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

Statement of Witness 59

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Status:	Adopted Person
Institution(s)/Agencies:	Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland; Ard Mhuire Mother and Baby Home, Dunboyne, County Meath
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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 a bundle of documents marked [redacted]1". These documents have been redacted to remove any identifying references to persons other than myself. 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. The account in this witness statement is based partly on the information contained in [redacted]1 and partly on my own recollection and experiences and what I have been told by my birth mother and adoptive family.

5. My birth mother was 24 when she became pregnant with me. At the time, she was working as a [redacted] in a [redacted] in [redacted] She met my natural father in [redacted] and they had a relationship for about a year. He was older by a few years and was working as [redacted]

6. Before I was born, my birth mother's doctor referred her to an adoption agency called the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland (which is now called "**Cunamh**"). I believe Cunamh was run by Catholic lay people but with involvement from the Catholic Church as a priest handled my mother's case.

7. I understand my mother visited Cunamh's office in Dublin at least three times during her pregnancy. Her case was managed by a priest called Father [redacted] ("F[redacted]").

8. I have been told that my mother's first meeting with F[redacted] was on 21 October 1974 (about [redacted] before I was born) during which they spoke about her background, her family, her education and my natural father. She told F[redacted] that my natural father knew about the pregnancy and had offered to help her in any way he could but she hadn't told her family that she was pregnant.

9. My mother visited F[redacted] again on 13 December 1974. She told him she was thinking of telling her parents about me while she was home for Christmas (but she wasn't sure). I do not know exactly what F[redacted] told my mother but I understand he advised her about St. Patrick's Mother & Baby Home on the Navan Road, Dublin ("**St Patrick's**") and also about Ard Mhuire Mother & Baby Home in Dunboyne, County Meath ("**Ard Mhuire**"). I

assume this was the first time they spoke about the Mother & Baby Homes. She said she would think about both homes and would let him know her decision.

10. On 20 December, my mother told F she had decided to go into Ard Mhuire to have me. I believe the way society was at the time influenced my mother's decision to go to into the home. F said he would arrange everything for her and wrote to a sister at Ard Mhuire called Sister on 30 December 1974 to apply for a place there on my mother's behalf.

11. My mother visited F again on 15 January 1975. She told him she hadn't told her parents about her pregnancy and she was planning to go into Ard Mhuire on the On 16 January 1975, F wrote to Sister to tell her about my mother's intention. I understand Sister confirmed that a place would be held in Ard Mhuire for my mother as requested.

12. As planned, my mother arrived at Ard Mhuire on 1975 (my natural father took her there). F visited her at least three times during her stay (on 4 March, 24 May and 12 June). I describe what little information I have been given about these meetings later in this statement.

13. I was born on 1975 in the National Maternity Hospital on Holles Street, Dublin 2. However, one of the documents provided to me by Cunamh in 2015 (**page 2)**, which is dated the 16th June 1975, states that my date of birth is 1975. I do not know who created this document. It is the on my birth certificate and my mother registered my birth name as My name was later changed to by my adoptive parents.

14. I understand I received a B.C.G. vaccination on the and a PKU test on (and that the results for both were negative). I presume these medical procedures were carried out at the Holles Street hospital as my birth mother was in hospital for a week after my birth.

15. My mother returned to Ard Mhuire with me approximately one week after my birth.

16. I do not have any memory of the time I spent at Ard Mhuire. I understand I was in the home for three or four weeks up until my adoption on 1975 and that I had a medical examination on 1975 (which I assume took place in the home).

17. Before I was adopted, I understand I was baptised in St Peter's church, Dunboyne in Ard Mhuire's local parish. I did not have any sponsors or godparents that I know of. I understand Cunamh amended my birth name on my original baptismal certificate

The original certificate was dated 17 June 1975 (**page 3**). An amended version was sent to my adoptive parents on 18 February 1976 (**page 4**).

Circumstances of my adoption

18. My adoption was arranged through Cunamh. It was managed by F and a social worker at Cunamh called [redacted]

19. I think my mother spent a long time deciding whether or not to have me adopted because she only told F about her decision to have me adopted when he visited her on [redacted]. Though I cannot be certain from the information I have, I assume F had spoken to my mother about the possibility of having me adopted in their earlier meetings. I understand that, [redacted] my mother told F that she didn't think it would be possible for her to take me home and that she felt that adoption would be best for me.

20. [redacted] sent my mother a letter enclosing the preliminary adoption consent forms and a medical certificate to be completed about me, on 5 June. I haven't seen the letter but I understand my mother was advised of the permanent nature of adoption and was told that F or [redacted] would visit her to discuss my future care.

21. F visited my mother at Ard Mhuire again on 12 June. I do not know what they discussed specifically but I understand from the documents that have been provided to me that they talked about my future care and my mother repeated that taking me home was not an option for her. My mother's decision to have me adopted was recorded and I understand my mother signed the initial consent form for my adoption during this meeting. My birth family still did not know about my mother's pregnancy or my birth at this point in time. Indeed, they did not find out until 1997 when I met them. I understand [redacted] sent some information to my mother to complete which was passed on to her by Sister [redacted]

22. I was placed with my adoptive parents on [redacted] 1975, at the age of 4 weeks, with a view to legal adoption. I understand my mother scheduled an appointment with F to sign the final consent form, which she subsequently did on 30 July 1975. My mother met with [redacted] again on 28 August 1975 and I understand the last contact Cunamh had with her was on 30 October 1975.

23. My adoption order was granted on [redacted] 1976.

24. I don't know much about the process my adoptive parents went through to adopt me but I believe it was fairly easy for them. The social worker visited me at my adoptive parents' house twice in the first year after I was placed with them. I understand that the first visit was made in November 1975 and the second in February 1976.

25. After those early visits, my adoptive parents had no further contact with Cunamh except I know they made an annual donation to Cunamh of around £100 after I was adopted. I do not know if Cunamh asked my adoptive parents to make these donations but I know they went on for a long time because I stopped the donations when my adoptive father died [redacted], as my adoptive mother has [redacted] and I manage her affairs now.

26. As far as I am aware, I was in a good state when I arrived at my adoptive parents, though I do remember being told that I would never drink from a bottle and that I cried the whole way to their house and was given to them with a dirty nappy. My adoptive family never really spoke to me about my arrival.

Details of my mother's experience in Ard Mhuire

27. My birth mother has told me very little about her time in Ard Mhuire and she rarely talks about it. I don't think she has a good memory of that time. I think this might be because she found the experience traumatic on some level.

28. I remember her telling me that it was okay and describing the dormitory where she and the other mothers stayed. She said the mothers had their own cubicle and they were allowed to keep their baby next to them. This was quite unusual because I believe normally babies in these homes were kept all together in one room away from their mothers. I understand it was a small home compared to some of the others.

29. My birth mother also told me she was given chores to do while she was in the home but that these weren't severe.

30. I understand from documents I have seen that my natural father and some of my mother's friends who knew about her pregnancy visited her while she was in the home. My mother also told me she stayed in the home for three or four weeks after I was adopted.

My childhood

31. I didn’t have a very good relationship with my adoptive parents (which got worse as I got older). I had a difficult relationship with my adoptive mother and my adoptive father drank quite a bit (though he was never violent or aggressive). I believe that my adoptive parents had their own emotional issues. My adoptive father liked to drink and sometimes that lasted the whole day when we were children if it was Mart day or a football match (very common and seen as normal in a lot of families in rural Ireland). His drinking caused a lot of arguing and my adoptive mother was angry a lot of the time. She sometimes would send me with him so he wouldn’t stay long in the pub. She wasn’t physically affectionate and easily vexed – and I was a sensitive timid child. I was closer to my adoptive father

who I used to go to if I was upset, but he wasn't always there. My cousin told me that my adoptive mother didn't even tell her own sister that she was adopting her first child (my adopted sister) and that the family only learnt about it after she brought my adopted sister home. My adoptive mother didn't like people to know we were adopted and also had a great fear of who was going to take care of her when she got older. She mentioned it to me many times as a child that I would look after her. So I don't believe she wanted children for the right reasons. To me it wasn't the ideal place to grow up with my personality and the environment was not nurturing for me. I also felt that I should have been checked upon by the adoption agency to see how I was doing as a child.

32. As stated above, I had an adopted sister who was already living with my adoptive parents by the time I arrived. She was about [redacted] older than me. She was born in St Patrick's and my parents adopted her through the same agency. My adopted sister has less information about her adoption, her mother was younger and about 18 years old. But I believe she may have been a few months old when she was given to my adoptive parents. My adopted sister bullied me and I was in my 20's before I started to realise the damage her manipulation had on me and on the family. My only contact with her now is in relation to my adoptive mother's care. My adopted sister seemed to have had a better relationship with my adoptive mother.

33. My adoptive parents told my sister and me that we were both adopted when I was about six. I understand that the adoption agency recommended that this was a good age to do it.

34. I don't believe Cunamh placed me with an appropriate family. I strongly believe the adoption agency should have looked into the suitability of my adoptive parents more than they did and made further visits after the first year to check how I was doing.

Access to information

35. I remember I first tried to get information about my birth mother when I was 17 or 18. I asked Cunamh if they could provide me with my records but they told me I wasn't mature enough and that I should come back when I was older.

36. I wrote to Cunamh about a year later (I see they received my letter on 2 November 1993) and this time they agreed to send a letter to the last known address they had for my birth mother (which was in [redacted] where her mother lived). My natural grandmother received this letter and forwarded it to my birth mother. My birth mother then wrote to me and we exchanged letters over the course of a year. We eventually met in 1996. I have an ok relationship with my birth mother. It was difficult in the beginning as I couldn't deal with the attention she was giving me and I pulled away for a while. There

have been high points and low points since then but we have been in regular contact since 2003. We don't see each other a lot, a few times a year, but we keep in contact by text and phone calls.

37. Cunamh also gave me a summary of the information they have in my file concerning my adoption and birth parents (**page5**). Cunamh gave me details in 1994 of my mother's appearance, her education and my father education and a little about their relationship. I went back to them in 2015 to ask for more details and they gave me a summary of the files (**pages 6-9**), which had more details about the adoption and the meetings with Cunamh before my adoption. However, I did not see the files and so I do not know exactly what is in them. Even though I have asked Cunamh to let me see my file, they have never shown it to me and I have never seen any original documents. I thought that I would be allowed to see it now that we have freedom of information and I am disappointed that this hasn't happened.

38. Cunamh were reluctant in 1993 to give me information and to help me. I believe the only reason they eventually gave me a summary of my file was to make me go away.

39. I managed to get a copy of my original birth certificate for the first time in 2009. I had my birth mother's name and the name given to me when I was christened [redacted] which my birth mother told me) and my date of birth and so I went to the General Register Office with this information and I got my original long form birth certificate. My birth mother's name and my date of birth were recorded correctly on the certificate. Prior to 2009, I had to use my adoption register form as a substitute for my birth certificate.

40. I believe that the contents of this statement are true.

Signed……

[redacted]

Date……