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

Statement of Witness 55

Reference Code:	CLANN/WIT55
Status:	Adopted person
Institution(s)/Agencies:	St Margaret of Scotland Adoption Society; St Patrick's Mother and Baby Home, Navan Road, Dublin;
Date:	17th November 2017
Transcript:	6 pages
Records/Papers included:	No
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[redacted]

EXHIBIT "A"

WITNESS STATEMENT OF [redacted]

I, [redacted] of [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 have always known that I was adopted from Ireland as a young child but I have only recently learned that my parents did not tell me the truth about the circumstances of my birth and adoption.

5. My parents told me that I had been abandoned by my birth mother at a home in Ireland when I was about six months old.

6. [redacted] me. I did not pay any close attention to them at the time and put them away in a drawer, but I came across them when I was tidying up a few weeks' ago. The documents he found were:

   (a) A membership card from St Margaret of Scotland Adoption Society (including a receipt for the membership payment) (see page 1 of [redacted]1); and

   (b) My baptism certificate (see page 2 of [redacted]1).

7. I was born on [redacted] 1954 and I was baptised at the Our Lady Help of Christians Church on Navan Road in Dublin on [redacted] 1954. My father used to tell a lot of tales and lies. When I was growing up he told me that they did not even know my specific date of birth, which I know now was not true.

8. I have since learned that St. Patrick's mother and baby home was also on Navan Road, and believe that I was in fact born in St. Patrick's and lived there from birth until my adoption.

9. As I always believed I had been abandoned when I was six months old, I never tried to find out anything about my birth mother as I did not think there would be anything to find.

10. I do not know who my birth mother was or know anything about the circumstances surrounding her pregnancy.

11. I was surprised how angry I was when I found out the truth, given it is now so many years later. I think it is because knowing where you are from is an important thing for anyone and I have spent my life believing the story my parents told me.

My baptism certificate

12. The baptism certificate my step-brother found is dated [redacted] 1961 (see page 2 of [redacted]1). I recall that there was some problems about my documents before my first communion and I assume that my parents needed a copy of my baptism certificate for that.

13. The baptism certificate was issued in my adopted name, [redacted].

14. I recall there being some other paperwork about my birth and adoption that I found when I was younger in an old wooden box. As children do, I think I had gone looking through things that I was not supposed to. I think I did see papers with my original name on and clearly remember the name [redacted]. I do not know what has happened to the paperwork although I have asked my step-brother to look through anything else he kept when clearing the family home.

15. I went back to [redacted] for my step-mother's funeral about [redacted] years ago. While there, I spoke to an old relative of mine. She was keen to talk about the past and my adoption. She did not remember me being called anything other than [redacted]. I think I also remember being told at some point that my parents wanted to change my name but were told not to because of my age.

16. While doing some research online recently, I found a record of birth for a child named [redacted] on [redacted] 1954 at St Patrick's. I think that is me.

My adoption

17. I was adopted to [redacted] in the spring/summer of 1956.

18. One of the documents that my step-brother gave me was a membership card to St. Margaret of Scotland Adoption Society in my parents' names. This is dated 1962 (see page 1 of [redacted]1).

19. As explained above, I recall some problems as to having the right documents at the time of my communion and I wonder if my parents had got back in touch with the Society to get the documents they needed for my communion.

20. I assume that my adoption was facilitated by this society. However, I have doubts that even if the adoption was through a formal organisation, that proper procedures were followed.

21. I do not believe I would have been placed with my parents if they had been properly vetted.

22. My parents were very active in the catholic church and made large donations to the church – they were relatively well off for the area and I think they wanted people to know it.

23. My parents told me that they had come to view me in a room with lines of cots and that they had debated whether to adopt me or a little boy called [redacted] in another cot. I was also often told that I could have ended up in America, just like [redacted].

24. The relative I spoke to at my step-mother's funeral told me that I was something of a surprise when my parents brought me home, almost as if they had gone on holiday and come back with a baby.

25. Until the age of about 7, I mainly lived with my Aunt [redacted] who was my mother's aunt but she was more of a grandmother as she had also brought up my mother when she was orphaned at 7 years old. She was very kind to me and helped protect me when there were any problems with my parents. The whole family was very involved with the church and I remember nuns coming to stay while I lived with her. I remember two nuns who were Sisters of Charity came to stay – they had the distinctive winged headpieces. I think there was some suggestion at the time that these nuns had something to do with me being in Scotland.

26. I was probably 5 or 6 years old at the time and I remember being absolutely terrified of these two nuns. I now wonder if I was so terrified of the nuns because of some memory I had from my time in St Patrick's.

My childhood

27. I did not have a good relationship with my parents. I was often told that I had been bought and that I was a disappointment for the money spent. Later on in life I was told by a relative that I had done well for someone who was a "charity case".

28. My parents had a natural daughter who was [redacted] older than me. Growing up, I did not always have a good relationship with my sister as my mother would often tell me my sister was the "golden child" and I was nothing in comparison although as I grew older I recognised that my sister also suffered from emotional abuse by my mother.

29. My aunt [redacted] died in 1961 when I was 7 years old and I then lived with my parents full time. My mother reacted very badly to her death and her behaviour became very extreme, especially towards me.

30. My mother had mental health issues and drank a lot. I was emotionally and physically abused, and it was not until I was an adult that I really realised how badly I was treated by my mother. My father also drank but perhaps not to the same extent. He would not step in to stop my mother from abusing me but did take me to hospital when stitches were needed and bones had to be reset. He was also good at making up a story to fit with the injuries I had.

31. My sister got married when she was sixteen years old to a man from the [redacted]. My parents were not happy about this at all and my sister suffered a lot of emotional abuse from my mother. At the time I did not mind as it meant some of the heat came off me and I could live in the shadows a bit. I have seen photos from the time when I look like I had not washed in days. I was just left to my own devices and could go where I liked.

32. My sister continued to live at home even after she gave birth to my nephew [redacted] and her husband was posted to [redacted]. Initially my parents did not let my sister go to join him as my mother threatened to commit suicide if my sister left. My sister and nephew did eventually move [redacted] as my brother-in-law had not seen his son for over a year.

33. When I was eleven years old, I was sent to live with my sister in [redacted] and returned some 6 months later. This was when the physical abuse by my mother had got very bad and I believe the school and church had started to raise concerns about my welfare.

34. My parents drinking was not a secret and I do not believe that if a proper vetting process had been followed they would have been allowed to adopt me. If they had asked anybody at the church, I think they would have been told that my parents were not suitable or stable enough to be adoptees.

My own experience as a mother in a mother and baby home

35. When I was 15, I fell pregnant and ended up in a mother and baby home in Scotland. Although I cannot speak to the treatment that mothers experienced in Ireland, I can share my experience as a young mother who had to give up her son.

36. In the home I was in, expectant mothers would help with housework, but once the baby was born, the mother would care for the baby full time. Usually mothers would care for their baby for six weeks. The baby would then be adopted and the mother would leave the home.

37. I initially refused to sign the paperwork giving up my son so I stayed in the home for longer than usual. The home eventually told me that I had to leave if I did not sign the paperwork and I left with my son and returned home to my parents. I persuaded myself that I would be able to cope, but when I returned home my mother got quite drunk and started to say terrible things about me and my son. I realised at that point that it would never work. I grew up then and knew I needed to protect my son. I stayed for one night only. I contacted the home and returned. They made me stay for another six weeks – it was unnecessary and I think it was supposed to be a form of punishment for my behaviour, but it was actually a wonderful six weeks as I was able to spend this time with him.

38. On the final day, I was made to dress my son to be collected by his new parents and then was given my bus fare to leave before the new parents arrived. I did not count anymore.

39. From what I have heard of the Irish mother and baby homes, I was treated much better than these mothers were. However, I still experienced the trauma of having to give my child up. I was never offered any support either when trying to keep him or after I had been forced to give him up. Any upset or pain caused by this was the deserved punishment for 'bad girls'.

40. I have not searched for my son. It is not that I don't want to be found by him, but rather I am not sure I have a right to be looking for him. After all I gave him up.

41. As explained above, one of the reasons I never looked for my birth mother was I thought I had been abandoned and so there would be nothing to find. The other reason I did not look for her was that I did not know what I could tell her if I found her; I could not tell her it was ok and that I had had a lovely life. I would not have wanted to lay that burden on someone else. I am afraid of my son trying to find me for the same reason, that fear that I did the wrong thing, that I made the wrong decision.

42. The impact of my adoption has had a lasting impact on my life and I had a serious breakdown in my mid-late 30s. I was a very vulnerable child who sadly attracted the attentions of people who took advantage of my situation. It has also had a lasting impact on my children. They have not known any grandparents or relatives other than those of their father's family. They have also had to tolerate my rather over-zealous parenting style as I have tried to make up for what I lost.

43. I have been able to stand on my own two feet – I now have a wonderful husband and family, but the lasting impact, the sense of loss and the quiet sadness will stay with me for the rest of my days.

44. I believe is important for me to share my story of the impact my adoption has had on my life. The poor treatment of young mothers and their children needs to be accepted by all who were complicit.

I believe that the contents of this statement are true.

Signed [redacted]

Date ..... 17/11/17. .....