

# Grapevine

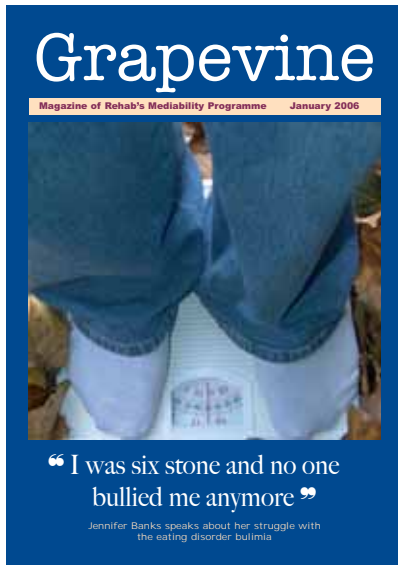
Magazine of Rehab's Mediability Programme

January 2006



“ I was six stone and no one  
bullied me anymore ”

Jennifer Banks speaks about her struggle with  
the eating disorder bulimia



**In a powerful and frank account, Jennifer Banks speaks about her struggle with the eating disorder bulimia. She outlines what triggered her battle with food and self-image and the steps she took in her recovery**

# My Battle with Bulimia

## Grapevine Editorial

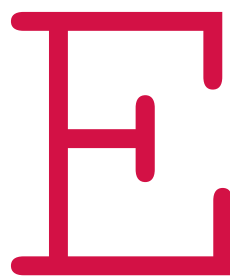
We're back! And we're becoming more visible by the day. In response to the hugely positive feedback the last issue of Grapevine attracted, the graduates of the Mediability programme have compiled a collection of reports and articles focusing on social and political issues.

Our lead story is a frank and powerful account of journalist Jennifer Bank's own battle with the eating disorder bulimia. With evidence that eating disorders are becoming increasingly prevalent in society, groups and organisations working in the area of anorexia and bulimia are calling for greater awareness and education about eating and body image generally.

Children and young people have been high on the political agenda recently. Reflecting the importance and pressing need to tackle youth-focused issues, articles on topics including bullying and young people in debt are featured in this issue.

Also included is a humorous look at the burgeoning social life of a young disabled man and a collection of stories about how non-disabled people view disability. I believe this issue of Grapevine magazine, offers a wide and varied insight into some of the important issues facing Irish society today. If you have any ideas or comments on the magazine content or would like to contact any of the journalists featured, please feel free to get in touch with me at the email address below.

Jacqueline Johnston-Fagan  
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very day, death became more and more appealing to me. From the age of five I was relentlessly bullied for being heavy. I had to run a daily

gauntlet to and from school. To say I hated myself was an understatement. Thoughts of suicide filled my mind but I was too afraid to kill myself. The priests used to say you went to hell for taking your own life and at twelve years old I believed them. I already lived in hell and had no desire to go to another one.

At age twelve, I was struck down by a virus and spent a week vomiting and unable to eat. I stood on the old bathroom scales and discovered to my delight I had lost 8 pounds. I can still see the blue bathroom with its white walls and even now, I can feel the anticipation as I took the rusty scales from the bottom shelf and laid it on the floor. I knew these scales well. I would take a deep breath every time before I had the courage to stand on them. Sometimes I rested my hand on the sink to take a few pounds off the result. But that day, I knew I had no need to do so as I could feel the flesh had melted away during my illness. At that very moment I hatched what I believed to my greatest plan; I could eat my food heartily to hide my secret then purge the lot knowing my family would never sus-

pect a thing. I found it difficult to hide my joy. I was going to lose weight. No one would ever know what I was doing and the bullying would stop.

I felt totally empowered by my eating disorder. To those around me, my self-confidence appeared to grow. I was happily going through life as far as my family and friends were concerned. Alone, I shed many tears as I sat on the bathroom floor and began the process of purging any food I had consumed in the previous three hours. I had researched how long the body took to digest food and was always on three-hour watch. If I went one second over this time limit, I felt like a failure and punished myself by forcing my body to purge until bile burnt my throat.

For eleven years I purged my food. Having moved to London, my secret remained undiscovered until the summer of 1988 when I was hospitalised suffering from malnutrition. The doctors contacted my mother who came over to London to see me. The shock on her face when she walked into the room made me cry. The last time I had seen my mother, I was two stone heavier and wore the baggy clothes essential to hide the results of a growing eating disorder. A heavy jumper and jeans can disguise all sorts of sins but lying in a hospital bed, I only had a sheet to hide under. One look at my skeletal body gave everything away.

My mother asked the inevitable "why are you doing this?" She could not understand I was so full of self-loathing that I



**Jennifer Banks: "After a year of facing up to my problems, I no longer felt the need to use bulimia to punish myself."**

punished myself with hunger. Bulimia had just been given a name and few understood the condition. To the average per-

son it seems insane to want to purge your food. It all made perfect sense to me; I was six stone and no one bullied me

Eating disorders are on the increase in Ireland. In many cases, it begins in early teens. Bodywhys, the organisation that offers support to people with an eating disorder, has developed a CD ROM for schools to create awareness and educate teenagers and teachers. Saschi Maymen consultant psychologist specialising in eating disorders has contributed to the CD and believes we need to get the message across that healthy eating and exercise is the key to a healthy life. "Parents need to be educated most of all. Never discuss dieting in front of your children and always reassure them that they are beautiful. We need to get our young people away from the TV and encourage

them to go outside," she says. Saschi also believes that parents should try not to purchase magazines showing music and film stars looking perfect. "It is vital that you explain to your children about airbrushing and that these pictures are an illusion - there is no such thing as perfection," she adds. Eating disorders are curable and Saschi has seen many successes. Early detection increases the chances of recovery but she says, "If a client has had an eating disorder for more than five years, then it is more difficult to change their behaviour patterns". Bodywhys is working hard to create awareness and provide countrywide support for those with an eating disorder.

anymore. After the hospital treated the malnutrition and fattened me up by a whole ten pounds, I left promising never to purge again. I had been given the "you will kill yourself" talk and a doctor's stern lecture about how I was increasing my risk of throat cancer or liver disease. I reiterated that there was no chance of me ever hurting my body again and thanked them for curing me. Everybody was happy and off home I went to start the cycle all over again.

I had learned in hospital how much food I required in order to keep the body ticking over and used this information to help sustain my bulimia. One healthy meal a day and everything else went down the toilet. The pain in my heart and the unbelievable loneliness I felt during this time can never be put into words.

Bulimia is a lonely disease. Bullying was the trigger that sent me on my long and lonely battle with an eating disorder. I was purging because I felt I had to. Doctors, parents and friends couldn't cure me because I had to face my demons within first. I went public in 1994 and began my journey of recovery. It took time but I eventually learned to love myself again.

I began to understand through therapy why I was a bulimic and eventually I identified the trigger. The process is a difficult one and in my case the bulimia escalated for a while. I began to understand why I had felt the need to behave in this way and had to relearn normal eating habits. My therapist gave me a mantra that I could use anytime I felt that I needed to purge. It was vital to learn how to extend the time process and for me to exceed the three-hour limit.

Therapy was hell at the time and I experienced many emotions; some so intense I was unable to sleep for days. Eventually the process began to work and after a year of facing up to my problems, I no longer felt the need to use bulimia to punish myself. I began to understand myself and discovered that I was a good person who deserved to live a normal, healthy life and that I deserved to love and allow others to love me. It's been eleven years now but sometimes when I feel low, the monster surfaces and I have to try hard to resist old temptations.

**For further information,  
contact Bodywhys helpline  
on 1890 200 444 or visit  
[www.bodywhys.ie](http://www.bodywhys.ie)**

**It has never been easier to obtain loans and credit cards from banks and young people are seizing these opportunities. David Gomm investigates the growing problem of debt for this group of people**



# At Debt's Door

**T**wenty years ago, young people did not receive offers of credit with their bank statements. Today, advertisements for car loans and holiday finance regularly come through the letter-box and with banks going for the hard sell, an increasing amount of customers are falling into debt.

With more teenagers holding down part time jobs, banks are increasingly targeting this group with a considerable disposable income with colourful ads offering pre-approved loans for cars and holidays.

When young people enter a bank branch, they can see colourful posters of attractive young male and female models advertising loans with freephone numbers underneath. Is it any wonder young people are attracted to spending at an excessive rate?

With more teenagers using credit cards than ever before, many of them are falling into the debt trap. Money and debt advisors warn that if we do not cut back on our spending habits, many of us could find ourselves at debt's door for many years to come.

The Irish obsession with spending means that fewer young people are saving and, according to organisations like St Vincent de Paul and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service, lots of young people are more in debt today than in their parents' generation when banks were more conservative about lending money.

A maths teacher from a Dublin Northside school said it is more essential for young people to know about personal taxation and credit cards than algebra or pie charts. He pointed out that many of his students have weekend jobs and have little knowledge of what tax they are paying. He said that over his 22 years of teaching he has had disagreements about the relevance of his subject in the school curriculum. He believes that it is up to those in the education system to ensure that what students are learning is of relevance in later life. He called for a change in the Leaving Cert maths syllabus to reflect pupils' needs more appropriately.

Speaking to teenagers, the teacher has learned that some of his students are buying cars at 16 years of age with money earned from summer and weekend jobs. Lured by attractive credit terms, some had no idea what they were buying into. He feels that it is important for pupils to be taught prudent habits in order to prevent debt becoming a



major part of their lives.

With reality BBC shows like 'Bank of Mum and Dad', it shows how easy it is for some people to overstretch their finances while availing of bank and credit card loans issued at the drop of a hat and how easily consumers can fall into living beyond their means.

Speaking to a teenager from Portmarnock who owes more than €2,000, he said his debts accrued because he wanted to have the latest motorcycle, designer clothes, foreign holidays and a healthy social life since finishing the Leaving Cert last August.

The teenager said he has worked every weekend in a local supermarket since he was 14 years old and was using his wages to

finance his lifestyle that included the latest CDs and trips to see his favourite soccer team play their home matches in Newcastle.

He had hoped to clear his loans quickly but has failed to do so and is now working at two jobs in order to clear the debt so that he can go to college one day. He said the worst thing to happen was putting his college place on hold as a result of his teenage spending splurge and that if given a second chance he would not do it again.

The Financial Regulator has warned financial institutions that they have to ensure that young people are made aware of the risks when taking out loans. This means ensuring that young people know the interest rates payable and how long the loan will take to pay back.

With everyone from electrical retailers to mobile phone companies and the city's top department stores all offering increased limits on store and charge cards and with credit card companies offering increased limits, is it going to spell financial ruin for many young people before they even get to adulthood?

## How's the form?

The disabled are a varied lot. But Joe and Jane Public are a different kettle of mackerel when it comes to disability. A friend of mine relates the following incident.

"When I was on crutches and callipers I was getting a bus home one night and as the bus stopped for me to get on there was a drunk getting on and one getting off. Without asking if I wanted help they both started to try to help me at the same time. One was trying to help me on and the other was trying to help me off. They were pulling me ragged and when I asked them to stop they started to argue with each other. So while they argued I got on the bus. The driver put them both off for fighting. As the bus pulled away they were punching and kicking each other. I got home without help from either of them!"

Perhaps, the best that could be said about that duo is that they were a six-pack short of a toxicology unit. Or a birdseed short of a hash plant.

Oh! The mind boggles and the world turns. One wonders how, after years of publicity and disability awareness, the following incident could occur.

A disabled person went for a job inter-

view in a major company and whilst filling out the form he ticked 'yes' opposite the question on disability. But, the form did not enquire any further regarding this question. At the interview one of the examiners asked him as to the whereabouts of his wheelchair. Needless to say my friend was not physically disabled and was somewhat taken aback by this question. The entire incident begs that old sequence of question and answer:

Question: How's the form.

Answer: Filled in. Then there was the story of the disabled lady who parked her car in the disabled parking zone with a valid badge that was plainly on display for all to see. When she returned she found that a bright yellow clamp had been put on the car and duly called the number on the very large sticker on her driver's side window. It took 30 minutes for the clammer to return and release the lady's car and she asked him why the clamp had been put on as the car had been legally parked. "Well you don't look disabled to me", came the sharp tongued reply. Thankfully, the lady's Multiple Sclerosis has not thus far rendered her physically disabled. However, the pretty lady in question can only walk short distances. But as for the clammer it seems that if he can't see the disability, then you're not disabled!

It seems that when it comes to disability Joe and Jane Public may sometimes be a brain cell short of an idea.

Jim Murray

**Domhnall Bruic looks at Paul Newman's Barretstown Castle and its role in helping children with life-threatening illnesses learn new life-changing skills through a programme of fun and new friendships**



# Prescription for Fun!

**T**

he brainchild of Hollywood legend, Paul Newman, Barretstown Camp is beautifully situated in the foothills of the Wicklow Mountains. Established to accommodate children with cancer

and other serious illnesses, the team at Barretstown promotes fun and adventure as part of a child's recovery.

The project pitches the idea of "serious fun" for the children who come from Ireland and 22 other European countries and apply it through adventure and, you guessed it – fun! The children take part in a unique programme recognised by the medical world as playing an important part in their recovery from serious illness. Uta Kerl, a paediatrician from San Francisco, USA, remarked: "At first glance Barretstown may appear to be a place where children with severe and chronic illness go to relax and have fun. It is soon apparent that for the children there is much more happening here."

Launched in 1994 by Newman after his success with the "Hole in the Wall Gang" in the US, he generously made a start-up donation of \$2 million. He still contributes to the €3.8 million running costs each year, along with generous donations from other individuals and companies. The Irish Government donated the castle, which is the focal point of the centre which has welcomed thousands of children. Said Newman: "When I first saw Barretstown Castle, I knew this was where I wanted the first European camp to be. I imagined a kind of medieval bazaar where children from different countries could raise a little hell together".

The programmes run at the centre are activity-based, offering a range of pursuits in three broad categories: Outdoors adventure, creative expression and sports and games. There is horse riding and archery, crafts and drama, music and canoeing and tree climbing – all carefully directed to a specific end. Always presented as fun at the centre, a programme of "Therapeutic Recreation" follows the model of: Challenge + Success + Reflection = Discovery. The children taking part make life-



**Barretstown's adventures, left. Above: Paul Newman, who set up Barretstown.**

changing discoveries of self-esteem, confidence, independence, trust and coping skills and friendship.

Barretstown's Medical Director Dr Fin Beatnach, consultant paediatric oncologist at Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children says: "Barretstown is a unique and invaluable element of cancer treatment and the process of rehabilitation. The therapeutic power of the programme changes children's lives, they return home happier with a more positive outlook, better able and more willing to participate actively in their own recovery process."

The staff team is made up of multi-lingual 'caras' (friends) who come from all over Europe. Hilary Making, communications manager at Barretstown says that so far this year 700 volunteers have been recruited with interpretative skills to cater for 1,600 children coming from 22 countries.

But it is only the children who have visited Barretstown who can really convey its magic.

Said one in a message after her stay: "Thank you so much for the brilliant time at camp, I would never have believed Barretstown could change your life, but it has done exactly that for me and I have you to thank for that".

Said another: "Thank you for a wonderful time at Barretstown. I wish I was still there! I'm going to be kept busy writing to all my friends that I have made at Barretstown. It's such a beautiful place here, everything is fabulous. I feel like I've got inside a wonderful fairytale."

The programme at Barretstown runs three times a year during spring, summer and autumn. Each ten-day session is aimed at children between 7 and 17 years of age. The long-term vision and goal of Barretstown is to construct additional facilities to eventually reach full capacity, serving up to 2,000 children and family members each year.

This will only be possible through generous donations and funding from outside sources. Fundraising events included a gala ball in both the camp itself and New York, and the Barretstown walkers and runners participation in the Dublin City Marathon. There was also a corporate quiz and Christmas fair in Marley Park last November and an opera in Barretstown last December.

As Paul Newman says of the camp: "It's not that the children say 'thank you for a wonderful time', it's that they say, 'thank you for changing my life.'"

**Research reveals that bullying can lead to mental health problems and may trigger suicidal thoughts and behaviour in some people. Mary Healy investigates its effects and looks at what is being done to address the issue**



# Bullying goes on



**B**ullying in Irish schools is a problem which affects the lives of thousands of school children and their families. It is not a new phenomenon and while most people are aware of its existence, it often goes unnoticed and only comes to light when it has such an effect on a young person's life that it can no longer be ignored. Persistent bullying can have a devastating effect on a child's self esteem leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

A study carried out by researchers from the Department of Child and Family Psychiatry at the Mater Hospital Dublin and UCD, revealed that bullying can also lead to mental health problems and suicidal thoughts or behaviour. Over 200 students from eight urban post-primary schools, ranging in age from 12 to 15 years took part in a study, which showed that 34.5 per cent of the students interviewed had a history of being bullied. It was also revealed that 29.2 per cent of bullying victims had a diagnosis of a depressive disorder either in the past and/or present and that attempted suicide was also more prevalent in those who had been bullied.

The need for further investigation into the psychological consequences of bullying was

emphasised in the study, which stated that because of the hidden nature of bullying the figures might represent an underestimation of the problem. The study concluded that bullying needed to be re-addressed in Irish schools. In a similar study undertaken in Norway, depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts were also found to be significantly higher in students who had been bullied. Following the suicide of three young people, the Norwegian Government provided substantial funding towards research into development and intervention programmes to address bullying in schools. International studies have shown that up to 40 per cent of students have reported being bullied at some point in their schooling. It has also been recognised that if aggressive behaviour is not challenged in childhood, it may lead to criminal behaviour in children and domestic violence in adulthood.

Twenty-five year old John from Co. Mayo has personal experience of the consequences of bullying and still carries the psychological scars. He said being bullied, both physically and verbally at school, destroyed his confidence and he felt at the time that no-one wanted to be his friend. "They used to kick me up against the wall and I was so frightened of them that I was afraid to tell anyone in case things got worse. I used to go home crying every day and my parents didn't know what was wrong with me," he said. John's school-work also suffered and he felt that even if he

did complain, nothing would be done about it. Bullying robbed him of his dream of pursuing further education. "I had such low self esteem that I felt suicidal and was unable to continue," he said. Over the years John indulged in self harm on numerous occasions and spent time in a psychiatric unit. He is still on medication. However, with help and support John now realises that there was nothing wrong with him; it was the bullies who had the problem. He feels very strongly that not enough is being done to address the issue in Irish schools. "Until such time as bullies are made more accountable for their actions the problem will continue," he said. He added that the gardai should be brought in at an earlier stage. Nevertheless, John has now turned what was a negative event in his life into something positive. He now helps victims of bullying. "People who are being bullied are always looking to me for advice and because of my own experiences I can empathise with them. I am glad to be able to help out because everyone has the right to be respected," he said.

According to the principal of a primary school in Mayo, most schools have a code of behaviour that includes a policy on what constitutes bullying and specific procedures for dealing with it. The principal said that activities in the playground of her school were always observed and a record taken of any incident. She also pointed out that some parents' perception of bullying can also create problems.

"Bullying is something that is persistent and constant. Disagreements do not constitute bullying," she said. She referred to the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) subject that forms part of the school curriculum. It covers - among other topics - assertiveness skills taught mainly through role-play. She said that this subject should be taught on a more serious level in schools. She also pointed out that, "Bullying happens right across the board; from pupils bullying each other to teachers bullying teachers and even parents bullying teachers."

However, Nuala Kilfeather, chief executive of the National Parents Council-Primary (NPC) said that even though there is a greater awareness of bullying, parents still feel that teachers are not dealing effectively with the problem. She added that all schools should formulate a policy on bullying in co-operation with parents, teachers and children. She stressed that bullying needs to be tackled at primary level and followed through to secondary school. "There should be mutual respect between teachers and students because teacher behaviour can also create problems," she said.

The NPC provides an advocacy service for parents who are taking or intend to take a formal complaint to the board of management of their child's school. It also operates a helpline, which is available during term-time from Monday to Friday. Mary Killeen, co-ordinator of the helpline, said they are inundated with queries from parents and that 23 per cent of calls are directly related to bullying by other children. According to Mary Killeen, parents have already tried to resolve the problem with the school before contacting the helpline. "But often the school will deny the allegations," she said.

Dr Maria Lawlor, consultant child psychiatrist attached to the HSE's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Navan Co Meath said that one in five second year students were bullied. However, she also said that 28 per cent of students admitted bullying teachers. Speaking on the topic of 'Bullying at School' at the Lucena Clinic's 50th Anniversary Conference in Dublin recently, Dr Lawlor said that 50 per cent of students who experienced bullying once a week or more said it made them feel suicidal. "Victims of bullying are prone to depression, anxiety attacks and low self esteem. School work also suffers," she said. She stressed that bullying can have very serious implications for an individual's mental health and if it is not prevented, there is a huge cost to the wider society also. "Children have to be assessed and treated and parents often have to take time off from work," she said.

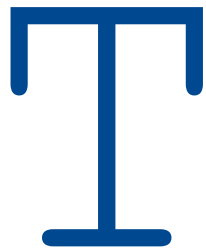
Dr Lawlor is involved with the Cool School programme, an anti-bullying initiative developed within the HSE's North Eastern Child Psychiatric Services. The programme aims to increase students, teachers and parents' knowledge and awareness of the extent, effects and dynamics of bullying.

NPC helpline available between the hours of 10am-1pm and 2pm-4pm on 01-8874477.

## David Quinn looks at ASBOs and speaks to those who believe it will lead to the unnecessary criminalisation of young people



# ASBOs: Necessary or Infringement of Human Rights?



he decision by Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell, to introduce the controversial Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) in an effort to deter unruly and anti-social conduct in young people, has been met throughout the year with protest and resentment from people across many sections of Irish life.

The primary objective of ASBOs is to prevent would-be offenders - including children - from engaging in behaviour in their local areas, which could be considered anti-social or bordering on criminal.

Anti-social behaviour takes many forms; examples include groups of young people congregating on street corners, playing loud music, consuming alcohol in public places or in one way or another engaging in behaviour considered unacceptable by the majority of the community.

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, according to the Government, would protect victims from anti-social activity in their homes or in their communities.

However, parents, youth campaigners and those involved in the protection of civil liberties and children's rights are not convinced, claiming that ASBOs undermine the provisions within the Children's Act of 2001, which states custodial sentences should be used as a last resort.

"The ASBO scheme will also divert yet more of the limited funds away from the implementation of the Children's Act 2001. That means more money wasted in courts and on lawyers that could be spent on communities and social programmes", according to the Children's Rights Alliance, an alliance of organizations involved in the promotion and protection of Children's Rights.

The Socialist Workers' Party in Ireland also echoed this point.

"Money could be better spent on tackling the root causes of anti-social behaviour," a

party spokesperson said, clearly urging the government to re-think its strategy in response to combating the problem of anti-social behaviour.

Sarah Benson, spokeswoman for the Children's Right's Alliance told Grapevine, "ASBOs are a punitive measure that can criminalise people for behaviour that is not in itself criminal. They can be often imposed solely on the basis of hearsay evidence." She added that a person could risk a prison sentence if he/she breaches an order imposed upon them.

"If young people are committing criminal offences, the Gardai have every right to bring criminal proceedings against them for doing so. Anti-social behaviour, on the other hand, can be tackled using the wide range of measures available under the Children's Act and through the support of communities," Ms Benson said.

Anti-ASBO campaigners also argue that the orders are not necessary because the Government recently gave local authorities the go ahead to fine anybody caught consuming alcohol in a public place and the power to ban 'anti-social' gatherings.

However, the Government intends to introduce a series of special provisions designed to deal specifically with children saying that any provision dealing with children will be fully integrated into the Children's Act to ensure that the child has all the safeguards that the Act affords. The provisions will explore alternative ways of dealing with children other than the criminal justice procedure applied to persons over the age of 18.

The Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell stands by his decision to introduce the orders, stating that, "the proposal will not reflect the UK law but will incorporate very important safeguards to ensure that the orders can be fairly and reasonably used for the benefit of the good of the community as a whole. The duration of any orders imposed will be for a maximum of two years as opposed to a minimum of two years imposed in the UK."

The granting of an Anti-Social Behaviour Order, critics believe, criminalises the individual, as any breach of an order imposed would mean the individual has committed an offence and is liable to be imprisoned.

Jim Murray **speaks to a recovering heroin addict who gives a graphic account of his descent into addiction and the harrowing life that followed**



**T**im (not his real name) is a 35 year old drug addict. Each day he imbibes a quantity of a prescribed green liquid - methadone - to allay the pain and anguish of having no heroin. It keeps him on the straight and narrow, from a life of crime and theft, from the heaven and hell of an opiate drug called heroin.

Yet, Tim's life began far from the dim underground of hard drug addiction. Born in a southern county he grew up in a fairly large town in a comfortably well-off family. Ironically, his father earned the family's crust as a psychiatric nurse. Tim had (and still has) good looks, a powerful physique and a keen intelligence. At school he was noteworthy for being at the top of the heap and not the bottom of the pile.

Why Tim became a drug addict is anyone's guess. But, there was one significant experience, which seemed to turn an ordinary boy onto those pathways where the perils of hard drug addiction wait with a ravenous and predatory hunger for youthful lives.

As Tim says himself, he "led an ordinary childhood". But this was marred by a significant incident, which may or may not have led Tim into addiction. "I came across certain people in the neighbourhood who took advantage of me and sexually abused me," he says. His recollection of this seems partly dimmed by all that he has been through, but he feels that this abuse occurred when he was seven or eight years old.

"Soon after this, I was in trouble breaking into people's houses and breaking up telephone boxes. At 12 I began drinking. Eventually I found myself in circles where drugs were a regular feature on the social menu." Tim began to smoke 'hash', which he describes as "pretty mediocre" in comparison to what he was later to do. "By now, I was 16 and I found that the hash calmed me down. Amphetamine - known on the streets as 'speed' - was the next

drug that I tried. After a while I felt I needed something to calm me down after a few days being high on speed." Curiously, during this period Tim was a good student - 'a bit of a messer maybe' - but the drugs did not affect his performance at school. Tim began stealing from his father in order to finance his speed habit.

"At 18 I was at college, studying electronics and gambling for serious money. Drinking, playing cards and taking speed had become the norm. It was at this point that I discovered heroin and also cocaine and I found myself drawn more and more into the hypnotic bliss of these drugs. Also, my amphetamine habit would provide me with the buzz and energy to go up to three or four days without sleep. Then I would inject myself with heroin to bring myself down off the amphetamine high." Gambling, shoplifting and stealing from his father on his monthly visits home financed Tim's addictions during this period of his life.

On his visits home no one seemed to notice any difference in Tim. "I find it strange that my drug use did not suppress my appetite as it did to other people I knew." Perhaps, this was the reason why Tim's increasing addiction to hard drugs went unnoticed.

After college Tim got a job in a meat factory. At first he was packing the meat

into boxes and after a time graduated to the boning hall. It seemed to him that this was an ideal situation. Since boning the meat was paid by rate, Tim had an excess of energy due to his speed habit. Thus, he was well paid and able to finance his drugs since he could work very fast. "The speed makes you more alert and keeps you awake," he says.

Tim then got the travel bug and he moved to England. Here he lived for a time in a London squat. From time to time he got work in a meat factory or a boning hall. "But mostly what I ended up doing was selling drugs so that I could take my drugs. I came into contact with every sort. The people I dealt with were basically the same as me. They dealt in drugs in order to feed their habit. It's only when you get to the top level, those people don't take drugs at all. They're just in it for the money," says Tim.

This situation continued for six or seven years. Somehow he avoided any serious contact with the law although he ran foul of the police as a result of his squatting activities. Tim fell on hard times and found himself on the streets walking the beat as a homeless person. "I learnt to think 12 hours ahead and where to go and what to do to gain aid from charitable or religious organisations," he says. Mostly, Tim got help from Christian charities and the Hare Krishna movement.

# Tim — The Story of a Heroin Addict



**“ I was by now injecting myself in the groin as the veins had collapsed in other areas. Probably as a result of this my big toe became gangrenous. It had to be amputated. I ended up so bad I nearly died in hospital ”**

Once a year, Tim came home to Ireland - even when homeless. But as he says himself, “I never gave away a whole lot of information”. When asked, he would tell people that he was getting on fine. “The main reason for coming home was to sell drugs so that I’d be all right when I went back,” says Tim.

Tim relates that he had no problem getting through customs. “It’s pretty lax actually. I looked like a really dirty person who wouldn’t have a lot anyway.” He talks about his time on the streets and says, “It was very dangerous. You never knew what sort of nutter you might meet. You’re made sleep in places where people will actually see you. That’s what the cops tell you anyway. If you go to those places you will have more of a chance of getting killed.” Although, Tim never knew anyone who was killed whilst sleeping rough, he heard a lot of stories. He relates how sometimes if someone was drunk, they were liable to have their blankets stolen and often got pneumonia as a result.

Tim came home for a while to Dublin. But London was calling once more and he returned to the life of a squatter there. “The local council offered me a flat in a

hard to let estate. This was a trade off for not squatting. The flat I got needed a lot of renovation. From here I traded drugs with contacts I knew, in order to feed my own habit,” he says.

Then, while on a trip to Ireland, Tim’s flat was raided by the London police. After that, Tim said, “I sold my haul, paid off my supplier and returned home. This time I veered towards Dublin.” For the next two years Tim “stayed away” from hard drugs though he “dabbled” from time to time.

Eventually he met a girl and began a relationship. Still relatively clean of heroin he started to get nightmares, which were mainly focused on the sexual abuse he had suffered as a child. This drove him back to the heroin and his relationship began to suffer. By now, Tim’s partner was pregnant with their son and his increasing drug taking was becoming more and more a focus of conflict between them.

After the baby was born the relationship ended and Tim found himself back on the trails of homelessness. He felt it was more dangerous being homeless in Dublin. “There’s a lot more nutters in

Dublin. The homeless addicts in London were a bit more human,” he says.

Tim had decided before his child was born that he needed to get clean. He went to various doctors, but all that they could offer him was an 18-day detox programme. There was a three-year waiting period for a continuous methadone maintenance programme. “Things looked hopeless for me as I couldn’t get the help I needed,” he says.

“I was by now injecting myself in the groin as the veins had collapsed in other areas. Probably as a result of this my big toe became gangrenous. It had to be amputated. I ended up so bad I nearly died in hospital,” says Tim. As a result, Tim’s three year waiting period for methadone maintenance was expedited. He was given the treatment he needed to stay off heroin.

Nowadays, Tim is relaxed and happy. The heroin substitute that he takes every day stabilises him and keeps him from the life of the drug addict. As to the future, Tim intends to take it easy. He knows that he won’t be taking any more hard drugs. And he is planning on getting married and going back to his hometown.

# X Grapevine

**Following a car accident in 1985, Pat Hallinan's serious injuries meant that his life was to change in many ways. He speaks to Mary Healy about these changes, his hopes for the future and his activism in the area of disability**



**Pat with his book 'More Than Skin Deep' which tells the story of his struggle to rebuild his life following his accident.**

## A New Road to Travel

**T**he 1st of August 1985 is forever etched in the mind of Pat Hallinan. It was on that day that life, as he knew it, was to change forever. A native of Killawalla near Westport in Co Mayo, Pat Hallinan, an only son, worked on the family farm with his parents.

Coupled with his love of farming, Pat also enjoyed the normal social activities associated with his peer group; particularly going to the pub and playing snooker. Life was carefree until that fateful day when his world and that of his parents and sister was turned upside down. Recalling the event Pat said: "I can remember having a pint and the next thing I remember was something dazzled my eyes and a vision in white appeared above me. A voice said: 'How are you Pat? You had a car accident last night and you are in hospital, but you'll be ok.'"

The voice belonged to his cousin, a nurse at Mayo General Hospital, where Pat had been admitted following the accident. Lying in his hospital bed unaware of the extent of his injuries and contemplating what he'd just been told, his thoughts turned to the neighbour

who had been in the car with him. Pat wondered if he had been seriously injured. "I couldn't have coped with that," Pat said. Thoughts of his family and how they would cope with such news also concerned him. However, a visit from his father brought some comfort, although Pat knew how difficult that visit was for his father. He also knew that his mother would have been unable to face such a visit at that time but nevertheless that she too would have been greatly concerned about him.

The realisation of the extent of his injuries came for Pat when he was transferred from Castlebar by helicopter to the Intensive Care Unit of the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dun Laoghaire from where the long journey to rebuilding his life began. Pat said that having to depend on nurses for his every need and in particular losing his privacy and having to be fed was a great source of embarrassment to him. Although reluctant to ask about his injuries for fear of hearing the worst, Pat learned over time that he had sustained a very serious injury to his neck.

Then one day while trying to make himself more comfortable in the rotating bed the realisation that he couldn't move his hands or legs dawned. "I knew then I was paralysed," he said. He summoned up the courage to ask the

nurse the question he had been avoiding for so long. Would he be able to move his hands and legs again? The answer was a diplomatic one. "We don't know, we'll have to wait and see" was the reply. Over the long year he spent in hospital, Pat Hallinan underwent a number of difficult procedures to help repair his damaged neck. Intensive physiotherapy and occupational therapy were part of his daily routine and he recalls with pride the first time he was able to lift a cup by himself. "That brought a great sense of achievement," he said. However, facing up to the consequences of his injuries was a difficult psychological task but visits from family and friends did help to lift his spirits, especially the regular visits from his sister who worked as a nurse in Dublin. A visit from his neighbour who had been in the accident with him was a welcome one because although Pat had been reassured that his neighbour was not seriously injured he was greatly relieved to see it for himself.

Despite his injuries Pat was determined to lead a productive life and obtained qualifications in a number of computer courses. He also enrolled for a correspondence course in journalism and went on to receive recognition for his poetry and prose. However, his first step on the road to independence began when he became a member of the local branch of the Irish Wheelchair Association.

# Confessions of a Bad Prognosis

This helped him to make friends, get out more often by availing of the organisation's bus and also go on holidays.

But his greatest breakthrough came in 1995 when he was offered paid employment with the Mayo Centre for Independent Living (CIL). Originally employed as a researcher for the organisation, Pat is now Leader/Co-ordinator at their offices in the Parish Centre in Castlebar.

Over the years Pat Hallinan has championed the cause of people with disabilities in his native county. His name is synonymous with creating a public awareness of their struggle for a better quality of life. Recently he travelled to the European Parliament as part of a delegation from CIL to take part in the 'Strasbourg Freedom Drive 2005' - an initiative which seeks to support the active citizenship of people with disabilities in the European Union. Assisted by the European Parliament's Disability Inter-Group; whose vice President is the Irish MEP Brian Crowley, the delegation - which also included 850 representatives from all EU countries - highlighted the need for core funding to be made available to provide PAs for people with disabilities to ensure independent living. Other key issues raised included the growing number of disabled people being institutionalised; significant human rights abuses that many people with disabilities experience and more effective representation of disabled people in European social exclusion strategies.

At home, in addition to the urgent need for additional Government funding to help improve the quality of life for people with disabilities, Pat believes that a lack of will to build greater cooperation between disability organisations was also an obstacle to progress. "95% of people running organisations for people with disabilities are able bodied people," he says, adding that little has changed in ten years since his research days with Mayo CIL when he audited almost 95% of public buildings in Mayo for accessibility to discover, in one case, that only three out of forty adult education centres were fully accessible. He said that even today some of the newer buildings are still inaccessible. "Much more needs to be done in relation to access to public buildings, transport and education and the abuse of disabled person's parking spaces also needs to be seriously addressed," he said.

Despite the ups and downs he has encountered since his accident 20 years ago, Pat has had a number of notable achievements in his life. Among them was the publication in 2003 of his book 'More Than Skin Deep' which tells the story of his struggle to rebuild his life following his accident. "I wrote it so that others could learn what it is like to live with a disability," he said. Although Pat believes that having a disability can be an obstacle to forming relationships, he has found romance in his life in the person of Anne Marie Healy from Glenamoy whom he has known for a number of years. She also formed part of the delegation from Ireland to the European Parliament in Strasbourg. When asked what the future held for them Pat said, "You'd never know. Watch this space!"

**N**owadays, with the average disabled person hanging out, doing the bad thing, behaving obnoxiously on

occasion, and not getting too many stares when going along the public highways, it's hard to believe that once upon a time a social life for a raspberry was a novelty.

On the drive over to Sandymount on that fateful first Club night, I first heard Paul Anka on the car radio singing 'Diana'. Then the coffin lid was finally nailed down on Patti Page and her 'Doggy in the Window' and Guy Mitchell and his 'Truly, Truly Fair'. Even good old Perry Como and his 'Memories Are Made of This' bit the dust. Rock 'n' Roll had got me.

I believe my old alma mater - St Brendan's Cerebral Palsy School in Sandymount - may have been the home of the first social club for disabled people in Dublin but I'm open to correction.

A whole raft of British, Irish and American singers were cast into oblivion as Elvis Presley belted out 'Heartbreak Hotel'. It was loud, full of testosterone and is still looked upon by wizened old guys in nursing homes and long-term psychiatric units as the song that defined their generation.

Cliff and the Beatles had not happened yet and there were still quite a few disabled persons who could be found in the school oratory on Thursday night each week saying the Rosary. It would take a few months before we could work out how to hang out in the toilets or outside until we could be sure it was over.

From a social point of view, I actually started from the top and worked my way down. I walked with crutches and used the stairs a lot in those days and made it up to the occupational therapy room to find other ravers sitting or standing round while Lonnie Donegan sang 'Putting on the Style' on a 78 disc on what might have been a state of the art turntable. It had a genuine brass horn speaker.

On other nights there might be Kenny Ball and his Jazzmen or, God forbid, Bridie Gallagher singing about the Boys From the County Armagh

As we graduated from once weekly socials to getting fed up with organised social events for the disabled and going out on our own, our problems increased and diminished accordingly. This was meant to happen. And is probably still happening to a lesser degree.

As soon the Legion of Mary dances appeared on the 'going out' calendar, I became a social animal. The first steps I took at one of these dances were in the arms of a beautifully upholstered lady who steered me around the floor with the skill of a tug towing a stricken



**Sean Richardson**

ship into harbour. The age, marital status and social standing of my dancing partner were not designed to awaken unruly passions in the breast of a callow youth on crutches.

I never really worked out the role of the Legion of Mary in this so I will have to rely on speculation, rumour (malicious or otherwise), religious prejudice and the likes and dislikes of many people concerned. After all it was in the 1950's.

I do have the mature recollection that a certain lady of the Protestant persuasion was more than a little incensed when on a club outing her son John was baptised into the Catholic faith by a mischievous papist in a roadside church. Young John had confessed his love for one of our female helpers and had been turned down. Larry decided that if John 'turned', everything would be hunky dory. So he did the business at the water fountain in the church porch somewhere in Blessington.

The object of John's affection and my lust was completely unaware that her rejected lover had converted until his mother rang her at home and lifted her out of it.

Some well-meaning old guy made a donation to bring us all to Knock one sunny Sunday and the club set off in high gear from what was known as Amiens St Station. This was the weekend that the Russians launched Sputnik I, pissing off the Yanks.

The agenda was to say the rosary on the way down and be entertained by Father Sidney McKewan singing all the top ten hymns over each carriage loudspeaker. This guy was a phenomenal hit during the 50's - a sort of Charlotte Church in a better frock. I don't know what order he belonged to but it obviously collected all the cash from his record sales. A veritable one-man priest's show.

We behaved like lager louts without the lager, refusing to sing-along-a-pilgrim and indulging in smoking and trying to get our most popular Legion of Mary girl into the guard's van.

The club leader had a difficult time making us behave as the train pulled into Claremorris. But we did behave ourselves while at the grotto. I was shamed into being a better person for at least three hours when I saw the real suffering, the really disabled.

Not one of us had any thought for the future and our social life was largely organised by the able-bodied. Most disabled swingers with any savvy usually became members of every disability organisation that gave weekly socials, summer holidays or any other freebie. If we had the access to the social and work amenities that we have today, it is likely that most of us would never have met.

**In war-torn areas, the devastating effects of military action are often most keenly felt by the most vulnerable in society. Jennifer Banks speaks to Commandant Shane Fahy about his experiences with street children during his tour of duty in Afghanistan**

# Suffer Little Children

**A**s part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) based in Afghanistan, Commandant Shane Fahy departed Irish shores in November 2004 with six other members of the Irish Defence Forces for a four-month tour of duty. It was not his first tour of the Middle East but nothing prepared him for the poverty and suffering he was about to witness.

Devastated by decades of unrest and conflict, Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. There are little or no education facilities, few hospitals and a lack of trained doctors, medicines and equipment. Because clean water and sanitation are sorely lacking, disease is widespread. Furthermore, thousands have become refugees or displaced within their own country. Children are now bearing the brunt of this disastrous situation; dying of preventable diseases like diarrhoea. In being denied even basic care and education, they are suffering from the effects of years of ongoing conflict.

Commandant Fahy speaks openly about his first impressions of the country. "Arriving in Kabul Airport was quite a shock. The whole area had been indiscriminately mined since the Russian occupation and we were in a military zone with specific boundaries to follow in order to avoid them. When you leave the airport you are met with breathtaking scenery. However, you quickly realise the level of destruction this city has endured during the occupation and war."

Commandant Fahy recounts witnessing children as young as nine working on the streets trying to make money for their families. "Most heart wrenching of all was the fact that many were young girls and in some cases they lived where they worked, on the streets. I have never seen poverty like it. Houses were made of mud. There was little to no electricity or running water," he says. He recalls arriving in Kabul during winter when the city was cold and dark with snow still visible on the surrounding mountains. Many of the children had to sleep outside, unprotected from the elements

Children in Crisis began work with Tahia Maskan and Allaudin orphanages in Kabul in 1997. Over the years this support has included huge rehabilitation and reconstruction projects, provision of non-food items and support to



**Commandant Shane Fahy distributing food in Afghanistan.**

personnel and logistics. UNICEF carried out an assessment of orphanages in Kabul in 2003. The final report concluded that the majority of children in the orphanages were admitted by families for economic reasons, generally following the loss of one parent, but rarely after the loss of two

Commandant Fahy called the Children in Crisis office and explained that logistically he could only bring a certain amount. He made up gift packs for 50 of the children. When he later spoke to Sylvia, the charity's representative, he was shocked to hear that the orphanages cared for anything from 300 to 500 children at a time. Not all were orphaned and in some cases day care was provided for children in an effort to keep families together and hopefully reduce the numbers on the street. They received food, clothing and education before going home in the evening.

When he arrived at the orphanage to deliver the gifts, he first had to pass through an armed security check at the main gate. Describing his experience he says: "This is still an unstable country but one never expects to find a reminder guarding the entrance to a children's orphanage." Once inside the building, he realised with deep sadness that his 50 gift parcels meant that he didn't have nearly enough to go around all the children. As a parent this was a particularly difficult experience for him. The emotions are still evident today as he recounts what happened. "My heart sank but I had been reassured in advance by Sylvia that the children understood that their turn would come. Even so I felt dreadful." Commandant Fahy and his colleagues distributed the gifts and were taken aback when it became apparent that some of

the children had never even seen a toy before. He recalled that in the midst of all the mixed emotions prompted by their visit, there was a sense that at least the tiniest glimmer of joy had been brought to some of the children and this made it all worthwhile.

Due to the extreme economic circumstances facing Afghan families, many young boys now have to work to support their families. Most of the boys are uneducated and carry out simple jobs like shoe shining, fixing bicycles, tailoring, and selling cigarettes.

While out on duty some time after the visit to the orphanage, Commandant Fahy was faced with an image that will stay with him for the rest of his life. "I saw what I believed to be a pile of rags at the side of a busy street. But then the two small feet of a young child no more than three came into vision. People going about their daily lives stepped over this child like he was invisible. In the few seconds it took for the jeep to pass, I had imprinted in my heart and mind the one picture of Afghanistan that says more than any words."

Many charities are working to improve the lives of children in Afghanistan. The US government recently announced a new initiative to rebuild the educational infrastructure in all regions of Afghanistan. The estimated \$60 million dollar project concentrates on several core issues essential to a functioning and effective educational system. The main aspect of the initiative will be the rehabilitation and construction of 1,000 schools across the country over the next three years.

For now, the crisis continues and - as is often the case in war-torn countries - it is the children who usually suffer most.