

# *The Arts & us*

**Poetry, Paintings and Craftwork  
by Polio Survivors in Ireland**



Compiled by Nuala Harnett

## Acknowledgement

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This book is a legacy initiative of the Post Polio Support Group so that the trials and triumphs of those Irish people who contracted polio in the 20th century should never be forgotten.

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Compiled by Nuala Harnett

Project Coordinator, Paula Lahiff  
Director, Post Polio Support Group

## **Mission Statement Post Polio Support Group**

To create awareness and provide information regarding the late effects of Polio among polio survivors, statutory agencies and the wider medical profession, and to work to ensure that polio survivors have all needs relating to their condition met.

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# Foreword

Following the successful publication of *Polio & Us* in 2007, the Post Polio Support Group asked Paula Lahiff and Nuala Harnett to produce this companion book, *The Arts & Us*, featuring the creative works of polio survivors in Ireland.

Polio was a terrorising disease which invaded Ireland in epidemics mainly in the 1940s and 1950s. It caused paralysis, principally in children, and left people very disabled. However, most recovered to varying degrees and carried on as best they could.

Unfortunately, 20 to 40 years after the initial infection, about 60% of polio survivors now suffer from Post Polio Syndrome. This causes fatigue, muscle pain and weakness and results in increased difficulty in carrying out activities of daily living. Often aids, such as callipers, limb supports, wheelchairs, etc. are once more required.

However, polio survivors have long been resilient and independent and have contributed to society to the best of their ability. Many have wonderful artistic talents, and this book displays some examples of their poetry, craftwork, paintings and photography.

I would like to thank all who contributed, and acknowledge the efforts of those not included, due to lack of space. Also, I want to thank Nuala and Paula for their untiring efforts in producing this very fine book. Finally, a big 'thank you' to The People in Need Trust and Sligo Co. Council Arts Office, without whose generosity this publication would not have been possible.

Hugh Hamilton  
Chairman, Post Polio Support Group

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# *Progress??*

Sheila O'Sullivan

Fluffy furls of cotton clouds, buffeting the breeze,  
Shafts of sunlight streaming through colour the distant trees.

Gentle hills that dip and rise, wending their way between  
Lush farmland of yellow, brown and deep luxuriant green.

A heifer gambles playfully, proud mother licks a curl.  
My being stands engulfed in peace, and I am just a girl.

Ten summers pass, my baby cries - I rock her pram and gaze  
At chimneys poking distant skies, where green trees brushed the haze

Stark grey roofs intrude the scene – the night air choking, damp,  
With thick black smoke that belches up where once we used to camp.

A lone thrush circles overhead oblivious of the fact  
Her offspring may not find a nest with next year's planning act.

Is this to be our future then- animals versus Man?  
We have failed to find the answer – perhaps our children can?





Photograph,  
Straw Fox  
by Ray Linehan

# Hands

Linda O'Leary

They were small and wrinkled I'm sure when they  
started out in life  
But I didn't know them then for I was yet to be born  
But my first memories of them were all embracing,  
A feeling of safety and security.

They remained that way as long as she lived  
However, as I became aware of life and death the hands  
seemed different,  
They were as long as night, nothing particularly decorative  
about them  
If anything, they showed an age not equal to their owner.  
The veins were the colour black which summed up her life,  
Always troubled, she attempted to get through each day  
without complaint  
By times all animated and all embracing, those are the memories  
I hold onto  
When I was at ease with the people with whom  
I shared my life.

And when she left to go to her maker  
Her hands were slim and quiet and offered no help  
It happened in an instant,  
But I felt the hands were happy and at peace.



Patchwork Quilt  
by Linda O'Leary

# *Through!*

Hugh Weir

Puffs of cotton,  
Superimposed:  
A blue background  
Framed  
Through a white window.

Desires, nay pleads, to  
Experience  
The life beyond,  
One knows or knew:  
Experiences.

Alas, there's another side  
To that frame;  
The side one's on  
In bed with  
Dreams ablaze.

The new-born day's  
Fresh morning air  
Invites;  
Stagnant air is  
Trapped inside.

Denied the ozone,  
Exuberance, the  
Beyond:  
Trapped  
Inside.

The sense beyond;  
The fresh, breezy  
Wind  
Invites the imprisoned,  
Out.

From their heavy  
Immobility, a bid for  
Freedom  
And life's happier  
Experiences





Painting,  
Still Life  
by Wolfram Stumpf

# Friendship

Catherine Lloyd

There is no need for words exchanged  
Nor time to waste on idle conversation  
No need for ponderous plans arranged  
Nor cause for devious explanation.

The food prepared stands growing cold  
For all the pangs of hunger now subdued  
In finding this is more than gold  
And richer far than wealth accrued.

A passion shared, one following another  
For this or that or some great book devoured.  
What joy to sense the same thoughts in each other  
As if our minds could be but one empowered.

Perhaps it is because we seldom spend  
More than a few hours when we are together;  
All thoughts of possessiveness we must suspend;  
To keep a balanced mind we must endeavour.



Painting,  
Alice and Daniel  
by Nuala Harnett





# *The Hound of Belgooly*

Ray Linehan

Todd flogged me a hound in Belgooly,  
The pick of the pack he assured me  
But when I got home and threw him a bone  
His dentures fell out right before me.  
We raced to Kinsale to the vet  
Where says he with a frown and a fret  
“I’m afraid he’s got fleas and a prosthetic knee  
But I’ll glue back his teeth in a set!”

Further veterinary inspection  
Revealed an aural infection  
A false implant nose, gout-ridden toes  
And acute ocular imperfection.  
Not one to consider defeat  
We went to the hunt at the heath  
But his prosthetic knee fractured in three  
And the fox ran away with his teeth.

With his confidence blown asunder  
He bounded downwind in the thunder  
Got soaked on the spot and all that he caught  
Was a bad bout of canine distemper.  
Now pining by the fireside couch  
The health of my hound petered out  
His fake nose deflated and disintegrated  
And he smothered on segments of snout.  
When the church bell tolled at eleven

His bones were interred in Glasnevin  
And his soul did depart (plus a few plastic parts)  
And ascend upon harrier heaven.  
With the elegy over it struck me  
That no hound was ever so plucky  
And engraved and embossed read the words on his cross  
Here rests my dear best friend . . . 'Lucky'.



Carving,  
Dog in Bogwood  
by Paddy Fitzpatrick

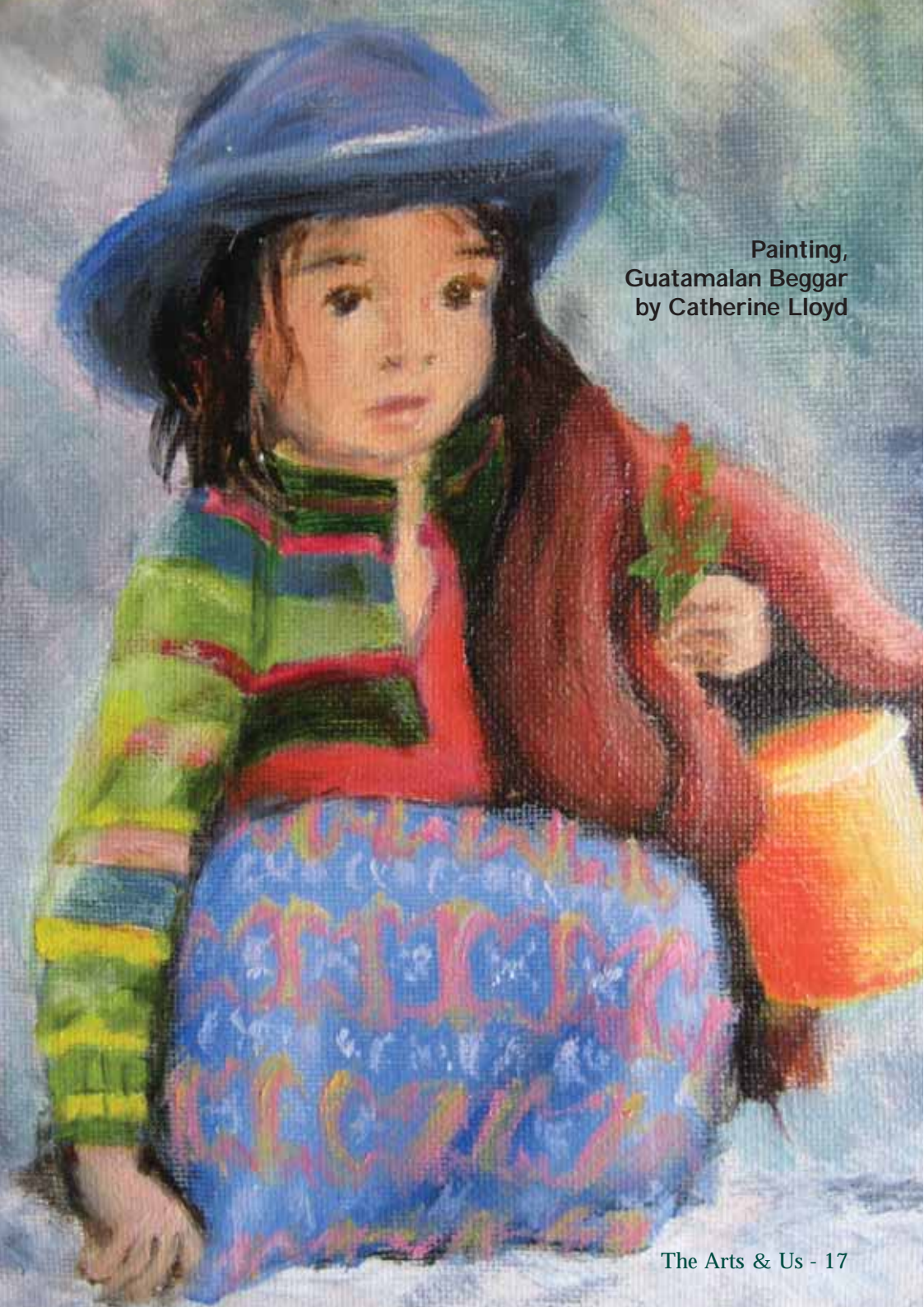
# *My Neighbour*

Joan Bradley

You came to see me yesterday, carried my bag, and in.  
I offered you my swivel chair to sit and slowly swing.  
Eight years old, and innocent of many kinds of sin.  
Did you come to get a sweet or biscuit from a tin?

Did you come to tell me news of something very new?  
Or question me on weighty things, on which you had no clue?  
Questions flowed, there is now doubt, like waves on sandy shore.  
Answers did not bring you in, you wanted something more.

You chatted all about your life, the happy things and sad,  
That you encountered in your realm, good, but some were bad.  
You did not need a brand new toy or book of tale or rhyme.  
Your only need, a listening ear, and minutes of my time.



Painting,  
Guatamalan Beggar  
by Catherine Lloyd



# *Guernica*

Paula Lahiff

Picasso's Guernica, jagged depiction of war,  
Child mouth-open silent scream, quartered in front of its mother.  
Deep blues and purples, sharp lines,  
Sword-slashed reds and orange,  
Mosaic people strewn across the canvas  
By huge strokes of brush vividly  
Showing us the horrors of war.

Paula's gurney rattles up the ward, strong  
Men in green scrubs, lift her from the bed  
Their soft shoes and masked mouth hallucinating her brain.  
Unembodied voices call her, asking  
Name, number, date of birth.  
A stab and legs fade out to nothingness.

Sounds of saw and staple  
Compete with ear-plugged Beethoven, and she floats  
Cradled like a baby, imprisoned, immobile in their hands.

She came to this by pain and only by pain will she survive.  
Was this her Guernica, the start of peace at last?



Painting,  
Flight  
by Bridget Quigley O'Brien

# Trees

Cathryn Duane

There they stand the trees so tall  
Witnessing each day that falls.  
They've seen the storms of many years  
They've seen despair of war and tears.

Standing there in sun and showers  
In all seasons of rain and shine,  
Their growth and strength ascends the sky  
Displaying leaves of beauty on high.

There they stand so grand and tall  
Just stop and look, you'll see them all  
Providing shelter for birds and people  
Through their towering height and branches.

The trees are born before us and will outlive us,  
Unless we take the time to stand and stare  
At the beauty before us  
We shall be lost in the lonely woods of life.



**Carving,  
Axe in Yew Wood  
by Paddy Fitzpatrick**



# *Marvinia* *Cardboard Box*

Patricia Gibson

I view the world from my cardboard box  
And dream what might have been  
I long for those bygone happy days  
And dream, and dream, and dream.

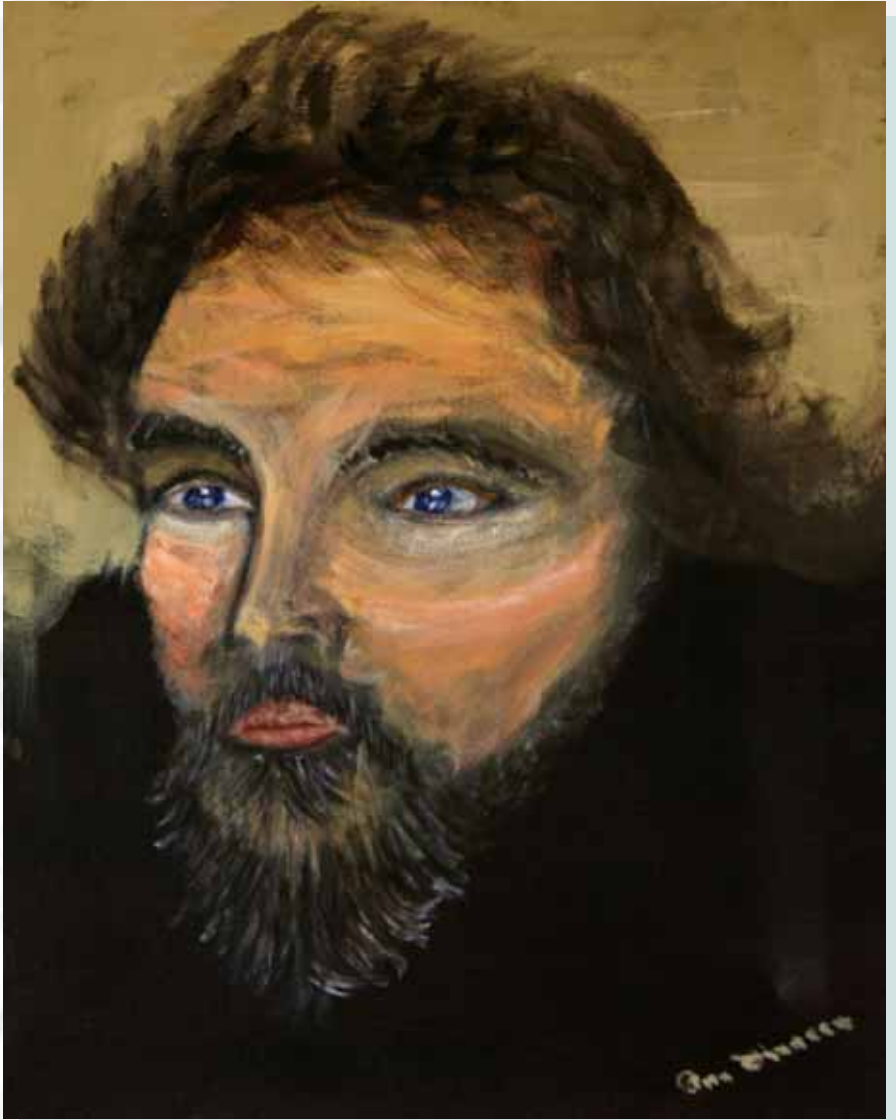
The ladder of fun was easy to climb  
Deserting wife and children too  
I didn't care, 'twas fun up there  
Suddenly the ladder gave way.

The friends I had while at the top  
Vanished into thin air  
Now here I am a broken man  
Dishevelled, weighed down with care.

Christ, what can I do, where will I go?  
I've paid for the pleasure and fun  
But the pain I've caused to the ones I love  
Can never be undone.

It's cold and lonely in my cardboard box  
Nobody hears me moan  
I long for the warmth of a flickering fire  
And the place I once called home.

Perhaps one day I'll hear her say  
Come back to me and the children too  
We'll rebuild our love put our arms around you  
And start our life anew.



Painting,  
Thoughtful  
by Ann Dinneen

# *Lists*

Catherine Lloyd

My whole life long I've made up lists and they keep getting longer  
I know if I could curb these lists my memory would grow stronger.

But I can't stop this gruelling task, it feels like an addiction,  
I cannot live without my lists; that is my strong conviction.

I make up lists into the night before I go to bed,  
I dream of them and when I wake they're circling round my head.

The shopping list is one small part, the chores are still another;  
The menu for each evening meal; the laundry's such a bother.

The guest list for the next big do and who likes what or doesn't  
The neighbours who still get along and oh, the maiden cousin.

The garden list goes on and on and what I planted where;  
I doubt I could remember all if they're not sprouting there.

The bin collection I ignore until it's much too late;  
Because the odour's just too much while wheeling to the gate.

I could go on with other lists but now it's getting late;  
It's time to make tomorrow's list and add tomorrow's date.





Pen and Ink,  
Floral Bouquet (1)  
by Barbara McDonagh

*Barbara McDonagh '99*

# *Steel Lover (My Car!)*

Bridget Quigley O'Brien

Wrap me around your arms  
To touch your skin of glass  
And feel the ice cold steel  
And rest my thoughts within your confines.  
I see the world through your steel glassy eyes  
That guide me through my daily chores.  
I have travelled with you along the paths and roads  
But we always come back to me.

You have listened to me cry and scream,  
Swear and sing, fighting with my shadow.  
You do not say a word of Shhh ... Bridget  
But leave me in my world of chatter.  
For when I am with you I begin to thaw  
And thoughts scatter like melted snow  
And wander over things that matter.

You old friend listen and do not judge  
You take me to my place of refuge  
And let me wander there alone,  
And time does not dictate to you  
Or tell me things I have to do.  
I love being alone with you  
So kiss me for I will never say 'Adieu' to you  
Steel lover.



Painting,  
Bridge to Gold  
by Rob Steinke



# *The Christmas Ray*

Joan Bradley

No satellite or cosmic dust fell on the earth that day.  
No earthquake caused the soil to shake or melt in laser ray.  
No Nagasaki bomb was dropped to wipe the earth of life,  
No Holocaust, no cloud of gas, atomic power or strife.

Yet stars were moved and kings who rule, paving for the way.  
And angels came to earth and sang and turned a night to day.  
A carpenter, a shepherd herd, a man who kept an inn,  
A girl, whose heart was deeply stirred, endured much gossiping.

Each, unknowing, pressed to serve, forwarding a plan  
They carried out a normal task, some were mocked by man.  
For on that day a child was born, raising hope on earth.  
God came down to touch mankind, took part in human birth.

The opening of the womb that night released a stronger ray  
Than all the atoms split on earth, in nuclear display.  
It melts the frozen embryo of hope; God's love unfolds  
And penetrating hearts of men zaps the blight on souls.



Painting,  
Mother and Child  
by Catherine Lloyd

# *Ocean Dreams*

Ray Linehan

Young minnow strewn from stream to sea by mountain river run,  
I crossed the teeming tributary from where I once begun.  
I crossed the weirs and waterways meandering down stream  
Until I found the salty spray and shoreline of a dream.

I tasted treasures of the deep blue mesmerising sea  
And viewed the coral forests steeped with jewel anemones.  
I heard the ancient ocean sigh prime secrets of the past  
And sensed a lifetime legacy of fortunes unsurpassed

But fortune changed and lustre lost and ancient oceans mourned,  
Their legacy was wanton tossed upon a dream wrecked shore.  
A bounty wondrously immense, once fathomless and free  
Was ravaged now and how I sensed the sorrow of the sea.

Old creature drawn from sea to stream by mountain river run,  
I crossed the ebbing estuary to where I once begun.  
I crossed the weirs and waterways clambering up stream.  
There shallow breath bore life and death to journeys and to dreams.

Painting,  
Swimmer  
by Bridget Quigley O'Brien





# *The Wild Woman Inside Me*

Paula Lahiff

I feel her cobwebbed touch against my face,  
As wrapping herself in filigree mist  
And whispering that she will be back,  
She steps out of me to greet the dawn.

She combs her wavy tresses with bulrush strokes,  
Sending streaks of light to colour up the sky.  
Standing on tippy toe, she draws the muslin  
Shadows from the hill, letting in the light.

Beat by beat, she becomes strong,  
Taking her energy from the rising sun.  
First slow and slow, then build and build  
Louder, stronger, faster, eager, her rhythm starts.

She lifts her skirt, points her toe, and begins to dance;  
Whirling and weaving, dipping and diving  
White frothy bubbles leaping light,  
Whip up a rainbow hurricane in her wake.

She dances, sparkles, shouts her beauty to the winds.  
Then slower and softer, down and deeper, she steps back,  
And folding her shawl around her beating heart  
She climbs back inside me, spent.



Painting,  
Unicorn  
by Rob Steinke

# *Depression*

Catherine Lloyd

The steady sound of falling rain creates a bittersweet refrain  
And tempers the pervading pain which in my mind for long  
has lain  
And will no doubt return again.

It lulls me to uncertain sleep and stops the desperate urge to weep  
As darkest shadows start to creep and out of nowhere seem to leap.  
Such fearful images they reap.

The pitter-patter on the ground; the empathy of nature's sound  
Brings consolation so profound and sad thoughts now  
are turned around  
To dreaded darkness no more bound.

# *Stillness*

W.T.Ahern

Why be afraid of stillness  
Are you aware it's me?  
Through the storms of life  
I'll guide you  
You will always be free.  
All of life's worries  
Place them in my care,  
Even if you don't know it  
I'm always there.



Photograph,  
Puffin  
by Ray Linehan



# *Tomfenloh*

E.R.Bailey

Beyond calm waters of nestling swans  
And yellow beaked black water hens,  
St. Luightighern came and built a church.  
A place devout above the verge of Fenloe,  
Where long stemmed rushes crown the shallows  
And Granahan spreads an evening shadow.  
A place of learning,  
Where scholars swamped through Celtic script  
And tread beneath the shallow lintel  
To kneel and harmonise their praise.  
Exposed,  
The nave now cradle to the rook and wren.  
An open palm stretched out to grasp a shower  
To weep within the ivy'd chancel.  
Tall lancet tracery disperses light  
Where bread and wine were offered once  
To contrite hearts.  
In solitude,  
The balm of spirits past envelop,  
And still the weary soul  
In Christ's eternal sanctuary.



Painting,  
Fanad Scene  
by Wolfram Stumpf

# *Hannah and Dick*

Ann Healy Dinneen

Because they stayed till past their prime  
We thought we had them for all time.  
When they were here, we used to say,  
“Ooh, Mam is here ... or ... just out there,  
And Dad is sitting in his chair.”  
No thought of how we’d miss that chair  
From where our Dad would call,  
“Hallo there!”  
And to Herself would say,  
“Mam girl, Quick! Put the kettle on,  
Can’t you see they’re here?”

But, now the chair is empty  
And the kettle it is cold  
And the home we knew since childhood  
Is gone for evermore.  
We miss them both, dear Mam and Dad  
And often talk of yore  
Of the dancing in the kitchen  
And the yarns of long ago.

But, they’ve moved on  
And so must we  
Until on day, please God,  
We’ll once again hear our Dad say,  
“Mam girl, Quick! Put the kettle on,  
Can’t you see they’re here?”



ck



Mosaic,  
Butterfly  
by Zyaynab Salman

Ceramic,  
Sunflower  
by Maureen Carolan



Crochet  
by Margaret Heath





# *Gifts*

Cathryn Duane

Oh, to feel the wind on my face,  
Touch your hand and feel your warm embrace.

Oh, to taste the food and wine  
To aid my health and growth in time.

Oh, the smell of fragrant flowers  
New mown hay and summer showers.

Oh, to see a smiling face,  
A new born baby full of grace.

Oh, to hear the sound of music  
That soothes and heals our souls.

The sound of breaking waves  
On the sea shore.

The birds' dawn chorus,  
The joy, the laughter.

Life is a gift with all these senses  
Could one ask for more?



Painting,  
The Saddle Mountain,  
Greenland by Povl Thim

# *The Old Sea Dog*

Valerie Beattie

The sands of time go rolling by  
The tides they ebb and flow.  
The Old Sea Dog is mindful now  
Of those days long ago.

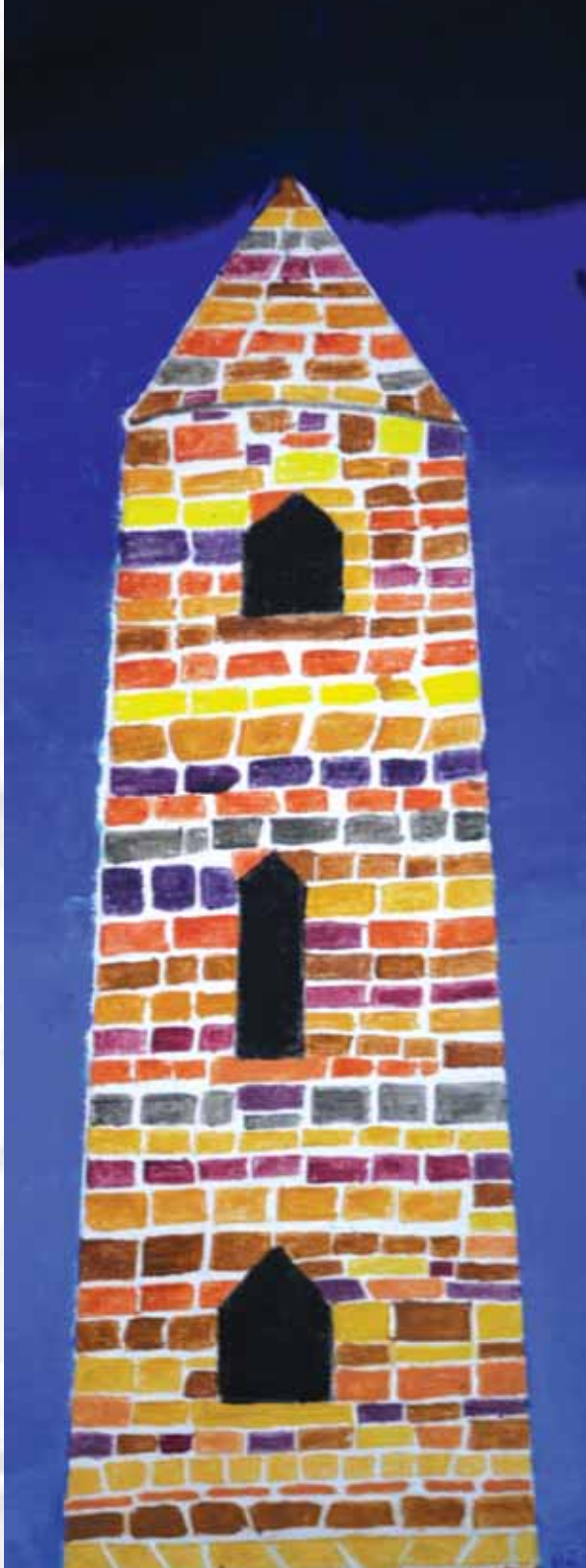
His days upon the rolling foam  
When nature takes its course,  
Yet joy he found upon the waves,  
It was his driving force.

And now he sits upon the shore  
Just looking out to sea.  
He lilts a song from days gone by  
When he was young and free.

And young men come  
And listen to the tales he has to tell.  
And women too are charmed by him;  
As if he weaved a spell.

The Old Sea Dog is peaceful now,  
His voyage is almost done.  
He gives a smile, and winks his eye  
And knocks back another rum.

g



Painting,  
Fawlty Tower  
by Gerald Feehan

# *Man's Inhumanity and (Rwanda)*

Patricia Gibson

A naked child wandering alone  
Wiping clinging flies  
From his tear stained eyes,  
His swollen stomach  
Denoting starvation  
Crying for his Mum and Dad.

Not far away, their bodies lie,  
In a mass grave,  
Not long ago their little babe  
Floated in safety and comfort,  
In his mother's womb,  
Emerging to a world  
Of cruelty and hate.

Never will he know love  
His emaciated body  
Cannot endure more pain  
His innocent cries are for love,  
Soon, very soon,  
He'll be with Mum and Dad,  
Death will be his friend.





Pen and Ink,  
Floral Bouquet (2)  
by Barbara McDonagh

# Longing to be a Granny

Paula Lahiff

I long to be a granny,  
But they all say “Not yet” or “I’m not ready”.  
I wonder if I had waited for everything to be ready  
Would I ever have had any children at all?

They say, “But I have to get married, buy a house,  
Get a Masters, go on holiday. No, I’m not ready yet.”  
I look back and think was it all that difficult?  
And watch their biological clocks ticking, but there isn’t a stir!

I long to spoil my grandchildren and enjoy them  
And then hand them back when they cry.  
I want to bury my nose in soft baby curls,  
Blow bubbles on their tummies and make them laugh.

I want to make them elderflower lemonade  
And Rice Krispies buns, and let them lick the spoon.  
I want to eavesdrop on Christmas morning  
When they discover that Santa has been.

I want to kiss them goodnight, and then have to do it again  
Because they can’t still feel that first kiss on their cheek.  
I want to give them butterfly kisses and Eskimo kisses  
And help them write a note to the tooth fairy.

But ... can I compete with Star Trek and Batman and Dinosaurs,  
With Nintendos and Ipods and Consoles?  
Oh dear, maybe **I’m** not ready, maybe the time’s **not right**.  
Maybe they **should** wait. Maybe **I won’t know** how to be a granny?



Photograph,  
Grey Heron  
by Ray Linehan

# Spring

Catherine Lloyd

The curtain of the night is thrust apart  
By morning light and rays that upward dart.

The fast receding clouds of purplish hue  
Remind us once again that all is new.

The early morning air is filled with song  
From birds that gather in a merry throng;  
On many budding branches of the trees  
That gently wave in motion with the breeze.

The bright and silvery sheen of morning dew  
Covers the soft new grass of greenish hue.

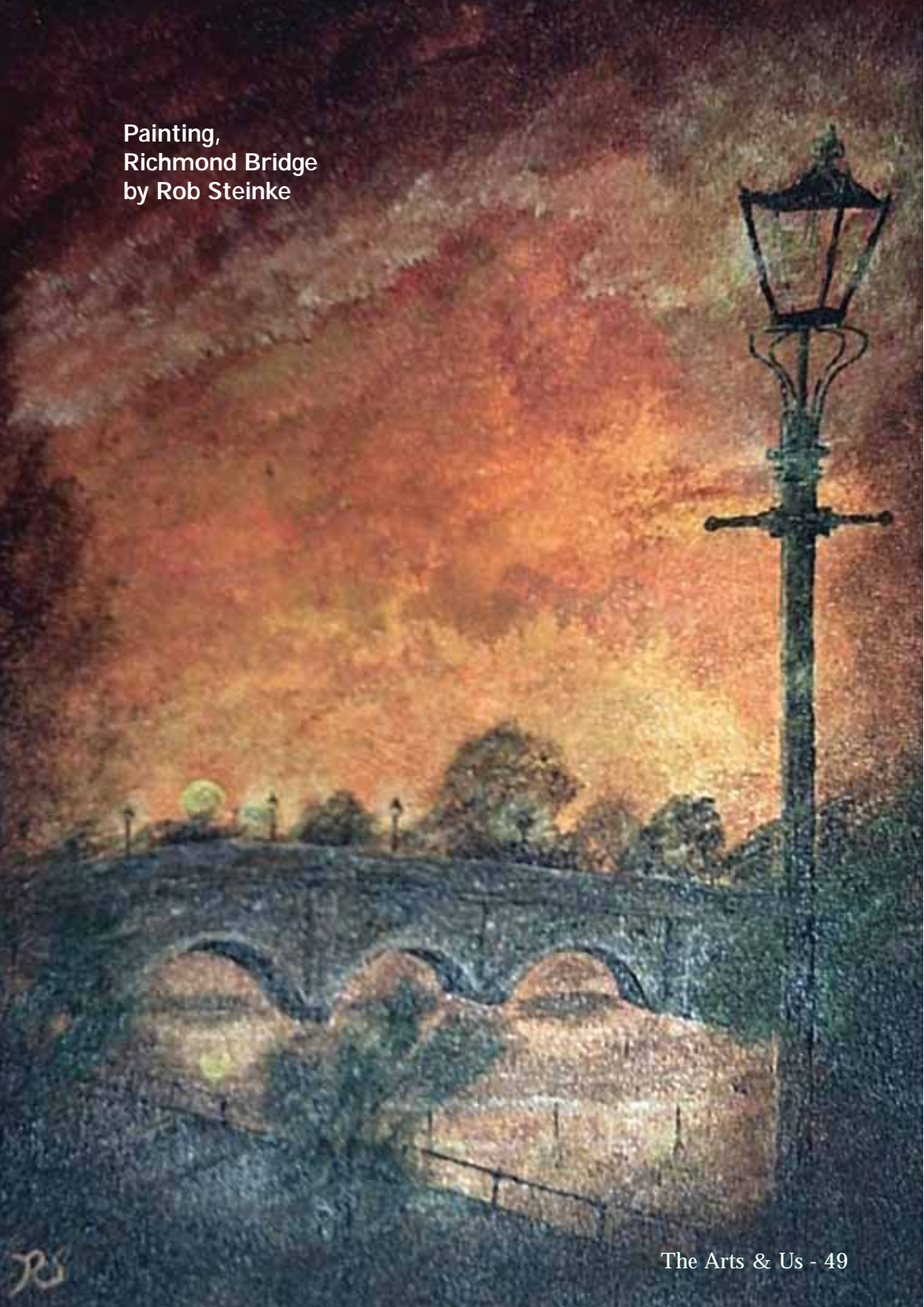
Awakened from a lengthy Winter sleep  
Various little creatures stir and creep.

The daffodils raise up their golden head  
Above crocuses emerging from their bed;

The perfume of the hyacinths fills the air  
And snowdrops gaily dance without a care



Painting,  
Richmond Bridge  
by Rob Steinke





# *Wheels Drove My Education*

Bridget Quigley O'Brien

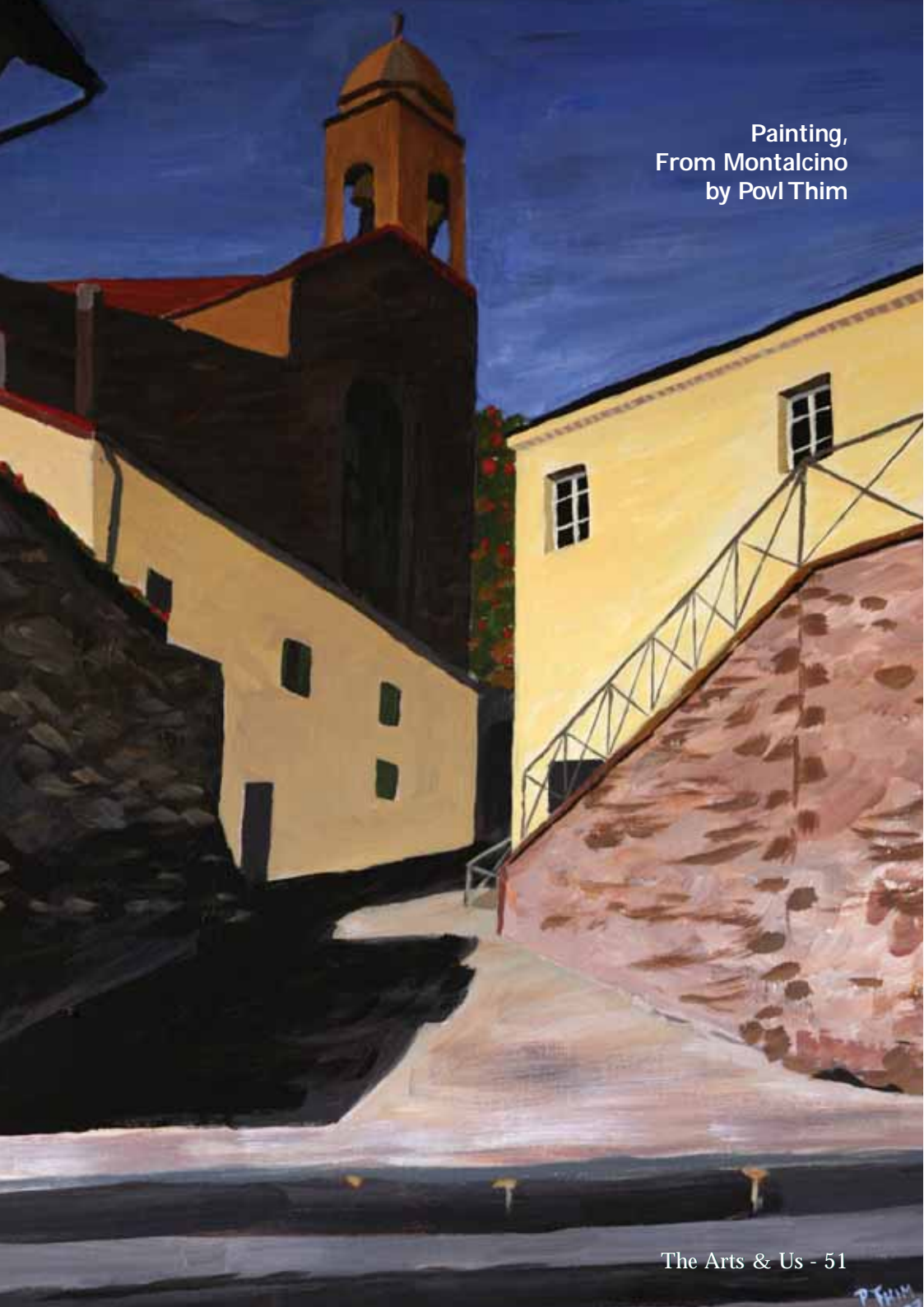
Wheels were very good to me  
When I was young in the country  
Where modes of transport were very low  
And human legs refused to go  
And far away the village school  
Beckoned me.

Through the country lanes and  
Between the ditches,  
Dirt splashed upon my breeches  
From the tractor I would ride  
With muck splattered upon my pride  
For there was nowhere to hide  
When you travelled in the open tide.

Through the wind and rain, and even snow  
There was no shelter from the blow  
But I did not really care  
As long as the tractor got me there  
Pride was left in the air.

Those folks of mine how they cared  
That educated I should be,  
They felt it was important for me  
That I should get the best you see  
Of all the wheels available to me  
To drive me to my destiny.

Painting,  
From Montalcino  
by Povl Thim



# *Golden Trees*

Ray Linehan

Silent disease fell on sapling trees  
When hewn down in the Spring breeze.  
From earth's golden grove they tearfully passed,  
Tumbling down they withered to ash.

Surviving trees kissed the Summer's breeze  
And bloomed new fruit and fresh budding leaves.  
Enchanting young forests would grow and cope,  
Branching out from the stem, resurrecting hope.

Those noble gnarled limbs they still stand fast  
Though deep weary roots delve deep in the past.  
Veiled rings of growth, grey ghosts never found  
Would sew new hues in Autumn's golden crown.

Now Winter's breeze treads light on these trees  
Which beam in white sunshine of glory achieved.  
Mastering life's seasons in heavenly throngs,  
Forever remembered, all truly belong.



**Painting,  
Twilight in Forest  
by Bridget Quigley O'Brien**



# *A Silent Message*

Patricia Gibson

His frail body  
With hunched shoulders  
Leans heavily against  
The cruel east wind,  
He must rest  
On a park bench.

Lonely, save for his companions  
The pigeons at his feet.  
Lonely, he has  
No crumbs for them.  
Lonely, his heart longs  
For understanding,  
Someone to listen.

While we watch in our thermal warmth  
Is he unknowingly  
Conveying to us  
That we review our conscience  
And try to appease the situation  
Of the lonely man  
On the park bench?



*e*

**Carving,  
Man in Bogwood  
by Paddy Fitzpatrick**





**Arts Squad,  
Finglas Post Polio Support Group**



