All About Us
Memories, stories and poems by patients and staff from the Dialysis Unit, Waterford Regional Hospital created through the arts programme of the Waterford Healing Arts Trust
and he'd put for his tea
she toasted it
my mother caught a bee
done the three

Oh, the good be
and may all fraud
and she cry.
She knew it was not
for me;
for me to be there.
for me to say
amongst hows.
The dream's worn
The heartache was

I would win
I would win
I would win
I would win
I would win
I would win

in a glass
in a glass
in a glass
in a glass
in a glass
in a glass
in a glass
Introduction

The Renal Dialysis Unit in Waterford Regional Hospital is an 18 bed unit that accommodates over 90 chronic renal dialysis patients. It provides a service to people living in the South East of Ireland. Each client attends for approximately four hours, three times per week. Due to the restrictive nature of the clinical activity, the unit is keen to engage patients in creative encounters and in so doing transform the dialysis experience from an empty negative space to a positive productive one.

Since 2006, the Waterford Healing Arts Trust (WHAT) has been working in partnership with the Renal Dialysis Unit in bringing arts experiences to the bedside of patients in the unit. The visual arts programme, which is based on a patient-centred approach, is facilitated by artists Boyer Phelan and Philip Cullen and funded by the Punchestown Kidney Research Association.

Given the length of time that patients spend on dialysis, the relationships that have developed over time between them and staff and between patients themselves tend to be more profound than other places in this acute hospital. In celebration of this sense of community and of the lives of patients beyond their time in hospital,
and in recognition that creativity takes many forms, artist Boyer Phelan invited patients and staff to share with her their memories, stories and artworks in a project entitled *All About Us*. This booklet is the result of that process.

We would like to thank the patients who shared of themselves so generously in contributing to this booklet and in so doing, have helped us to get to know them better as people with fully rounded lives beyond their weekly appointments in Dialysis. Many thanks also to Boyer for her sensitive gathering of work from patients and editing of this special collection of voices.

Mary Grehan and Claire Meaney
Waterford Healing Arts Trust
Foreword

I first had the opportunity of facilitating Art Kart sessions in the Renal Dialysis Unit in Waterford Regional Hospital way back in 2006. Having worked for some time in the Paediatric Ward, I found the Dialysis Unit a very different experience - the atmosphere was intense and the machines scary! However it was a real privilege for me to work with patients who attend Dialysis three days a week all year around and I appreciated (in the words of one patient) the “home away from home” created by staff.

The “mixum gatherum” of contributions in this book came from an invitation from me to people in the Dialysis Unit to share their memories, stories, poems or thoughts. The resulting All About Us bears testament to lives lived richly.

The memories and stories were either written by patients and staff or told directly to me at the bedside. Through them, we are welcomed into vivid scenes of new mown hay, threshing days and kicking ball in Regents Park. We meet three very different cows. We share the frustration of witnessing through media a world driven by profit and full of environmental destruction. We learn about the exacting standards of a pattern factory in London and a memory of a parent’s traumatic childhood experience is poignantly recalled.
There is humour, spirituality, frustration, pathos and carefully crafted writing, giving a glimpse into the lives, loves and personalities of those who have been brought together through dialysis and also from a staff member Nora Galvin Delahunty who brightens patients’ days through her work.

Sadly one of our contributors, Marianne Hill, died on 2nd April 2012. Here, her creative gift is pared down to its essence, where just three words evoke a forest or an explosion of colour with paint in her Haikus. I had not explained these Japanese three line poems properly, so Marianne thought 17 letters, not syllables, was required leading to her small but vibrant poems.

We gain an insight into patients’ thoughts on the routine of dialysis, from words of gratitude to the dialysis machine itself and its staff to aspirations for a transplant. One definition of art is “pain transformed into beauty” and this is illustrated in Johanna’s very honest poem in which she negotiates her struggle with a difficult diagnosis through her faith.

I hope this small book does justice to its creators; those with the courage to submit their writings or to share their stories at the bedside. It has been produced with love, thanks and respect to them for giving of themselves so openly.

Boyer Phelan,
August 2012
Stories, memories and poems
Look at Life

Look at life with eyes that see
the good and not the bad.
Cherish in your memory
the glad times, not the sad.

Elizabeth O’ Higgins
To Sid with Love

Sitting comfortable on my hospitable hospital bed for four long hours Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Attached by tubes from my leg to my kidney dialysis machine. Most mornings I read quietly or maybe watch TV. The catering lady comes around without fail to bring us all a nice cuppa and a few slices of toast spread with butter and marmalade if it was asked for. This happens three mornings a week throughout my life without fail, come hail, rain or sunshine. My dialysis machine’s nickname is Sidney, the Dynamic Kidney or plain old Sid for short. Now Sid needs a crew to keep him running smoothly. Technicians, doctors, nurses, electricians, care assistants, caterers, cleaners and launderers. The list is endless. My nurses I call my Dynamic Angels, the Care Assistants are my Care Bears. It takes a lot of people to run our brilliant Dialysis Unit. We all have a grumble about the Government. However with the money they supply our unit, no matter how small the amount, our wonderful team are keeping us alive and I for one am forever grateful to my beautiful Angels, Care Bears, Sid and his crew. There would be no Lizzybits without them all. Thank you my Dynamic Team.

Lizzy McCue
Big Guns

We have a lovely Angel in our unit who I nicknamed Big Guns. My nurse is very good and can always cheer me up, with her mischievous laugh and her little curl in the middle of her forehead. The highlight of her day would be a nice cup of coffee and maybe a cream bun. That would make her smile. However if she has not had her morning fix, then quick, duck, here comes her bullet. Bang Bang! Big Guns has exploded.

Lizzy McCue
They made a pill to stop the birth
We have people polluting the Earth
Some lands are full of drought
Other people without food in their mouth
They tell you smoking is bad for your health
But it don’t matter if it doubles their wealth

Ger Hanrahan
A teenager in London in the sixties

I never had time to be feeling down
When I lived in a flat in Kentish Town
The mini skirt was all the rage
When I went with a girl twice my age
I went to a match to hear the Highway roar
It is a sound won’t be heard no more
We kicked a ball in Regents Park
And didn’t get home till after dark
You’ll never forget no matter how you try
These memories till the day you die

Ger Hanrahan
One for the road

Oh Johnny, Oh Johnny where are you my dear?  
I'm here at the bar having a pint of beer  
Come home you fool to your dear darling wife  
I will my dear Mary after another twenty five  
I stagger to the door trying to find the lock  
Half afraid I'll wake her I give it a knock  
It feels like a jackhammer inside my head  
As I make an attempt to get out of bed  
I promise her faithfully I'll give up the stout  
But another session is never in doubt

Ger Hanrahan
Two Haikus

Warm sun, use your hat
Freezing cold, wear scarf and gloves
Gum boots keep feet dry

Horses to plough your fields
Cows milk makes cheese and butter
Sheep for wool you need

Ger Hanrahan
Elsie used to drive a tractor up the mountain to collect turf and bring it home to make a fire.

Elsie wore clogs going to school. There were boys and girls all in the one big room.

Told by Elsie McGee
Drawing by Boyer Phelan
The Wish

When I was a child, a wish was a great thing. I could wish for many things, it was so easy.

Now I’m an adult, wishes are more complicated, but not impossible.

At the minute I am getting great care where I’m attending for Dialysis at Waterford Regional Hospital.

My wish is for a kidney, of course, which would give me a second chance of life.

Then I can achieve my goal and enjoy the journey of life.

That’s my wish!

Teresa Quinn
For Now

If I should win the lottery
and millions it would be,
I’d trade it all for a kidney, for it to set me free;
For what could all the money bring,
If health stands in the way,
I’d rather live my life again,
and run another day.
But until I win that lottery,
I’ll stay as it should be,
My three days on and my four days off
And my diet.
O hear my plea

Marie Ryan
The Brown Penny

It was a tough, cruel time. The Black and Tans were wreaking havoc on the country and raids on houses were brutal and destructive. This cruelty was to come to my Mother’s house when she was only six years old.

1920
They roared up to the house in their transport and broke in the front door. In the kitchen, my Grandma and Eileen (my mother) sat terrified. “Where are your two f***n sons?” The tans shouted. “I don’t know,” said Grandma. “Right boys, said the leader. “Search the house!” They didn’t just search the house; they smashed anything they got their hands on!

In the little back bedroom, Eileen’s 19 year old brother lay in his bed very ill. The tans showed no pity and dragged Paddy out of his bed, all the time shouting at him. “Tell us where your two bastard brothers are.” Poor Paddy told them that he hadn’t a clue, but for two hours they kept at him until Paddy finally collapsed.

To keep an eye on my Grandma and a little six year old child, a young British soldier was told not to move away from the kitchen. The soldier was obviously uncomfortable at what was going on. Turning to Eileen he said “Mam, I’m sorry for this.” Eileen
was crying now and the fact that she had a sore fin-
ger didn’t help. “Have you a sore finger?” he asked. Eileen just nodded her head. Putting his hand in his pocket, the soldier took out a brown penny dated 1916. “This is all I have,” he said, “and I want you to have it.”

Finally the raid was over. The tans left, leaving a trail of destruction behind them. Two days later, Paddy died.

1940 -1942
Mammy was sitting knitting when a knock came to the door. A man was standing outside. Mam hadn’t any idea who he was. “Sorry to disturb you Mam” he said. “But I’m looking for the Clancy’s house.” “This was Clancy’s house,” Mam replied. “But since I got married, it’s now Brights.” The man paused for a minute. “I was here many years ago, and I have wondered what became of the little girl with the sore finger. Did she ever get over what happened here? You see Mam, I was a young soldier left to keep an eye on the mother and little girl.” Mam invited the man in and they talked for ages about what had happed. The former boy soldier broke down in tears.

As to the brown penny, I have it still. It may not be worth anything, but to me it is a link between me and the little girl with the sore finger, my mother.

Celine Looby
The Kerry Cow

When Tom was a child he had a teacher who was a tyrant bully girl. They all called her the Kerry Cow. (She was from Kerry).

Her name was Miss O’Sullivan and she taught up to 3rd class. The headmaster taught in the second room.

There was an open fireplace and she made the children collect the sticks off the ditches for the fire. She’d stand in front of it all day.

Tom was left-handed. She forced him to use his right. She just kept belting his left hand with a stick “till you used the right, that you wouldn’t forget”.

Told by Tom Tierney
A Kerry Cow

We roamed the lanes together
The sky was covered in stars
We reached the gate in silence
I lifted up the bars
She neither smiled nor thanked me
Because she knew not how
I a simple farmer’s boy
And she a Kerry cow

Remembered by Sean Redmond
The Threshing Day

It happened once a year. It was a big day in the farming calendar. The big machine which threshed the corn arrived in the farmer’s haggard the night before the threshing, and on the day friends, neighbours and relatives arrived to help. The threshing machine comprised of a large steam engine, a mill which threshed the corn and a pitcher which took the straw away from the mill to where the men made a straw rick.

The threshing started at about nine o clock in the morning and continued all day till all the corn was threshed and all the sacks of corn were stored in the barn. It took about thirty men to man the thresher. There had to be pitchers to pitch the sheaves to the mill bag, men to take the corn away and men to make the straw rick. It took six men to feed the mill, two to cut the sheaves, two to feed and two to pitch sheaves. The ladies of the house also had a busy day having to cook on an open fire for a large crowd of men, the dinner being potatoes, bacon and cabbage. In farmer’s places discrimination was to be seen - farmer’s sons and farmers were fed in the parlour and workmen were fed in the kitchen. In some farms, especially in farms with a few daughters, the day was rounded off with a dance with cases of stout. The dances did not last
very long as everyone had to go to another long
days threshing the next day.

But the threshing alas is no more. The collection
of friends, neighbours and relatives is gone for-
ever, and is replaced by the Combine Harvester
which does not require the same amount of men
to operate.

Sean Redmond
Ham Sandwiches

When Sean worked as a psychiatric nurse, he would make recommendations to the doctors for patients to go home or out for weekends. One Saturday Sean was in his local pub for a pint. A man he had known as a patient came over and wanted to buy him a drink. This was not unusual but this particular night the man was in extra good form and insisted he buy a brandy for Sean.

Anyway, Sean went away home but about three o’clock in the morning there was loud knocking on his door. When he answered the door the man’s brother was there: “You’ll have to come with me,” he said “I don’t know what I’m to do. Please come down home with me.”

“Why?” says Sean “what’s after happening?”
“The brother is in the kitchen with the pony and he’s making ham sandwiches and himself and the pony are eating the ham sandwiches. “Tell me,” says Sean “is the bread alright?”
“Oh, yes!” says he “it’s the best of bread”.
“Well, tell me” says Sean “what sort of ham is it? Is the ham alright?”
“Oh, yes!” says he “it’s the very best of ham.”
“Well then,” says Sean “I’ll tell you what you do. Go home and pull up a chair and have a ham sandwich and none of you will come to any harm.”

Told by Sean Redmond
Marianne’s Haikus

Paint
Colours
Magic

Storm
Pending
Tense

Trees
Forest
Green

Bloom
Flowers
Scent

Heart
Pumping
Alive

Marianne Terese du Barry Hill
An Appreciation

“Do you know where you should go, and I’ll bring you”, offered kind and encouraging Brother Isidore one day in the early spring of 2010. “Down to the Dialysis Unit. I’ll meet you next Wednesday and introduce you”.

I was grateful. In a new chaplain’s post I was trying to get to know the hospital more fully. I had little knowledge of the dialysis unit although I had seen the creative work produced there with the help of Boyer and the Healing Arts.

Wednesday came, and through the double doors Isidore and I went. No sense here of being an interruption or a nuisance in the midst of obvious busyness. Instead, smiling staff, wonderful patients, welcome, interest, warmth, banter. But also the reality of why the unit is needed – the relentless cycle of treatment, the distances travelled, the waiting for transplants, the lives saved as others are lost.

That day began a connection to the Dialysis Unit which should be a blessing from me, but which is certainly a blessing to me. “It is in giving that we receive”, says the prayer of St. Francis.
May God bless our giving and receiving and our friendship in each other.

Thank you Isidore.

Jenny Crowley
Our Own House

When we have our own house,
What shall we keep there?
Let’s have a jug of flowers
At the corner by the chair.

We’ll take a pot of fresh paint
To window and to door,
And we’ll let in a sunbeam
To shine across the floor.

Let’s have a brass door knocker
And keep it shining bright
As the welcome that we give to friends
Who knock there, day or night.

We’ll have a stove upon the hearth
When winter nights are cold,
And company to cheer and comfort
Both the young and old.

Let’s keep enough of everything
To satisfy our need,
But not too much of anything -
For that would just be greed.

Let’s keep the promises we made
To our children one or twenty
And pray that our house always
Will be filled with Love a Plenty

Nora Galvin Delahunty
Station Disaster

I tried too hard to have everything perfect. And so, I went out to buy a brand new kettle especially for the occasion. The old kettle, which I had inherited on marriage, was bent battered and somewhat on the blackened side. Perfect saucepans I had enough of, as wedding presents, to boil the eggs and make the porridge. And, to my great comfort, the eggs were neither too runny nor too hard when I opened one in the kitchen before sending the lot up to the room.

So, relaxing, I made the tea, and went up myself to pour it out. The first cup, of course, was for the parish priest and it came out black. Now, I was generous with the tea leaves all right, so as not to be thought mean. But this was BLACK. Just like liquid soot it came out the spout.

I was covered in confusion. Billy looked at me, from his seat next to the Parish Priest. But I had no idea what was wrong, or what to do so hastily departed, taking the filled cup, and the teapot with me. Dumping the lot, I made a whole fresh pot of tea from the now re-boiled kettle on the Rayburn.

Alas and alack, it made no difference. It still came out black. At this stage, all the women in
the kitchen knew the young bride was in trouble. They had also had the same tea, but from a different teapot. However, one kind neighbour, Peggie, had the answer for me.

It was my new kettle. I, in my youth and inexperience, never knew that always one had to season a new aluminium kettle by first boiling spuds in it, at least once. The old kettle I had dumped only that morning, with the last of the rubbish from the station clean-up. The breakfast inside was nearly over. Boiling fresh water in a saucepan was the obvious answer. But that would take such a long time from cold.

“Never mind, Maura,” said the same neighbour. “I’ll fix it for you”. And she made the tea, right there and then, from the boiling water off the saucepan full of eggs. “Sure the men won’t know the difference!” said she. And neither did they, as both Parish Priest and curate had three cups a piece with their toast and marmalade before they left.

This story was told to me by mother. R.I.P Mam.

Nora Galvin Delahunty
Going to Market: Hanna’s memories

Hanna was very young when she drove a horse and cart, full of sheep, to the mart in Gorey. The sheep were all around her. Her father was leading the way bringing another load.

Hanna remembers seeing two or three women standing in a shop doorway. She could only just see them over the side of the cart. One was calling out: “Look at the child driving the horse and cart with all the sheep!”

Her father only got one offer for the sheep. The train, which would have conveyed all animals sold to Dublin, was leaving shortly. So when he knew he would not get any other offers he decided to bring them all home.

Another day Hanna was at the mart in Enniscorthy with her father. This time he sold his animals. After selling them he bought Hanna a pair of shoes. They were brown lace up shoes. They also went to a restaurant for their tea.

Next day in school her teacher said to her: “You have lovely new shoes.” So Hanna told her: “My Daddy bought them for me in Enniscorthy yesterday and we had our tea in a restaurant.”

Told by Hanna Strong
Farm Life

Hanna described long and busy days on the farm.

There would be four men to feed all year round, except on Sundays. They helped to feed the cattle and would work the horses in the fields. They would have to change the horses at lunchtime, to rest those that worked all morning.

There was early morning feeding at 5am, breakfast for themselves and then out sowing the fields by 8am in the Spring.

There would be 10 o’clock tea, dinner at 12, tea mid afternoon and tea again at six. Some lived nearby and would cycle home. They would have a bottle of milk going home and a bag of vegetables and a bag of potatoes at Christmas.

This was how it was on the farm when Hanna was growing up and continued when she married.

When cutting hay and bringing it in they would have mugs of tea around the hay stacks in the afternoon.
There were hens and milking cows. Coming up to Christmas, turkeys would be prepared.

Hanna used make two churns of butter every week. The churn had a little tap for buttermilk to come away. The butter would be white if it was very warm and cold water would have to be poured over the churn. There was a gauge on top to tell you when the butter was ready. The butter was made into one pound weights and wrapped in white paper. If it hadn’t been delivered the man from the shop in town would come out to the farm for it.

Told by Hanna Strong
The Pattern Factory

Before she was married and had her family, Mary worked in England. She lived with a family, minding children at first but it was really badly paid and there was very little time off. So Mary got a job in a factory. Dress patterns were made there.

Patterns are made up of lots of individual pieces of tissue paper with the outlines to be cut out printed on them. After assembling all of the patterns one extra piece might turn up. Then you had to open every pattern until you identified the one to which the missing piece belonged. There could be as many as a hundred patterns and so this could take ages.

Told by Mary Clampett
The Art Experience

When Mary went to school they wrote on slates with chalk. They did not get pencils until later on. There was never drawing or painting. It just didn’t happen.

Mary has two daughters and a son. Mary’s children are good artists and they still give time to it. When they were small, she used to bring them out into the fields with paints and colours and paper. The first time her son painted a cow it was a funny looking cow. It had a really long neck. Mary kept it along with many others.

Told by Mary Clampett
Skipping Rhymes

One, two, three
My mother caught a bee
She roast it and toast it
And ate it for her tea

Oh Janey Mac, my shirt is black
What will I do on Sunday
Go to bed and bury your head
And don’t get up till Monday

Plum Pudding hot
Plum Pudding cold
Plum Pudding in a pot
Nine days old

Jack Sprat could eat no fat
His wife could eat no lean
Between them both
They killed a goat
And licked the dishes clean

As recalled by Kathleen Kinsella
A Memory

Sean Redmond worked as a psychiatric nurse for forty years in St. Senan’s in Enniscorthy. (It used to be called E.L.A., Enniscorthy Lunatic Asylum before, not a nice address).

He used to recommend a little fella be allowed home to his mother for the weekend and the doctors would allow him home.

He and his mother smoked pipes. He would ring Sean and say “I’ve lost my pipe in the bed. Should I ring the guards?” Sean would advise him to take all the clothes off the bed and make it again and he’d always be ringing back to say he found the pipe.

Told by Sean Redmond
Reaching Out

Lead me by your hand
Dear Lord
Through this maze of
Uncertain direction
I know there is an exit
Somewhere
From this seemingly endless
Hope-filled search
And continuous quest

Lead me by your hand
Dear Lord
As I walk on the waters
Of trust
Strengthen my faith
As I wade my way
Through turbulence
And calm,
To reach my goal

Lead me by your hand
Dear Lord
Through this obstacle course
To rise higher as I
Die to self

To go further than
I've ever ventured before
As the spirit guides
Lead me by the hand
Dear Lord
Along the dry and desert way
To reach the oasis
Of your healing love
And the fire of your Spirit
Which brings new life
Poured out first
On Pentecost day

As I clasped your
Outreached hand
I feel secure dear Lord
Like a child loved
Nothing matters anymore
My confidence and hope
In you returned
In the Heart of Divine Mercy
Is my abode

Johanna Tanner

The last verse was written in the car on the way to the Annual Dialysis Service of Remembrance, 27th May 2012
Music of Life

On many a summer’s evening,
As the sun was going down,
Grandad would play his fiddle,
And I would act the clown.
So many songs I’d sing then,
My voice so sweet and clear,
It feels like only yesterday,
The music I still hear.
I often asked my Grandad,
What he thought my life would be,
The firelight flickered in his eyes,
As he said these words to me,
“Sing your songs and play your tune,
But, learn to listen too,
Be kind and understanding,
And to yourself be true.
Take a little time each day
To find out who you are,
Then, rich or poor, whatever comes,
You’ll always be a star.”

Marianne Terese du Barry Hill
Memories

I was born and raised in Monaseed
A little place on the hill,
There is no one there now, my folks are all gone,
How I long to be there still.

The Kirwins, the Kearneys, the Conways,
Our neighbours one and all,
The best you could find in all Ireland,
Whenever you came to call.

I’d love to be there amongst them now
But that will never be,
‘Cause I’m safely home in Cranford
With my children all around me.

Phyllis Curran
Molly and the White Calf

One Saturday Molly bought a white calf in Tullycannon. When she told her husband that evening she had bought a white calf he was furious. He had wanted her to bring home a Hereford or some other breed, not a white calf.

The calf turned out to be wicked when she grew up. Once she attacked Molly and tore her vest with her horns. Molly called some young lads to bring her a stick so she could turn the cow out into the field. She broke the handle of the pike turning her out.

But that was not the last of it.

One Sunday when Molly was coming home from mass on her bicycle she saw blood on the lane. She got a fright. The same vicious cow had gone for the man who was milking the cows. He had defended himself with a sprong and one of the tines had gone into her nostril so it was the cow’s blood on the lane.

After this, the cow was kept in the house until she was sold.

Told by Molly Sinnott
I HAVE LIVED MY LIFE, AND THAT WHICH I HAVE DONE MAY HE WITHIN HIM, NEARLY AFFLICT ME BY YOUR HAND.

Another king, CHERNG, the next day through his maze of the rainbow, I knew there is an exit somewhere.

I am alone there could be gone from this seeming end. men to feed, Hope-filled Search, and continuous quest.

We have a lonely Angel in our unit, who I call Big Guns as her Nick name, Pety my name is very good and can always cheer me up, with her Mischiefian Ing.

In the letter I rather dye my dye again, it would be rest and this day all for a Kidney PILL to stop the Birth Polluting The Earth.

But until I win that Lottery, I'll stay as it should be, with my 23300 days on and my you and my diet 'O lean and jelly.
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