



September 2017

Dear Friend,

My name is Susan O’Keeffe. I’ve lost my ability to speak, and I’ve limited movement, so I am writing this to you with one finger on a screen that can electronically speak what I write.

My life has been transformed by my wonderful experience under the care of the staff here at Our Lady’s Hospice & Care Services, Blackrock Hospice. So, I wanted to tell you my story – and also to respectfully ask for your help with one really powerful and exciting project that will have a huge benefit for people and families who need the loving care the hospice is now giving me.

I really appreciate you taking the time to read this.

So first, a little about my life now. It will probably sound quite stark to you but I can assure you, there’s a bright side to my story which I explain later in this letter.

I have Motor Neuron Disease (MND). That means the messages from my brain to my body are being interrupted, causing my muscles to weaken, stiffen and waste.

I have very little movement in my body, my arms and my hands. I need help walking. And even this level of movement will soon end. Things will only get worse until the day comes when I can’t swallow or breathe.

So, I know exactly what I’m facing. My condition is incurable and untreatable. Most people with MND die within 27 months.

That’s the bad news.

The good news is I have come to a surprisingly comforting place in my life. It’s obviously not a place I would have ever chosen, but I fully accept my fate.

please turn over...

I have a wonderful husband, Brian, and three grown-up children, who I love more than life. I have truly amazing friends around me. All of them care for me with love and great humour. I am still completely connected to life and interested in the world.

For me, all of that adds up to a definition of a good life being lived as fully as I possibly can.

I'm not afraid to die. I'm heartbroken at the thought of leaving loved ones and friends behind. But, once you've gone through hell and back – in having to accept a disease like MND – you're not afraid of much else.

One of the main reasons I'm feeling so positive is because of the extraordinary impact that Our Lady's Hospice & Care Services has had on my physical wellbeing and on my emotional health and my outlook on life. Because my outlook is on life, not death.

In some ways, the extraordinary people in the hospice have given me back parts of my life that I thought would be lost to me by now. Physical activity. Some sense of normality. Peace of mind.

And they've also helped me discover new and surprising things in myself. Like emotional strength. Spiritual ease. A few short years ago, I was travelling and exploring exotic places, cultures and people – now I'm exploring new and rich meanings to life and love and friendship.

Let me tell you about my amazing experience of the hospice so you understand why I'm asking for your kindness today.

It's difficult to adequately describe the healing atmosphere here. The place is like a loving parent who wraps their strong and comforting arms around you and tells you everything will be all right.

In the beginning, I availed of Day Hospice so my husband Brian would get a break from looking after me. It turned out that we both benefited from it so much.

It offers everyone so many terrific choices – from group and individual physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, complementary therapy, occupational therapy, mindfulness, group gatherings, to just having a quiet chat, one-on-one, about whatever is on your mind.

But it's also a lively, gathering place for sharing and laughing.

The first time I went for Respite Care, I found the staff were so kind that my emotions got the better of me and I cried. I also cried when I was leaving because I didn't want to leave. Respite is 'me' time.

The staff are like guardian angels. Caring seems to come so naturally to them – but I know it's extremely demanding work but they never let it show. They're so deeply interested in everyone. At this stage, even though I can't speak, they

know the real me that's trapped inside this silent body.

The beautiful gardens are a sanctuary of calmness and growth; the flowers and plants remind you of the beauty of life. Walking there, brings me right back to the spectacular sensation of trekking in places like the Himalayas.

I get the most benefit out of the physiotherapy and hydrotherapy. Having warm water cradling my body is a real relief and being able to exercise and stretch is a big bonus. I also feel great after availing of complementary therapies.

I feel passionately that these quality, life-enhancing facilities should be available to all who need them at the end of life.

And that's why I am asking you today to give that same powerful gift to other people. By helping to complete these 36 new, single, state-of-the-art palliative care bedrooms at the Hospice in Harold's Cross to match the quality of the rooms here in Blackrock Hospice.

Please make one of the most meaningful gifts you could ever make.

Because when you're at your lowest point, hospice helps you fall back in love again with life. I think that's a very precious gift.

I used to bring my children on holidays, one at a time, to amazing places like New York, Cuba and London. Now, in a way, I'm bringing them on my last journey. So, I want it to be as positive and meaningful for them as it can be.

The hospice is making that possible.

Knowing this haven will be here for me when I need it most takes away all worries and fear.

Please, make a gift to help others have the same reassurance and care. Help the hospice complete these 36 new, single, state-of-the-art palliative care bedrooms.

Thank you so much for hearing my urgent request.

Yours sincerely,

A large, stylized, handwritten letter 'S' in black ink, serving as the signature of Susan O'Keeffe.

Susan O'Keeffe