

CLANN: IRELAND'S UNMARRIED MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN: GATHERING THE DATA

Statement of Miseria Oizys

Reference Code:	CLANN/Miseria Oizys
Status:	Natural mother
Institution(s)/Agencies:	St Patrick's Mother and Baby Home, Navan Road (repatriated from the United Kingdom).
Date:	11-28 th January 2021
Information Note:	This statement has been compiled from a written account and supplementary emails submitted by the witness in January 2021.
Access Conditions:	Anonymised statements are freely available to the public.
Conditions Governing Reproduction:	Statements can be reproduced, however the citation below must be used at all times.

To cite this statement:

O'Rourke, M., McGettrick, C., Baker, R. and Hill, R. (2018) "Statement of Miseria Oizys." *Clann: Ireland's Unmarried Mothers and their Children: Gathering the Data*. Dublin: Justice for Magdalenes Research, Adoption Rights Alliance, Hogan Lovells.

Excerpts from email dated 28 January 2021

I did not give evidence to the Commission of Investigation.

I only revealed my secret to my husband and children about twenty years ago and that was when my adopted daughter found me.

It was in March last year 2020 whilst in lockdown and out walking, on my own that I thought of the burden I was carrying and burst into tears and my goodness did those tears fall like rivers and rivers of grief merging into a sea of blackness. When I returned home my husband was horrified to see me in such a state and asked "what happened did someone attack you" and I replied "only those monsters who crucified me in 63" - his reply "Is that all". Those three little words enraged me and restored the gift of Clarity of Vision which sometimes can be hard to attain in any state. I went straight to my computer and started writing and that is nearly a year ago and I am still writing.

I believe St Patrick's home didn't close until the late eighties "why oh why" are these people who ran and maintained these home have not been arrested and charged and I also believe that these crimes should be tried before a European Human Rights Commission.

Excerpts from email dated 27 January 2021

I have written over sixty thousand words on my experience in that hellhole and it is not a pretty story. No it is not just a story like a fairy story but a true and honest account of my time there.

Those months spent there fifty seven years ago still haunts me to this day and I live with the knowledge that it was I who signed that bit of paper and lost my daughter forever - signed with a secondhand pen - handed to me dipped in poison and with the pen shaking in my trembling hand I signed my daughter's fate. Whoever forgets that or forgives oneself. Certainly no forgiveness for the Government, Church, Police, Social workers, and all who participated in my daughter's removal. My rage today is still as powerful as all of those yesteryears.

My daughter was born in a hospital in Birmingham and at two weeks old we were both repatriated back to Ireland - just told we were going back to Ireland and we would be cared for with love and care.

I give you permission to format my account into a statement for inclusion in the archive.

My secret of shame is no more and if necessary I will stand in person and confront anyone, anybody who participated or who denies this horror went on.

My opinion on the apology - The apology is a sham, a miscarriage of justice and just not acceptable by me.

NO ARCHIVE WITHOUT AN EXTERNAL

There is within my own mind and what is outside an interior-exterior, a flesh and blood archive where there is an internal parade, a surface and space onto and into where my experiences have been imprinted and archived.

I want to single out what to write on these blank pages. I want to choose today, tomorrow and every tomorrow for it to be happy and wonderful. The painful memories are my books with unwritten chapters deep and horrible. I left those books hidden on a shelf for many years gathering dust but no more. Those memories are as razor sharp today as yesteryear and cut through me each and everytime I think and ponder about the time I walked the long road of hardship to St Patrick's Home where I was imprisoned there so long ago.

But a voice within my head - a place which holds, retains information and memory keeps telling me how I will never be enough for anything and never enough for nothing. I must not listen to this voice and so today I will exorcise this voice and write and fill these blank pages. A real structure, a space set apart to safeguard whatever had been chosen to survive time.

Today I found the courage to break through shame and speak about the wounds in my life and as I put pen to paper now, moving forward and backwards in time hardened in ice I will fill these blank pages with writing, writing of every minute of living in St Patrick's home and believe me living in St Patrick's Home was like poison dripped out daily in various dosages small, medium and large.

In the decades since I have squeezed and cursed these miseries down to their pure ingredients which I am now sharing via these pages. I have a duty to speak the truth as I see it and share the pain and shame – unmitigated pain. I am going to write until the fire comes out of my ears, the tears out of my eyes, the snot dripping from my nose, my mouth splitting into dry lips – everywhere. I am going to write like a fucking demon until the fire dies down. For my silence of yesteryears, or when I was afraid to speak, for my words not to be heard or welcomed - now I can shout from the rooftops. So it is better to speak now, to remember that I will never be a whole person if I remain silent, remembering and so this story is all on me and it isn't an easy one to tell.

(these miseries grounded down into a cauldron of fire)

**A small account of my experience of my incarceration in St Patricks Home
Navan Road 1963**

By Miseria Oizys

January 2021

*Go down – down - down the tunnel of throat, dark cavity of lung. Breath frothing egg
- Go down, get lower I must not stop coughing - hot rage bubbling from my gut through
my vocal passages. If I stop coughing I am dead and yet and yet*

NAIVETE

How could I have been so blind? How could I have been so naive? How did I not believe that the worst was possible until I plummeted into it? How did I not know that demagogic tyrants ruled the country and the land of my birth is now no more than an illusion of eyes distorted and warped by both age and emotion? I too could weep but my tears are kept in check by the events that scarred my young life.

I am truly shocked at my innocence – my innocence in believing every word I was ever told as a child. At times my life now feels at odds with the Catholic religion of my childhood and I wonder what the young girl I once was would think of the woman I have become but I must remember I was eighteen years old and should have had more sense. Can you imagine a young person today being so committed to their religion? I blush with embarrassment now at my pure innocence in those days.

How could I believe everything I was told and never questioned any of it? How could I have been such a believer? How could I believe everything and anything that I was told as I believed that it was a mortal sin to lie? How was I so sure that no lies were ever told? This is a question I have asked myself many times over the years. How naive I was and how stupid. How, how, how I could go on and on questioning this word “how” but I know I will never get the answers.

I will not suggest any words of wisdom or report the overwhelming narratives of abuse because the time is now when it calls for realism not for imagination, not nostalgia. Nostalgia is a paralytic curse as productive and healthy as drinking the poisoned wine of a dream. Nostalgia and dreams shattered in 1963 when I dared to love a boy and became pregnant.

As I write this and think back to the ritual abuse I suffered it is utterly appalling! The sub humans who dressed up as nuns will answer to a Higher Power one day and hopefully the society by saying nothing, ignoring those who did manage to share and endorsed those so-called homes contributed to the evil.

MANIPULATION

This manipulation reality has been perpetuated throughout the past few decades by the very organisations that were responsible for the abduction of my daughter. They have successfully, perpetually created for society an acceptance of class culture that women who are infertile - married women - have the right to another birth mother's baby regardless of the rights of the mother or her child.

DO NOT DENY what happened to my daughter and myself by ignoring us. I had my daughter stolen from me by the unethical and illegal practices of those who were there to care for us. I wept then and I weep now of my loss – a loss caused by a corrupt Government and society. I lost my respect then for anybody in power but now today at the age of seventy five I have the strength and power to question everything and anything, anybody in society be they the man who empties my trash bin to Boris Johnson our prime minister.

I am asking that those who were a party to the gross denial of human rights to my daughter and myself to face charges of child theft and be made to acknowledge their participation in the STEALING OF MY BABY- ASSAULT - FRAUD – DENIAL – NEGLECT - FALSE DECLARATIONS in other words the sin of - PERJURY.

I am also asking that those parties who participated in the gross denial of human rights of my daughter and myself to also face charges of - ISOLATION - FORCED LABOUR - REPETITIVE INDOCTRINATION - HUMILIATION - INCARCERATION - MORAL COERCION all to be held accountable.

These are strong words but these words of mine is the TRUTH and nothing but the TRUTH.

I don't care anymore who I offend by my questioning I am not now that girl of eighteen who lost it all.

ARRIVING AT THE CONVENT

I arrived on the convent's doorstep on a cold early January morning in 1964 with my daughter in my arms. As we drove up the long driveway I could see in front of me a huge scary looking building. It didn't look like a home, it looked more like the worst institution ever, stuff made of nightmares and in a way it was.

My hands trembled and my eyes watered as I stepped from the car and as I reached the imposing front door my hand stretched towards the door knob I felt that there was something behind that door and it wasn't anything good. My body felt hot and sweat started trickling down my neck. I gripped it tightly and twisted it.

With every move I made I got more and more terrified. My breath quickened until I saw that there was nothing there and my tense body slowly relaxed. This is what facing your fears felt like as I heard the creaking of the door. Suddenly everything is silent and behind the door darkness loomed and slowly as the door begins to open, I am again terror stricken. I look up and in front of me stands a nun with a face like a fallen cake and a figure like a carving on a spire.

We were led into a corridor style hall. We weren't greeted by peals of holy music instead my daughter was whipped from me with lightning speed and taken to the nursery. A nun ushered me into an office, pointed to a chair and said take a seat. I sat myself down and in came the Mother Superior. She took her seat, gazed at me and uttered the words "Do you know why you are here". I noticed a crucifix on the wall near her and I focused my eyes on this, the crucified eyes were half open, half closed adorned with a crown of thorns on top of its head. The crucifix seemed alive but was made from wood and I could see his muscles hardened and non-real. I replied "Yes I do". The nun eyed me her face framed in a wimple headpiece, her hands resting on the desk in front of her, palms down. She raised her eyebrows, studied me and sat back.

She proceeded to ask lots of questions, too many questions – questions I wanted so much to ignore but as I sat there watching the movement of her jaws constantly opening, her closing lips moving and swallowing with saliva dripping – a dreadful sight and feeling so ill I knew I had brought all this on myself so what else could I have been asking for. I gave her my name, address, age, my background and the name of the father. Did I think I ought to inform the father – perhaps he might want to marry me? No I assured her he didn't want to marry me. How could he I hadn't told him I was pregnant in the first place.

Dare I say it I was too ashamed to tell him!!!!She again raised her eyebrows looked at the cross and said "Our Lord bore his pain for us; it is an honour to share his suffering and pain. And I though FECK that, I don't want to share anybody's pain or suffering I am already suffering.

I sensed a chill in the office and as I sat back in the chair the nun rambled on and on but by that stage I was no longer listening, I wanted to get away from there as quickly as possible so I could get to the nursery to see my baby. I stared again at the piece of wood on the wall as the nun crosses herself muttering – the sound of her lips with grease glistening, a short prayer.

I knew then that this nun had no compassion as she hadn't once asked me how I was and how I was bearing up. The previous day I had been discharged from a hospital in Birmingham with my baby, travelled by train to Holyhead and then boarded a mail boat to Dun Laoghaire.

A car picked had picked us up a couple of hours previously on that cold morning. How could this nun not ask me how I was considering the length of time my baby and myself had spent travelling. I was cold, weary, hungry and my body ached. I was still bleeding from the birth of my baby. Did she not see all of this as she interviewed me? Was she so unseeing, so blind or perhaps she just didn't care. She didn't ask me if I had a good trip or how I was. She didn't summon a doctor to attend to me and to be fair I didn't ask to see one and in fact for the three months I spent there I never got to see a doctor. She barely noticed me and seemed to be in thrall gazing in adoration at the piece of wood nailed to the wall.

I had come here for refuge and help but there was no pity or compassion, no shake of the hand, would you like a cup of tea, no self help leaflets handed to me and no offer of counselling. NOTHING. When I finally plucked up the nerve to ask some questions they were met with dismissal, a shrug and no positive responses. I was basically told you are here now just get on with it.

Whilst I was been interviewed I felt greatly intimidated by the way the Mother Superior questioned me in her superior aloof way with disdain. Her long old maid's eyes boring into me with stiff cheeks and eyes pointing upwards quickly returning to their original position, staring at me. What are you really looking for I thought as I felt shame and humiliation. The look, the tone of her voice and body language made me feel worthless as if I was a nothing and I was doing something wrong by being there.

I walked away from the office escorted by a small rotund nun whose face looked glacial and icy like a glacier mint, her habit covering her large belly looking so taboo that the sight of her actually made me giddy. This little old nun was certainly no beauty. I followed her steps like a shadow and I thought about the way my life once was and now look at me. I held back my tears and wished I could turn back the clock of time. But that was wishful thinking I was here so I had to endure.

MY BABY

I lived in that home with my baby for three months if you could call it living more of a nightmare. I had no rights, no thoughts just complete numbness. This was a sad and loveless place. I moved through those day in a flux of anxiety and denial. But the fear in the background changed things. It changed how I made decisions – important decisions that concerned my baby and myself. There seemed to be no other self to tell myself what to do.

Later on that day I went to feed my baby in her nursery. My first visit to the nursery was a shock as it looked terribly poor, shoddy and neglected. It was a horrid place and contact with my baby was forbidden apart from feeding and changing her. As time progressed I paid more attention to the babies and surroundings. There were no lovely toys, books or colour scattered around this nursery. It looked colourless, wan

and sickly lined with cots all neatly in rows with babies lying still as death while others cried weakly and others screaming for attention.

The nursery reminded me of a shelter for the homeless, sparse and barren with an air of fatigued, faded, and lustreless with a tired atmosphere. These poor babies were left lying in their cots all day, every day except when they were fed and nappies changed. The nuns were very firm. There were set times for their feeds and you weren't allowed to visit spontaneously. Although I did creep along when I had a spare moment from my chores but God help me if the nuns caught me, I would have been in trouble.

I would arise very early to feed and change my baby change and afterwards have breakfast. She would have a mid morning and evening feed. I don't remember her having a night feed and sometimes I would find her crying, her little hands blue with cold and starving. I couldn't go to her as none of us mothers could as the nursery was out of bounds to us. The nuns were very firm about us not doing anything for our babies apart from the bare minimum necessary for their survival. We weren't allowed to interact with them lovingly much less sit and play with them. If they caught you kissing and hugging your baby you were doomed.

Many times I was told "hurry up and get that baby changed". That baby was mine and as her mother I had no right to love my baby. I may have given birth to her but I had no right to her as I was part of a production process delivering up babies to people who did deserve them.

The babies weren't rocked or sung to – no lullabies there, no laughter, no fun- just do your duty and feed and change your baby. I would watch these babies playing with their hands and fingers. They had no other stimulation. This was worse than a third world country. This was neglect. This was Hell – Hell on earth.

I held onto that thought, held onto you in the shifting fog as I breathed in your baby smell. Instead of lullabies "I love you, you are my baby," familiarising my mouth with your name. I breathed you in until your musky scented hair filled my lungs. "In two three" "Out two three" as I inhaled your baby smell until my heart rate decreased and your smell seeped into my skin. I rocked her gently, laughed, hugged and kissed her very quietly and furtively. She was my little piece of Heaven foreign but familiar.

I loved those moments playing and singing with my baby. My singing became assured, my words firm but unyielding. I would sing "you are my baby" – "I love you" – "you are my baby" – "I love you" until my throat and nose was clogged with tears and couldn't sing any longer. I held you tightly in my arms until my hands shook as if you were going to slip through my fingers like a piece of delicate china. The fear of losing you was tangible. It stalked my days questioning will today be the day they take you away from me. Those thoughts crushing my throat leaving me breathless.

I had to stimulate my daughter somehow in the sparse time I spent with her. I would weep when I laid her back in the cot and walk away. I never once took her out for a walk in a pram. She had to be left in that colourless nursery. We weren't allowed outside so no fresh air for us. I don't ever remember seeing any prams or pushchairs.

I never once saw a nun holding a baby lovingly, cuddling, tickling, kissing, singing or telling nursery rhymes and if they did it wasn't with love or compassion. It was the mothers whose babies had been adopted who would help in the nursery. Those tired, washed out young and older women with no strength and in a state of trauma themselves.

In the nursery there were babies incarcerated on their own where their mothers had left them for whatever reason or other. I always thought of these as abandoned babies. This was pure neglect by the nuns, the Catholic Church, the Government and Ireland.

I was told to forget about my mistake: my mistake, excuse me the big mistake I made was ever entering those doors. Indeed I realised there and then it would have been better for my daughter and myself if we had laid ourselves down on the pavement outside Clery's doorway in O'Connell street. I knew that the general public would have noticed and seen us and I am sure we would have had more kindness from them.

For the months I spent in that home I always felt I was being followed and soon realised that this stalker was a conspiracy of silence, my mindset. Anywhere and everywhere I went this stalker was always close by watching and waiting which left me feeling desperately lonely and grieving without any support. I could hear them coming the soft susurrations of their footsteps like a threatening storm. These footsteps didn't seem to come from any direction but the sound would heighten my despair and hopelessness.

To my mind the nuns were criminally careless in their treatment and contempt of my daughter and myself. There was a lack of food and the little food that I did eat was inedible. When I was a little girl I helped my father to feed the pigs on our farm. Their meal consisted of swill and slops. He grew a field of curly kale cabbage for the pig's menu nutritious greens to fatten them up. A fine menu indeed.

Truth be said my father's pigs were better fed than I the unworthy mother I was. St Patrick's food menus were the most unappetising foods imaginable. There were no fine chefs there cooking the inmates food with love and care. No fine cuisine. In fact my insides after eating these meals would be a steaming mess, slight bumping and pain as though what I had eaten were frantic to get out. I do remember thinking at the time that the nuns ate much nicer meals than I did.

There was also a shortage of medication. I suffered from chapped knees, yellow and purple mottled into rainbow colours like the outer layer of a ripe plum a mixture of beauty and pain from kneeling for many hours on the floors. My nails and hands also suffered from many hours with hands in water. The splinters peeling from my finger nails, the cuticles hissing, hands like an old woman. It would take a day or two searching for a plaster before I found one. There were prayers daily and the working conditions were appalling. We the poor diseased girls had to learn a lesson so why fatten us up. WE HAD TO SUFFER.

I wasn't told that I had a right to keep my baby. I had no counselling about the FOR and AGAINST of keeping my baby. They told me often enough how better my baby would be with a mother and father. It's best for you and best for your baby when they spoke of adoption with their cold voices. I was told this so often I came to believe it. In effect I had no choice but to put my daughter up for adoption. To be honest I had no choice anyway as I had nowhere to go; no family I could turn to, no money, no confidence, and no hope just a big gaping NOTHING.

I had toyed with the idea of perhaps having my baby fostered but very soon realised this was a NO NO. No I couldn't leave her behind in that soulless nursery. I had ideas and dreams that maybe in a few months I might be in a good job and find accommodation but reality soon set in and knew then there was no way I could achieve this in such a short space of time.

I also realised that I couldn't leave her in this prison on her own. It could take months of waiting for foster parents to take her. No it had to be adoption as I knew there would be no love given to my baby in that place by nuns incapable of love and a successive queue of damaged and distraught girls and women with their own problems.

When I think back to that time I am sure I was brainwashed by the nuns. Sometimes I felt as if I was two people in one – one visible and the other a shadow hovering nearby the visible one explaining what the first could not tell me as they tried to take my identity from me. I didn't seem to have a will of my own. They attempted to change my beliefs and thoughts. They wormed their way into my mind with their repatriations. OH how devious they were - a job well done - by those religious fake nuns.

In silence and fear these demons of darkness visited me making me believe these demons knew best. They were always with me, sometimes out of sight waiting in the background until the time was right. They were making me believe that they knew best.

At night in visible darkness where there was always something flickering and moving - a terrible darkness that held greater fear than the darkness outside and I wanted to scream out "where is my family – where is my daughter – where is she" but I was

overwhelmed with shame and fear. This darkness, a darkness that helped my mind see and feel the ghosts and monsters that were busy plotting and planning. These whispering demons were destructive knocking the life out of me, making me despise myself. They were like the virus we live with now this “coronavirus”. Like this virus these demons were also invisible. They lived inside your mind and body with their evil.

Did the other girls also experience this same loss? Perhaps they were just acting, pretending to be dignified and that life was still the same, that people were still the same, that people and their world were still the same.

These were nuns who made my life a hell. If I had to do it all again I would live my life more for myself. My priorities would change and I would reach back more to my family who had cared for me the most. I would not accept hurt or abuse but demand love and respect. I would nurture those parts of myself that I had neglected.

I worried about my work chores each and every day. Did I do it correctly so I wouldn't upset the nuns or get it done quickly enough – Did I do it, didn't I do it – DID – DIDNT – DID –DIDNT get, or didn't get done, that day. I went to sleep burdened by those thoughts and woke up to that reverie of this sing song. I worried if I retaliated in any way they could well send me somewhere else and then I would be separated from my baby. NO, NO that couldn't happen.

This internal condition of my self worth, this mind of mine DIDN'T I do enough to please them, it lived at the very heart of my self worth, my anxieties, my mindset to please. A mindset only a step away from explosion and destruction. These are poisons which are dripped out slowly, torturously and silent with no antidote which can break a body's spirit but I wouldn't succumb and drown in silence.

My heart – my dying heart - ached each and every day. It was full of anger, pain and regrets which wouldn't go away. I will never forget the day I handed my baby over. I keep going back to that horrible day and if only there had been anything I could have done to have kept her I would have done so. With each passing day I prayed to give me strength, that everything would be okay. I would have given anything to have whispered to her that I had found some shelter where we could both live but I couldn't there was nowhere for us to go to.

(Dedicated to all victims of neglect and abuse)

FIRES OF THE SOUL

Last night I dreamt
I was standing

At the edge of hell
Looking down into a deep hole
Smelling the stench of sin
Smelling fire and smoke
Watching the monsters' bodies
Beaten
Burned
Dismembered
Bodies floating
Mouths wailing
High voices
Hoarse voices
Whispering voices
Floating
Heads rising above the flames
Skin burned
Skin scalded
Eyes of cinders
Mouths screaming
Trapped forever
In the fires of
Hell
To the sound of
Clapping hands
Rising up
Where the worst sinners
Now reside
Forever

OPENING THE DOOR TO A SPRING DAY

In 1964 I opened the door and walked to freedom from St Patricks home to start my life anew.

But just when I turned to close the door I realized that I was unafraid - their faces disappearing into air, their names floating above me into nothingness and their voices silenced. All that was left was emptiness, wide mouthed open emptiness.

I turned and took a last look at the discoloured building with all its sad floors and the misery that lived within its walls. I was leaving- I had done my penance and standing on the drive I remembered the nights I had slept there with my baby separated from me in the nursery. My soft, fragile and sweet baby just like a pink marshmallow. A

luminosity of rose petals tangled up in sheets. And I laughed without rhyme or reason utterly incredulous.

I was on my own apart from my companion a small suitcase, the suitcase my mother had loaned to me packed with despair.

Silence throbbed around me a mysterious mighty silence and the pure sweet spring air that I was so deprived of during my incarceration filled my senses. I felt myself evaporating like the steam from a boiling kettle caressing me and as the sky dissolved around me I began to sob silently as a pit of loneliness engulfed me and became intolerable. A pain rushed in to fill the void but that was better than that empty space of heartbreak - this pain was a bandage for my grief.

The heartbreak, the grief and the fear. The intolerable fear where my daughter was and no longer there with me but I was. As I walked my feet dragging noisily on a carpet of dead leaves each step triggering a pain within me but despite my weak condition I smiled as realization hit me I had finally escaped from Saint Patrick's.

I wondered if the sky ached like my body did but I wasn't rid of the nuns I could see them all around me – walking alongside me, hanging from trees, blackening the sky they were everywhere. They were floating like small clouds against a vast sky of personal assumptions and insubstantial meanings, through the air landing on new surfaces, unmoored like snarling wolves against the grey clouds on the horizon and then:

I noticed my steps lagging, thighs aching, bruised feet, toes curling and I had to stop and rest. I sat on the side of the road like an alcoholic gasping for a drink feeling numb and senseless but I had to go on and as I walked, my steps became faster, the clouds becoming lighter in colour and I could see the light. I could see the city skyline and it was new. The landscape around the city was new. People walking, talking, waving, wearing clothes, people hopping on off buses, people hailing taxis, people smelling the air, the water whispering in the gutter all new. The wind blowing through the trees, the leaves singing their music was new – freedom new.

As I walked on my mind felt split, as though there were two voices in my head debating the importance of shame and regret and like the pendulum on a clock swinging from one to the other. The rational voice within me kept pointing out that it was not only shameful but also a waste of time to cower before regrets. I couldn't shake the feeling that the years ahead if they were to be lived in a way that didn't leave me feeling like I was standing still watching the action but not living it I would have to change into a person I did not yet recognise and not totally convinced existed a delaying excuse. But I must hurry I must think of an elsewhere as an elsewhere is important and necessary and nourishment for my body so I must steady myself to think of where I am going- *Keep going.*

I noticed the nuns gradually disappearing from their frightening free fall and I felt the bile within my throat diminishing, the poison within my lungs evaporating but then another picture appeared in front of me, I could now see my daughter sitting on a stranger's lap. Those thoughts and images, the absence of dislocation stayed with me until I reached home and donned my mask.

COERCION

Coercion is like a slimy disease and was used liberally at St Patrick's. Care and affirmation the opposite of abuse and humiliation are the foundation of love but there was no love within the walls of that prison. How could the Catholic Church and Irish Government rightfully claim to be loving when they were behaving abusively?

ANGER

I refused to obey to anger and started channelling my anger outwards into something beautiful all while keeping a steady gaze at reality and resisting the urge to turn the rage inward against myself. If I hid the word shame and its impact on me it would make everything about my life a lie and a nod to silence and shame.

DESPAIR

It was hard not to counter this despair with a refusal that no matter what was coming at me I was armed in a particular way with enough gumption to spit and chew the whole world up and spit it out in small pieces. Those events sit heavy on my heart, and in my mind they are a never-ending nightmare. A part of me, a part of my soul, was taken when they stole my child, and what they left was a void filled with indescribable pain. Mother Nature has made provision for acceptance of death but I was never prepared for the theft of my healthy newborn. I was never prepared for this violation of my motherhood.

EVIL

Evil is motivated by those who are not human and I truly believe this as the nuns at St Patrick's were bullies always hovering over my shoulder and in my head. They were relentless with their ruthless remarks after ruthless remark. There were some who were insidious doling out pretend sweetness when they questioned me about some of the other girls. I never fell for that as I was repulsed and sickened at their sneakiness.

I was in the wrong and they were waiting to pounce on my vulnerability. I was nothing but worthless for being a teenager, making mistakes and taking risks. But why was I that bad person and what had I done wrong - but oh so clever they convinced me that

I deserved those negative remarks which I drank into my young mind. I let myself down, down, down and kicked myself down into the dirt for what I did wrong.

SADNESS

Many times I have wished away this sadness, burying it but again it comes back time and time again. Many, many times sadness and I were soul mates strolling side by side, holding hands like lovers, loving it into remission gripping me in its icy fingers of sadness. I know the general outline of sadness. Sadness has no heart and my heart always touches breathless sadness. I do try and separate myself from you, my way of thinking about the things that are basically unthinkable but I believe I have the power to live my life strongly, make do and hold on.

GRIEF

The pain of grief is agonizing but the pain of regret is unexplainable and for me there was no long lasting medicine, no remedy to cure this ailment.

WHERE DO I BELONG?

Where do I really belong as I watched and questioned myself all those years ago standing on a bridge between the UK and Ireland. This was a question I asked myself many times when I left Ireland and emigrated to the UK over fifty years ago. There was nothing easy about emigration for me. This was a search for a better life but in a way it felt like a death - would I be lucky enough to re-visit my family every year or so. This was a line I couldn't uncross and everyone and everything I knew seemed to be disappearing.

It took me quite some time to settle as I missed my family and friends so very much. I needed a sense of belonging and it took quite a while in my search for this - belonging - of this feeling of self acceptance like a homing pigeon circling to get its bearings before I finally did.

I would and did return to Ireland on holidays many times over the years to visit my family where I hoped that the ghosts of my past would welcome me home and indeed these ghosts did but when I fly to Dublin I always sit by the window. In those moments I close my eyes and think when I step on Irish soil I will not be visible to others and will wonder if I have remembered something long forgotten and wonder why and my mind races to my daughter who lives in this country with her family.

As we circle Dublin Airport I open my eyes and look at the deep white clouds that give shape to all kinds of objects but mostly I see demons on the move searching for their prey. As the plane descends and in the silence I sink into my mind the memories, the

fantasies, the shame, the locked box of pain and I keep falling down - down until I tumble into the demons' clutches who are wearing nuns' habits.

CONNECTIONS

I still felt that there was connection to Ireland for me "was this not the country that my daughter now lived in". This was the country that I had requested that she should live with her forever parents. Many times as I arrived in Dublin while the aeroplane circled over the Airport and awaiting its descent I would always think - soon my feet will touch Irish soil - the home of my daughter but not my home. I was returning to say Hello to my family and in spirit Hello to my daughter.

This Ireland the land of my fathers, where my father fought in the early nineteen hundreds to make Ireland free. Where my parents brought up my six siblings and myself, the country that they helped build, where they prayed, sweated and toiled. Where people were tortured, resisted and fought, wept as their children were stolen, sold and were traumatized as they were raped for profit and murdered for the country where they died, the places they still haunt.

Where people died and emigrated throughout the world, the Ireland I left, the Ireland where I missed the opportunities that I was denied and the humanity that I was refused. Home is a calling for many but my understanding of home is rife with ambiguity.

I want to articulate some of the hidden even ghostly matters that materialized when I returned to my ancestral homeland for holidays and the story of what it's been like to have visited a country that is and isn't mine.

I want to acknowledge the unrepentant structural bigotry of the Irish Government and the Catholic Church in the nineteen sixties society while not negating the subversive, insidious bigotry. Now I feel bewildered and awed by love and hope and pride in this country, this Ireland that has been my daughter's happy home for fifty six years. The dedication of Irish people to making this country better even as it has, more often than not refused to love them back.

Male ideologies are the creation of masculine subjectivity. They are neither objective or value free or actually human. It would be a lie if I told you that one day I would overcome all the painful feelings associated with choosing adoption and becoming a birth mother. Denial is a mental reflex of the cowardly or insane while also serving as a tool of all abusers. It is an old strategy to perpetuate a maniacal system.

Abusers never have to correct behaviour if all parties can agree to pretend it never happened. I don't believe in forgiveness. I believe in justice. I believe in contracts. Broken contracts have consequences. I will never give up and have refused to believe

the lies that the narcissists told me and I know in my heart I am worth much more than the abusers would have me believe and I will never stop seeking the truth and sooner or later I will find my way into the sunshine.

More than anything, this is a story about what it means to be in a place, to have ancestral ties to a place, to be haunted by the ghosts tethered to the land, water and soil, but to feel to be not of this place. These are the questions I have asked myself for over fifty years as I try to think through whether I can and should lay claim to this country again, whether I can or should lay claim to freedom, dreams that might have been born there, but which were denied to me, which have also travelled around the globe with me and what these claims might mean in the broader context of what it means to truly belong. I often think that religion is about a person's behaviour.

Some people, I think, just act in explicitly bigoted ways toward people. Those are the real bigots I tell myself. But bigotry is not simply a function of individual attitudes, and it can't be eradicated by changing hearts and minds. Bigotry is the social, legal, political and economic distinctions that mark and maintain people. It is embedded in structures, institutions, ideas, representation, redistribution and the proper role of government, but where do I really belong.

Perhaps you can't hear the presumption in its argument. Where do I really belong because I can see I am not one of us? Where do I really belong to because I don't seem to fit in? Where do I really belong? Amidst the dynamic urban capes of this rapidly changing country, I don't belong and yet I feel so connected to it.

Where am I on this path? This is the question I ask myself every day. I am not that person. And I am too old to romanticize that person. Am I too cowardly or too reasonable to indulge myself in self-destruction in order to make a statement? As I move through this life of mine I unfailingly behave like a good immigrant. I am polite, law abiding, behave myself, pay my taxes but in my mind it's another story. My inner self is a product of multiple universes, several lived experiences. Inside my head there is a centipede, each foot stuck in a different reality, many of which are in conflict with one another. This is a story of myself that I carry within me a framework of which I interact with people. This is mine and mine alone a negotiation of a two way journey as I negotiate my identity of human interaction.

A LETTER TO MYSELF

Hi

For many years darkness seemed to hover around me, waiting to seep back into my life from time to time. I kept moving forward as if nothing had happened and silence

was thick with the unsaid, the unthinkable but it was always there. Like a dark shadow, the impact of my daughter's adoption shaping who I was. All my life I have had goals to go after, goals in the far off distance. As I approach and meet the fantasies that rose from my young mind I am frightened as those goals of far off years were fire and ice.

Embracing the world brow to nose with what I got and lost, hugging old sorrows as they drift away the re-emerging to goals of long ago. These goals existed in many moments of my life without even realizing as they gave my experience of the life around me its eye of life. As I force my fingers across the keyboard like a frantic performance I am trying to prove to myself that I wasn't lost but trying to prove the opposite. I feel I haven't got the words to describe this empty feeling and a kind of blankness blinds me and without the words to describe it to myself that year I gave away my baby to adoption was the loneliest of my life.

I wish I could go back in time and talk to that eighteen year old pregnant girl – the places I wish I could stand again so that I might know who I was or who I wasn't and finally feel the distance between the person I was then and the person I am today. If I could stand next to the girl I was then would I even tell her how the SONG? I was on or would I just sit, tap my foot and listen to the song but she is still inside me – talk to her – feel her pain and grief. I am her and she is me and my daughter deserved much more that I had to give her. The shame I felt then only reinforced within me that adoption was the only way.

To this day I still think of the trauma and horror of my baby's adoption surrender. This is a pain which is impossible to heal and a shame that society handed to me and I so willingly put on myself. No one can understand what you have lost when your baby is relinquished. No one can bear the burden of your tribute to a love – a life – an identity all now gone. It isn't true that I will ever get over my baby's adoption and it isn't true that I ever will want to.

My love for my daughter felt almost tautological and has always defined my notion of what love is. Thinking of her today my ordinary days are everything to me because they are me.

I must not be too hard on myself. At least I have my husband and together we can share some of this loneliness and anxiety. The uncertainty is daunting; hundreds of people dying each day. Each day I career on a roller coaster and each day it seems to be getting faster. I had no idea how beautiful I was in my youth. Not the dishonest beauty of cat walk models and glossy magazine covers, but the inherent beauty in the promise of the life ahead of me.

Memories in my life have been awakened in this Pandemic. They had been stored away in my memory never forgotten. I had pushed them to the side to be safe so I

could remember them in the future. My mind was like a book I wrote the important things down and kept them between the pages forever. These memories were meant to be kept so that they would be there for me to never forget. Today I opened up this book of memories.

What did I do with that person who had so much to offer to the world? I hid her behind the security blanket of convention and expectation. I allowed my life to steer around the course, and I excused myself by saying you were too this, or too that. Was it arrogance or reticence that led me to this grey world that I now inhabit – this isolation? Did I really believe that there was a plan for myself? I waited for life to come to me.

Goodness I was a lovely girl at eighteen. I was resourceful, kind, funny, engaging and loving. I had all of the best characteristics for motherhood. The best of all I was the mother that God chose for my daughter. There is a special bond between mothers and children but this bond I had with my daughter was broken and twisted apart by a society who courted evil.

I thought that I was being adventurous by travelling to many countries throughout the world -in India tiger spotting, climbing Machu Picchu in Peru and many more adventures. Let me tell you: it was a token effort. I was so caught up in myself that the thought of what I could do to make an impact on the world barely crossed my mind.

I got back from my travels and carried on working and living every day life. Just like that. I didn't think of searching for my passions. I didn't think about my contribution to the world, I didn't think about how I would spend this precious life of mine. I didn't think at all. I found a boyfriend and I married him. I bought a house. I had two babies and a baby adopted. I worked hard and I patted myself on the back and told myself I was a success.

I allowed the treadmill of life to carry myself along and I slumped into a comfortable life. I didn't make a plan for myself. I wasted my intelligence, my education, my stable family background. I let life happen to me and I didn't take control. Did I think that the world owed it to me to make life interesting, did I really think that I was special. The arrogance and naivety were equally balanced.

Now I look at others – those brave, adventurous, engaged, passionate, resilient people who were once my peers – and I am inspired, humbled and feel so terribly inadequate. I built a house around myself and filled it with the comfortable and the conventional and now I am wondering if there's a key to get out. If there is, it's unlikely I will get to it soon because I have responsibilities, my husband, my children, my grandchildren and the home that I wanted so much.

Once I was equal. My own career became just a job as I took on responsibility for the children. I prided myself on keeping a job and family going but I haven't actually: my job has ground to a slow and mind-numbing trudge. I have made the lives of my children and husband as perfect as possible and this is what I wanted. I am happy with that, but in doing so I have disappeared into the grey.

Now, at seventy five I have so many ideas about things I would like to do. There is a yearning for a life not fully lived, a potential not realised. I am still looking for the next adventure but as I am getting older I need time.

I look at my beautiful children and grandchildren and see the promise in the life ahead of them. Let the years come as I pass on my wisdom of a mother, the strength of a grandmother and their guide when they ask for it. Let my arms envelop them, my shoulders solace them and my heart always warm and welcoming. My vision, my dreams and my desires I never let slip down the line of priorities in terms of awareness. I am the person that I want to be, the person that I can live with and that I can have what I want if I want it.

I am a strong woman. If I have something to say I say it. I am very determined and no force will hush me. I can bear any pain just like the pain when I wear my stiletto shoes. I don't fear fire anymore I am the fire.

I have tied myself up in the conventional life when I could have gone out into the world. People will humour me when I sign up for a new course or take up a new hobby, for what can a seventy five year old something, working mother of two really offer.

Now that I have questioned my life and who do I want to be: the honest answer would be I would change some things – not my life the here and now, the time I spent as a child, teenager, the girl who had her baby adopted, but the time I spent in the institution. The life I have lived has made me the woman I am today. I am not a victim and never really was. In St Patricks I was surrounded by diseased minded nuns and frightened young girls and not so young traumatised women. I deem myself a winner; I survived and secured a loving and wonderful Mum and Dad for my daughter.

Today I am happy and I don't worry about making my ancestors proud. I don't need to be perfect. My life now is what I wanted it to be. Life is the people I have around me, the ones I love and that is all that matters. Yes I am happy and I do have regrets but not my time spent in isolation in the Mother and Baby home on the Navan Road in Dublin. That was a war – a war of survival and strength and I CAME through it. In Saint Patrick's I learned a lot about the nature of people and I vowed then I would never, ever allow my brain to become diseased, mean spirited and spiteful, in truth I would be the exact opposite to be kind, generous, loving and caring. This gave me a strength that has stayed with me to this day.

This isolation that I live in now – in comfort in my beautiful home in _____ with a virus rampaging throughout the world is a walk in the park compared to those days back in 1963/64.

Aging is part of being a parent putting my children's needs first. Aging allows me to realize I have acquired wisdom and skills with which I can help the next generation. Aging is the beauty that stays in my soul and shines from my eyes. Aging is the salty drops that run into my mouth. Aging is the kiss of life. Aging is the reassurance that I can still run and keep on running for years to come. So whilst my youth was exhilarating and never to be wished away, age is an opportunity to give back and acknowledge the blessings bestowed.

I look back with aging eyes on the girl I once was, the crazy times spent in Dublin busy with new romances, visiting coffee shops, dance halls, dancing the nights away, fun lunches with friends, visiting theatres, watching movies, hanging around with my friends – yes I remember all this with great fondness but also recalling stupid mistakes made with high intensity over things that were so fleeting.

It amazes me how the choices I made has built me to the person I am today for better or worse. I wonder sometime if I had taken a different path would it have held less pain but I don't hold on to those thoughts for long as my aging roots takes me to the here and now to the love of my husband and family.

I have had highs and lows throughout my life. I have had joy and laughter and excitement. I have heartbreak, tears and pain. I did the best I could with what I had at the time and now I think my life has been one long rollercoaster with some small breaks in the rides.

Now my goals are much simpler. I enjoy comfort, nice clothes, my home, good music, good food and to be happy. I vote and give to charity but I will not give myself, however I will lend myself to others.

As my friends prepare for old age I prepare for my twenties. And perhaps a quiet retirement oh it sounds so tempting but no I am not ready for that yet. I want to continue making a meaningful contribution in the workplace. I am still endeavouring to make something out of this life and a better future for my grandchildren.

In the end I am simply growing old and it's not a pretty party when the body begins to fail. Even at my age I continue to be inspired by the possibility of what might be ahead of me and I rejoice of what women have achieved since the sixties that many women though not all can benefit from. We won fair play and equality and it was a privilege to play a small part in the ongoing for equality of which there are many. Self determination, perseverance and standing together is a good outcome.

Living my life today I try to use my senses more. Those thoughts are wrinkles over my soul my eyes still dance even though my legs are a bit tottery. A part of me has never aged a day since I was that young free spirited girl of long ago. I feel immortal while all the signs around me proclaim that I'm not. Now and again I feel the need for a passion transfusion, a shot of energy in the veins but my heart grows when I do something I have never done before, when I learn something new, when I feel something different.

Each generation makes its own history, and each generation is judged and defined by the history it makes. I will continue to make history as I nurture new ideas and raise new possibilities

What does all this mean? These questions are just as fundamental today as they were seventy years ago. Reflecting on all the changes that have happened in my lifetime I have the chance now in lockdown, at this very critical moment to find and assert my pathway.

Once I existed in a failed silence. This silence failed me. It failed my human development. It failed my social development. It failed everything that I needed to sustain a human life. But I awakened and motivated the spirit within me – the spirit of this particular year 2020 – the pandemic year.

*Every day my work
Becomes a conscious decision
A longed for bed
Where I rest my tired body
Gratefully
From which I rise up empowered*

I still dream and I love as fiercely as anyone of younger years. I want to feel I have lived my life to the fullest and that means living in the present.

Yours truly

Miseria Oizys

AGEING

*Perfect does not exist
In looks or body shape
Ideals are admirable
Holding up what you can't control
Is tiring
A battle lost*

*I must let go
Aging is a privilege
Denied to many
Look deeper into the mirror
Deeper, deeper
Yes I see my true magnificence
Keep marching on*

SOMEONE IN THE MIRROR

In December 1963 I came face to face
With someone in the mirror
From the corner of my eye
She looked in despair
And the camera in my head clicked
Suspending this image of despair
Moments later she was gone and forgotten
Hiding away in the shoebox of memory
The one I could not show anyone
And more likely would mean nothing to them
Today the camera in my head unlocked
And I came face to face fifty seven years later
April 2020 with that someone in the mirror