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

Statement of Witness 40

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Status:	Adopted person
Institution(s)/Agencies:	Bessborough Mother and Baby Home, Cork; Adoption Authority of Ireland
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Statement was edited by witness for anonymity.

WITNESS STATEMENT OF [redacted]

I, An adopted person of Ireland 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. I make this statement as an adopted person.

My stay at Bessboro House

3. I was born in the 1970's at Bessboro House, Blackrock in Cork ("**Bessboro**"). I cannot remember exactly how long I stayed at Bessboro for, but I believe that I remained there for approximately six weeks at which time I was adopted domestically in Ireland.

4. My adoption was arranged through a district nurse. I believe that the reason why my adoptive parents decided to go through this is because my adoptive mother had previously lost a child in childbirth. She was suffering from depression and my father was worried about her. A district nurse recommended that maybe they should adopt a child.

Childhood and relationship with my adoptive parents

5. I did not have an unhappy childhood. There was no abuse or anything untoward. When I was eight years old, my adoptive parents told me that I had been adopted.

My natural mother's childhood, early life and pregnancy

7. My natural mother was …, born in Northern Ireland. From what I have been told by my birth family after I contacted them, I understand that my mother had a terrible upbringing. Her mother, i.e. my maternal grandmother, was only 18 years old when she was forced to enter an arranged marriage with a man who was around 47 years old.

8. My mother was the eldest child and became a*de facto* maternal figure for her siblings.

9. When she was 20 or 21 years old, my mother started working in Northern Ireland. I believe that is where she met my father. My mother had become pregnant with me, when she was around 22 years old.

10. Our family's background (depression, sickness,) did not create the best circumstances in which to raise a child. I believe that a relative and the priest arranged for my mother to go to Bessboro. They lied and said she got a job in Dublin, but instead of going to Dublin, she was sent to Cork.

11. None of my mother's siblings knew about the pregnancy. My aunt, who was young at the time, told me she was heartbroken to see my mother leave them. My mother wasn't showing when she left and no one knew she was pregnant, but my aunt remembers seeing my mother lactating after she came back from Bessboro.

13. I believe my mother stayed at Bessboro for approximately two months after giving birth to me, to ensure she had lost all the baby weight before coming back.

14. From what my aunt told me, my mother would get severe post-natal depression after each pregnancy. She would take the bed for days, as her mother before her. She would get depressed every time she was pregnant, and yet it was never fully addressed .She sometimes had very dark days. Ultimately, depression took her life as my mother committed suicide.

My natural mother's search for information

16. Back in …., I decided to move out of my adoptive family home and move to UK, straight after taking my last school exams. It was around that time that my mother tried to contact me through the Bessboro nuns and Siste [redacted] in particular. When I went back to Ireland in September …., my adoptive father mentioned that the Bessboro nuns had called my adoptive family's phone number because my mother had been enquiring about me.

17. My adoptive father told me that, when the nuns enquired about me, he replied "I don't know what she's doing, I don't know she ever will". It was very dismissive. I believe he was angry with my leaving the family home at age 18.

18. I believe Sister [redacted] didn't have a filter. My father's response ("I don't know what she's doing, I don't know she ever will") could be interpreted as dismissive or rude or disruptive

meaning I was lost in my life, and I believe Siste [redacted] made no effort to put it poetically when she reported back to my mother. Sister [redacted] probably repeated it word for word to her, implying that I was lost and had no stable life.

19. My birth family confirmed that my mother had indeed called the nuns in September 1989 to enquire about me, whether I was still alive, and what I was doing. My mother was living in UK at that time.

20. She committed suicide six months after she called Bessboro to enquire about me.

My own search for information and Sister [redacted]

21. After my father told me about this interaction, I started my quest to obtain more information from the nuns at Bessboro. I contacted Sister [redacted] who was my main point of contact with the nuns at Bessboro, in early 1990's. When I first called Sister [redacted] she was very soft, and nice and gentle. She declined to give me more information about my mother.

22. I decided to contact Sister [redacted] a couple of years later in 1994. This time, her tone was different. She berated me for trying to get in touch with my mother again. She told me that my mother had a family and told me not to interfere with her family life. She wrote a letter essentially telling me to get on with my life.The underlying message of Sister Sarto's letter was that I should leave her alone and stop bothering her with this. She used a very condescending tone. This letter might be in a file in Bessboro. I cannot remember whether I kept a copy of this correspondence, and if I did I likely hid it somewhere as I found Sister [redacted] s reaction very upsetting.

23. Sister [redacted] wanted me to undertake counselling sessions with her, which I strongly opposed. I was offended by that suggestion, as I had no desire to sit in a room and open up to the very person who had put me in this situation by refusing to provide me with my mother's details. It is my understanding that that is how the nuns used to work back then, but I believe there was a conflict of interest.

24. Siste [redacted] s suggestion that I get counselling sessions with her felt like she was rubbing salt over a wound. I believe she was enjoying the hold, the power she had over me. She definitely had power issues. Whether in writing or on the phone, she was always very belittling. She played on how vulnerable I was. I could hear it in her voice. I found Sister [redacted] very manipulative and I believe that she has repeatedly lied to me and other people who were asking questions about Bessboro. I believe she had a habit of fabricating truths, of

mistreating facts and information.

25. Siste [redacted] told me that my mother had a beautiful family, a life in UK, and she was getting on with her life. She told me to get on with my life. That must have been around late 1990's, so my mother had already been dead for a number of years at that point. I do not know whether or not Sister [redacted] knew that my mother had killed herself. On reflection, none of my mother's family members knew concretely that I existed.

Information gathering and tracing

26. A few years ago, the Adoption Authority of Ireland ("**AAI**") started looking into the situation of people who had been affected by Mother and Baby homes. There was a national call for

people to put their name on a register in order for them to be contacted by birth families. I signed up for this. In 2013, after I updated my contact details as I had recently changed addresses, I received documents containing information (names and dates). Unfortunately, most of the information had been blacked out with a thick black marker.

27. I contacted the AAI, asking to see the details. I explained that four of my friends had recently died in the last year and that all of them were around 45-46 years old. They all died of hereditary conditions, family diseases which no one had told them about. As my friends were dying of natural causes, I was worried about passing on hereditary diseases to future children. Not knowing about my family history and family conditions couldbe fatal, and I used that argument as a 'lever' or 'fork' to try to get more information out of the AAI.

28. When I contacted the AAI, I spoke for over an hour with an adviser who worked for the agency. The adviser did not tell me her full name. She was really upset by my story and decided to give me all the details they had.That woman told me that she was quitting her job because she couldn't bear the stories she was hearing. She said she was disgusted by the way women were treated in Ireland, and that she was going to leave the country. Perhaps this was the year the Tuam Babies were found.

29. The woman decided to give me the birth date of my mother, the location where my mother came from, and the three addresses that my mother had given when she went into Bessboro. She posted all the documents they had, unredacted, into an envelope addressed to me. Thanks to this information, I could identify exactly who my mother was.

30. I tracked my birth family by writing to the addresses that my mother had given when she went to Bessboro. It was coming up to my mother's birthday, so I decided to get her a beautiful birthday card. On it, I wrote a message that looked like it was from an old work colleague, wishing her a happy birthday and writing "I haven't seen you in ages".

31. After a week, I received a phone call from my mother's relative, who was trying to figure out who I was. They realised who I was as soon as we started talking. At the end of the conversation, he told me that my mother had died. They first made it out to be an accident, but I kept asking how she died and he finally told me that she committed suicide.

Impact of my birth at Bessboro and adoption

32. When I think about my mother giving me up for adoption, I feel sadness and immense grief. After meeting my birth brothers and sisters and with my mother's husband, I was moved by the love that everyone had for me. My tears are their tears. From what my birth family told me, I also believe that, had they known what was happening, my mother's siblings wouldn't have let the adoption happen, they would have looked after her.

33. I believe something bad must have happened in Bessboro. She took her own life. I don't know what happened in Bessboro but I worry about the treatment of mothers there. Sister [redacted] treated me badly, and I am worried that her treatment of the mothers was even worse. I worry about how calculating she must have been when talking to vulnerable women in Bessboro.

[redacted]

34. As I mentioned above, I found Sister [redacted]s offer of counselling sessions with her particularly inappropriate. Nevertheless, I do think more efforts should be made to provide those affected by the Mother and Baby homes with free counselling sessions. Every person affected by Mother and Baby homes should get free professional counselling to help them deal with the impact of adoption on their life.

I believe that the contents of this statement are true.

Signed ……

Date

…….

