, different exhibitions, things like this.'

The most difficult part of their lives in Dublin, he says, is living in rental

accommodation. But Varga even has a funny story to go with this.

The couple had been living — and socialising — with Peter Fitzpatrick for eight months before discovering their friend and housemate was the

was in hospital for almost a year.

Miraculously, he made a full recovery. 'And I said, "What the hell?!" How did you never mention this before?"' the photographer says.

Of course, the story became another HOD sensation.

The other main challenge they have, he says, is the language barrier — and not just with English.

'If my mother wants to say something to Maria's mother, she is saying it in Hungarian and I translate it to English and Maria translates it to Portuguese.'

'The first time they met we were going to Galway and that was the first time that I was actually driving in Ireland, on the other side of the road. The whole three hours driving my head wanted to explode because I wanted to focus on driving and they were talking constantly to each other, they had so many stories to tell.'

Finally, Varga and Souza told their own story, when his romantic proposal last month set pulses racing.

'That was the hardest project of my life probably. Whenever I am working on any Humans of Dublin projects,

she's the one I come talking to about it. For this project I was five months keeping it a secret.'

After showing her the last photograph in the book, he got down on one knee in Sorrento Park, Dalkey, presenting her with a diamond ring. Unbeknownst to Souza, their photographer friend Niall Carson was shooting her reaction with a long lens — which also delighted the HOD community. Now they are planning 'a beach wedding — something very simple' for next summer and plan to settle down in Ireland because they 'love it here'.

He will continue to work on HOD and has lined up another job photographing people involved with the Ana Liffey Drug Project, which helps anyone affected by addiction.

'I'm still a guy who used to make coffees. I just happen to have a nice project and I'm able to talk to these people. It's the most amazing thing ever. It has given me so much energy for this project, to use it for something good.'

■ *Humans of Dublin* is published by Gill Books, €22.99

Man of the people:
Photographer
Peter Varga

'Depression is a very big thing in Ireland'

sole person ever to survive a fall from the Cliffs of Moher. It was only when he invited them to his family home in Clare for Souza's birthday that he happened to mention it.

Now 32 and working as a plasterer, Peter was 13 and climbing down the Cliffs of Moher with his brother Stephen and a friend when he fell 48 feet to the bottom. He broke everything on the left side of his body, his jaw had to be reconstructed and he