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

Statement of Witness 10

Reference Code:	CLANN/WIT10
Status:	Adopted person
Institution(s)/Agencies:	Bessborough Mother and Baby Home, Cork; Health Service Authority
Date:	Not available at this time
Transcript:	7 pages
Records/Papers included:	Yes
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WITNESS STATEMENT OF [redacted]

[redacted] 1[redacted]

WILL SAY:

1. I make this statement for the purpose of providing evidence to the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation established by the Irish Government pursuant to Section 3 of the Commissions of Investigations Act 2004.

2. Attached to this statement is an exhibit marked [redacted]**1**" which contains various copy documents. References to page numbers in this statement are to pages in [redacted]**1**.

3. I make this statement as an adopted person.

Circumstances of my Birth and Early Life

4. I was born on [redacted] 1959 at Bessboro House, Blackrock in Cork ("**Bessboro**"). I remained at Bessboro until 1962 when I was approximately two and a half years old at which time I was adopted domestically in Ireland. I am now 57 years old.

5. From information that I have obtained, my birth mother became pregnant at the age of 19 when she was not married. Both my mother and [redacted] became pregnant around the same time. Her family was from [redacted] and when my mother and [redacted] became pregnant they were both sent to Bessboro. Her mother told other relatives that she had 'arranged work'.

6. My adoptive mother and father were in their late forties when I was placed in their care. My adoption was arranged bymy adoptive father's [redacted] sisters who had joined the Sacred HeartsOrder at a young age and lived and worked at a convent in [redacted] My adoptive parents were [redacted] and my aunts were concerned that they had no children of their own to look after the business when they were old. My adoptive mother often talked of the fact she had never really intended to have children of her own but had felt pressured by her sisters in law to adopt for the sake of the business. My aunts arranged my adoption, I think because my parents were older they may not have been able to adopt through the ordinary channels. I do not know the specifics of my adoption process, I can vaguely recall talk of visiting Mother [redacted] to give her money – there could well have been money involved in the process.

7. In my adoptive family, I have an older sister who, like me, was adopted from Bessboro. My aunts also arranged her adoption.

8. I always knew that I had been adopted. My older sister is of mixed race and it was not a secret that we were both adopted, although I am not of mixed race myself. There was no awkwardness around the fact we were adopted it was an accepted part of life, even in

school assemblies we would pray for adoptive parents.I had a good relationship with my adoptive parents and I could ask questions about my adoption, albeit if I asked questions of my adoption at the wrong time I would be told it did not concern me. It was really when my adoptive sister grew up to find out she could not conceive naturally that my adoptive mother opened up a bit more about the circumstances surrounding my adoption and the process involved. She was clear about the fact that she had never wanted or intended to have children but that she was happy that she had been able to be a mother to both of us. She was talking about this to highlight the positive experience she had had with adoption, to comfort my sister.

9. My adoptive parents originally told me that I was born in Dublin but we visited Bessboro throughout the years to visit the nuns and bring thempresents at Christmas. I think this was a common 'ritual' for adoptive parents, it was a way for them to thank the nuns for their children. I have various photographs of me as a child on these visits to Bessboro [redacted]**1 page 1)**.

10. I sought to obtain a copy of my birth certificate but I was not able to obtain this, I did obtain a copy of the certificate admitting my name to the adoption register but that is all. This shows my name as [redacted] being my maiden name and the name of my adoptive parents.

11. I have little information about my time at Bessboro. My older sister was adopted when she was around three weeks old, I questioned why I had been older when I was adopted but my adoptive mother did not give a long explanation, and she just said that was 'the way it was'. The earliest photos I have seen of myself were taken when I was around three or four [redacted]**1 page 1**). I did think this was a little strange as I was adopted when I was around two and a half. I was also aware that there were many photos of my sister when she was much younger than this but again I didn't get much in the way of an explanation. I didn't question it a great deal so I am unsure if not many photos exist because I was in a poor physical state when I arrived with my adoptive parents.

12. My childhood was a good one. I did not want for anything and all my physical needs were met. We were sent to a nice school, received piano lessons, dance lessons and on the whole I think that adoption was the best option for both me and my sister. However, my adoptive parents were busy- they owned their own business which was always the main priority within the household. They were not particularly affectionate people and I think that was something I always longed for. In some ways it was clear that my adoptive mother had never intended to have children as she did not come across as particularly maternal. In many ways I grew up with a sense that my adoptive family were not my real family, and being a member of that family was not quite where I belonged.

Information and Finding Out about my Birth Parents

13. I had always wanted to take steps to track down my birth mother, or at least gain more information about her. When I was 18 I began to take steps to find out what I could about her. My adoptive parents were still alive at the time but it was not something I ever discussed with them. I have ultimately been able to make contact and reunite with her, although this was a very long and difficult process.

14. In my attempt to gain information, I sought the help of the HSE. I was put in contact with a social worker [redacted] who let me know that my birth mother was from the [redacted] and was 19 years old when I was born. She told me that my father was also from the [redacted] and was 20 years old when I was born [redacted]**1 pages 2-4**). The information the HSE provided contained little information and I was told verbally that I must engage in counselling to be given any further information. This was not something I wanted to do and therefore the HSE did not provide any further information.

15. I tried to obtain information from Bessboro, and sent many letters to the Sisters over the years [redacted]**1 pages 5-14**).

16. I also visited Bessboro. On one of my first visits, when I was around 19 years old, I can remember being brought into a room with four or five obviously pregnant young girls. I had started my first job and was wearing a beautiful cream coat. I can remember the Sister saying to the girls 'look, this is the way your babies could end up, this is how they could turn out'. I will never forget that moment. The Sisters impressed upon me that my sense of curiosity and longing to learn about my birth mother would ultimately bring more trouble than it was worth. They said things like 'you would be better not trying to find out anything else' and 'you will not find a husband- nobody will want to marry you when they know the truth'.

17. The visits appeared contrived, it would always be the same process I would be brought in for a cup of tea and we would have a chat but the sisters were always reluctant to give away any information. On one of these visits a Sister had taken me on a tour of the new home for elderly people. In one of the offices that we stopped at on the tour there were many black bin bags filled to bursting. The Sister commented that anything that has not been sold is in those bags, when I was asked what was going to be done with the contents of the bags she said they were being disposed of. I was shocked at the Sister's blasé attitude toward the contents of the bags. For many individuals what was in those bags would have been the only record of their identity and where they came from and the

Sisters were quite happy to throw this out without a second thought. I felt this was not right.

18. On around my third visit there was an older Sister in the room and she seemed to remember my birth mother. She asked did I know that my birth mother was [redacted] At the time I did not know this, and she went on to explain that my mother and her [redacted] both gave birth to baby girls in Bessboro and said that the [redacted] came from [redacted]

19. I was subsequently able to make contact with my cousin, [redacted] was born at Bessboro in [redacted] 1960, her adoption was arranged by Father [redacted] and she went to a family in [redacted] She was also keen to make contact with her birth mother. It was through speaking to my cousin that I learned that vaccine trials took place at Bessboro. I do not know if I was involved in a trial but I do have a strange mark on my arm that I never knew the origin of. My adoptive parents were not informed that I was in a trial, or if they were they never passed this information on to me. When I met with my cousin she had a similar mark. I am not sure that this is evidence that I was involved in a vaccine trial or not.

20. The Sisters told me that they did contact my mother and [redacted] but that neither [redacted] wanted to meet me or my cousin.

21. Eventually I hired my own private investigator. Using the little information I had the private investigator was able to locate contact details for my mother.I initially made contact by telephone.My mother appeared reluctant to talk at first however through time, and with the assurance that I would never contact her family who she had never told of her time at Bessboro, she and her [redacted] agreed to meet with me and my cousin.

My mother's time at Bessboro

22. When I met with my mother she had left Bessboro some 50 years before but she remained traumatised by what she had experienced. She was very ashamed and embarrassed when talking about her past and was petrified that anyone would find out.

23. I tried to ask my mother about the circumstances which led to her arriving in Bessboro and questions about my father. My cousin and I wondered whether we possibly had the same father given the similarities between the circumstances of our births. We learned that we did not have the same father, my mother told me that my father was somebody involved with the church and that is all the information I was able to obtain.My mother told me that when she and [redacted] had become pregnant their mother sent them to Bessboro under the pretence that she had 'arranged work' for them. I understand this was quite a

common occurrence. When I made contact with my birth mother she was unsure where the name [redacted] originated from as she had given me the name [redacted]

24. She told me that both her and [redacted] were put to work when they were in Bessboro. I understood that they had to work for two and a half years at Bessboro, as a way of *paying their keep*. My mother, being the stronger [redacted] worked outside, performing manual labour in a field, I think she may have farmed vegetables of some sort. The work sounded difficult and the hours were long but I got the impression that she enjoyed the benefit of being away from Bessboro for a short while each day. Her [redacted] worked indoors doing housework style tasks, she would have begun these at 5am and finished around 10pm. She told me she was allowed in to feed me and that was all. I am not sure whether she consented to my adoption but she told me that she was always aware my being adopted was inevitable.

25. I do not think that my mother spent any time at any other institution after Bessboro. When I told her that I had gone on to become [redacted] and work shift patterns she commented that she knew all about shift work from her time at [redacted] but I understood this to mean she had worked there. My mother told me that she had gone on to be married and have more children with her husband. As far as I am aware, she had no other children that were put up for adoption. She stressed that they did not know anything about me or Bessboro and she did not want them to find out. Even though both her and her [redacted] had been through the same experience, and remained very close even to this day, they had not discussed what had happened at Bessboro until my cousin and I had been in contact- not even with each other. She did not want to meet again but said I could contact her by telephone.

26. I have sent my mother cards at Christmas throughout the years (none signed with my name so as not to rouse suspicion), I have also sent text messages. The Sisters told me that my mother could not read or write when I had enquired initially at Bessboro but I know that she can. I think this was another tactical attempt at discouraging me from searching for information. I also phone her, maybe three times a year, she tells me about her children and I tell her about my life. When the recent discoveries were made at the Tuam Mother &Baby Home she was very upset, she made contact with me to talk about what she had watched on the news.

27. I remain curious of the treatment my mother underwent in her time at Bessboro and feel sadness for all those who will never obtain any information about their birth mothers or the circumstances that surrounded their birth. I hope that in giving this witness statement I can play a small part in assuring the mothers that gave birth in an Irish Mother and Baby Home that they did nothing wrong; they do not need to feel ashamed or guilty any longer

and can get on with living their lives. I look forward to reading the Commission's conclusions.

I believe that the contents of this statement are true.

Signed……..

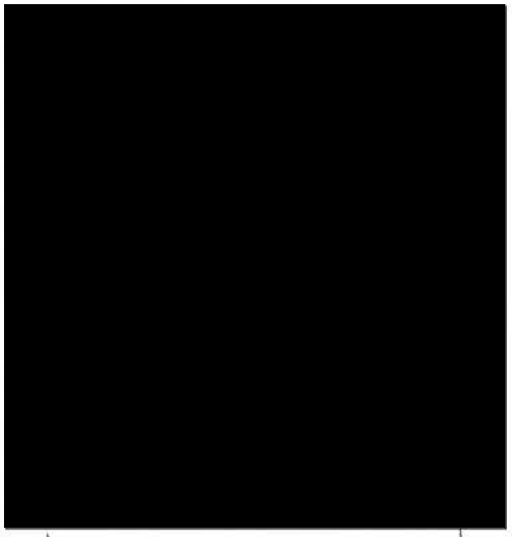
Name……

Date:

All redactions have been carried out by the Clann Project

[redacted]

EXHIBIT [redacted]1



Bessboro
aged 3½ - 4yrs



Bessboro 7yrs



Bessboro 3yrs - 4yrs



3½ - 4yrs

GUTHÁN [redacted]
(Telephone)

TAGAIRT:
(Ref. No.)

AN BORD UCHTÁLA,
(Adoption Board),
65, CEARNÓG MUIRFEAN,
(65, Merrion Square),
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH.
(Dublin).

22nd March, 1985

Dear [redacted]

I have now had some news for you. As I shall be away on leave until 15th April, I thought I would write to you & you can call to see me later if you like, on my return.

Your mother was 19 when you were born. She came from [redacted] & enjoyed good health. She helped on a [redacted] You weighed 6 lbs & 4ozs at birth. Your father came from the same county and was aged 20 years. [redacted]

We can make an appointment on my return if you like.

Yours Sincerely,
[redacted]
Senior Social Worker.

GUTHÁN [redacted]
(Telephone)

TAGAIRT:
(Ref. No.)

AN BORD UCHTALA,
(Adoption Board),
65, CEARNÓG MUIRFEAN,
(65, Merrion Square),
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH.
(Dublin).

15 April, 1985

Dear [redacted]

As you may see I did write to you & the letter was returned to the office. I have been on leave from 25th March until to-day.

I shall be out of the office to-morrow & Wed. so it would be best to wait until Friday before phoning me if you wish.

With all best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

An Bord Uchtala
64/65 Cearnóg Muirfean,
Baile Átha Cliath 2.

Adoption Board
64/65 Merrion Square,
Dublin 2.

Reference No.: [redacted]

Tel: [redacted]

Your Reference:

1st June, 1988

[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

Please excuse the delay in replying to your recent letter.

I got all the information about your mother from Sr [redacted] at the Sacred Heart Adoption Society, Blackrock, Cork. At that time she told me that your mother is now married and her husband is not aware that she had a previous child. Sister knows where she now lives so it may be possible for her to make contact with her. However, you will appreciate that it will require very discreet handling.

I would suggest that you write to Sister and tell her that you would be interested in eventually meeting your mother if possible. I feel you should also be prepared to visit the society as there are many issues which you may not have thought ~~have~~ about and which could be discussed with you beforehand.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Senior Social Worker.

Sacred Heart Adoption Society

Phone : [redacted]

BLACKROCK,
CORK.

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for your letter re. your natural mother. I have been making discreet inquires and coming up with the following information. I am not yet sure if I should approach the lady. As far as I know she has now married and moved to another Parish. She married around [redacted] or [redacted] She has a son working for a [redacted] but I'm not sure

be a [redacted] but this is not
definate information.
I will try to make contact with her
& if so will let you know the outcome.
She would be about 50 yrs now.
Wishing you every success,

yours sincerely,

Sr. [redacted] / [redacted]

Sacred Heart Adoption Society

Phone: [redacted]

BLACKROCK,
CORK.

16th May.

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for your letter recieved recently. I'm so pleased to hear you have settled in [redacted] and find it interesting.

I have been to [redacted] to try and trace your mother. [redacted] is now married and moved

away from the area.
I did not get an address for her but a kind of general direction it was getting late and I could not get a lead in the right direction. She seems to be a [redacted]. I'm not sure how many children they have but they have one son who works as a [redacted]. This work takes a lot of time in searching for the real person. Let me know if you want me to continue.

Yours sincerely,
Se. [redacted]

Sacred Heart Adoption Society

Phone: [redacted]

BLACKROCK,
CORK.

17 - 2 - 92

Dear [redacted],

Thank you for your last letter re. your birth mother. When I last wrote I gave any information I had & have not gone further. It would mean going to [redacted] again & making further inquiries and we have many similar requests which keep mounting up.

You say you are planning a trip to Ireland in '93 or '94.

When you have your plans arranged, perhaps you could let me know, I may be able to go to [redacted] again & get more information but then one is never sure of being successful.

When writing please state that you are catelogued under [redacted] in the 1989 Book. This will help me to identify you. Each year we have to open a New File to deal with all those looking for information.

Wishing you every success.

Yours sincerely

Sk. [redacted]

Sacred Heart Adoption Society

Phone: [redacted]

BLACKROCK,
CORK.

Our ref [redacted]

6th July 1994

[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for returning the Search Form so promtly and for the search fee of £20.00.

I would like to mention, that it is our policy in Ireland to advise the searcher to discuss the possible consequences of their search with a trained counselor or a Social Worker.

We will be in touch as soon as we have any information for you.

Yours sincerely,

Sr. [redacted]

Sacred Heart Adoption Society

Tel. [redacted]
Fax

BLACKROCK
CORK

Our ref [redacted]

3rd August 1995

[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

Further to your recent letter regarding how we are progressing in tracing your birth mother and realizing that there has been considerable correspondence since 1989, all we can say at this stage is that [redacted] is a [redacted] and they were both in [redacted].

Sr. [redacted] remembered both of them. I contacted your birth mother who denied she was in [redacted] Sr. [redacted] met the [redacted] who also denied having a baby in [redacted] although Sr. [redacted] had a clear memory of them both.

I have written again to [redacted] and will let you know the outcome if any.

Yours sincerely,

Sr. [redacted]

Sr. [redacted]

Sacred Heart Adoption Society

Tel. [redacted]
Fax

BLACKROCK
CORK

Our ref [redacted]

19th July 1995

[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for your recent letter regarding tracing your birth mother.

You mention in your letter that your file is [redacted], but having searched the files for that year I have not been able to locate your file.

Please write to me again and give me the details, i.e. date of birth, name and address of adoptive parents at the time of the adoption, and where you were born.

I am sorry for any inconvenience this may cause you, I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Sr. [redacted]

Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Sr. [redacted]
Sacred Heart Convent,
Blackrock,
Cork.

Phone/Fax. [redacted]
Mobile [redacted]
email [redacted]

16 March 2010

[redacted]

Please quote our ref. [redacted]

Dear [redacted]

Please find enclosed two photograph's of [redacted] & [redacted] which I'm sure that you will be happy to have. They arrived to see me one Saturday morning & they were very anxious. They had not been able to eat or sleep since I had made contact with them. [redacted] husband is an Alcoholic & is not aware of anything, neither are his family. She said that he would literally kill her if he knew anything. We calmed them down as best we could & gave them a nice meal. Afterwards, I dropped them back to the train station, where they made their way back home. They said that they hoped that you would understand their situation. They would dearly loved to have kept you, but there was no way that this was possible. I didn't let them go home before I got a photo of them & thankfully they were able to manage a smile! [redacted] is wearing the cream coat & [redacted] is wearing the red one. Also enclosed is a letter that she wrote. She found this letter very difficult to write, they both left school very young. I hope that you are keeping well.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Sr. [redacted]
<[redacted]>