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

Statement of Witness 6

Reference Code:	CLANN/WIT6
Status:	Mother
Institution(s)/Agencies:	St Catherine's Adoption Society, Ennis, County Clare; CURA
Date:	12th April 2017
Transcript:	5 pages
Records/Papers included:	Yes
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 Witness 6." *Clann: Ireland's Unmarried Mothers and their Children: Gathering the Data.* Dublin: Justice for Magdalenes Research, Adoption Rights Alliance, Hogan Lovells.



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] which contains various copy documents. References to page numbers in this statement are to pages in [redacted]

3. I make this statement as someone who had a child who was adopted through St Catherine's Adoption Society, Clarecare, Ennis, County Clare.

My Early Life

4. I was born on [redacted] 1961 in [redacted] County Meath. I was one of [redacted] children and I was the [redacted] girl. I had a fairly volatile family background and was an insecure teenager when I started a relationship with a local boy. That relationship continued on and off for a number of years and we had sex without knowing much about the risks and without any form of contraception because it wasn't really available in Ireland at the time. I fell pregnant in 1982 on the night of my 21st birthday.

5. In a panic, I told my [redacted] brother that I was pregnant. He went to meet with the father who, by that time, I was not currently seeing. Between them they decided I should go to England for an abortion but I refused. Instead, I rang the CURA helpline and after doing so they simply took over.

6. CURA organised for me to go to a family house in [redacted] and I was appointed a social worker who was also a nun. The family with whom I stayed were kind to me, especially the husband, and they were in the process of adopting themselves.

7. CURA set up the situation with my family by telling everybody that I was going to work as au pair in [redacted] They even went so far as to arrange an address in [redacted] to which correspondence could be sent (and was sent) and forwarded on to me. Nonetheless, as I was only in [redacted] there was always a chance that I might meet someone who would recognise me so I went outside as little as possible and even when I did go out I wore sunglasses.

8. I don't know how the social worker/nun was appointed but I understand that she was attached to Clarecare which at some point had taken over the St Catherine's Adoption Society. I believe I was receiving an allowance from the State as an unmarried mother and some of this may have gone to the people in the house but I don't believe that I ever paid rent or any money to the family that looked after me. As I mention above, the house

was a safe place and the people looking after me were a decent couple. The husband was kind to me and he made contact with my partner when I was eight months pregnant to see if we might salvage something from the relationship so as to enable me to keep my baby but the result was that he came to [redacted] and threatened me that if I ever came back with my baby he would shoot us both.

Having the baby and events leading up to the adoption

9. I had my baby in [redacted] and it was a complicated delivery. Because I was single, the doctors were keen to avoid doing a caesarean section because that would leave evidence that I had had a child but, having failed to deliver the baby using forceps, I ultimately had an emergency caesarean section.

10. Because of the difficulties that I had had giving birth, the family with whom I was living arranged for me to have an investigation as to why the birth had been so difficult. The gynaecologist who prepared the report concluded that I had an issue with my pelvis and that I would not be able to have any more children by natural childbirth. In fact, this was wrong because I had [redacted] subsequent children by natural childbirth.

11. Prior to giving birth, I had a discussion with the social worker about adoption and it was just taken for granted both by her and by me that this was the only option. However, when I gave birth on [redacted] 1983 and saw my daughter, I simply couldn't bring myself to give her up. I named her [redacted] On 18 July 1983, I received a letter from the social worker saying that she had heard that the birth had been difficult and that she couldn't come and see me until a week later but that "a girl from the office would go up to get the baby on the date I was discharged" (page 1).

12. After I said that I had changed my mind, my brother was sent for and he came to see me in the hospital. He said to me that I couldn't change my mind but I didn't accept that and so I told him to go away.

13. When I was discharged from hospital, [redacted] was put into foster care while I went home. My plan was to tell my father what had happened and to see if I could return home with my baby. My father was in a bad way when I got home because he was in the throes of separating from my mother and so I left without telling him. I simply couldn't bring my daughter back to the environment in which I had been brought up so I went back to [redacted] Having got back to [redacted] I continued to refuse to sign adoption papers and there is a record in the papers (page 2) that I didn't sign them on the advice of the social worker.

14. [redacted] was placed with a foster family at home in [redacted] I went to see her twice in the home and she was there between [redacted] and [redacted] 1983. My file (page 2) says [redacted]

that I was delighted with her progress but this wasn't true because on each occasion it was clear that [redacted] was very distressed in the foster home.

15. I was under continued pressure from the social worker to sign the adoption consent form but I was still keen to try to find any way in which I could keep her. I was in a traumatised state as I felt that I was being judged whatever I did, either for leaving her or for not putting her up for adoption.

16. Ultimately, although I cannot recall this, I must have agreed to [redacted] being adopted because, on 4 November 1983, I wrote a letter to the social worker asking for a letter I had written to be passed on to [redacted] adoptive mother. In that letter, I asked her to raise [redacted] knowing that she was adopted and why I had done what I had. I understand now that the letter was not delivered but was just kept on my file.

17. In May 1984, I received a letter from the social worker telling me about [redacted] progress with the new family and that was the last I heard for 20 years.

Post Adoption

18. After [redacted] had been adopted, I returned home and my old employer gave me my job back working in a [redacted] Shortly after my return, I got a call saying that [redacted] birth father had got engaged to be married and this tipped me over the edge with anger, resentment and a sense of unfairness. These emotions came to the fore in an unhealthy way with over-use of alcohol.

19. In the summer of 1986 I met a man, and in [redacted] 1986, he asked me to marry him. I told him about [redacted] and he left me on hearing about my baby as, at that time, a girl who had a baby out of wedlock, was not seen as someone with whom it was suitable to have a relationship. I was devastated but happily he came back to me and we have now been married for [redacted] years and have [redacted] wonderful children.

Meeting with my Daughter

20. In 2005, I received a letter stating that [redacted] (now known as [redacted]) had been trying to locate me and that she wanted to meet. She had been to Clarecare who had kept on telling her that they couldn't find me even though I had never moved from where I had been brought up. [redacted] found me when she was 22 shortly before she was leaving to go to [redacted] and so our initial meetings all took place in quite a short period of time.

21. I had always believed that [redacted] had known that she was adopted and that in my mind I had always believed I played an important part in her life. As it turned out, all [redacted] adoptive mother had said to her was on each birthday when she said she was sure her

birth mother would be thinking about her. My belief that I was part of her life was pretty naive as in fact I was a total stranger.

22. At our initial meeting, which was attended by [redacted] adoptive parents also, her mother said that [redacted] had never questioned who she looked like or where she came from until she started college at 18. [redacted] subsequently told me though that she had always had lots of questions but no-one to answer them.

23. [redacted] is now living in [redacted] I did visit her twice in [redacted] and one of those visits was to attend her wedding. Part of me died the day I lost [redacted] to adoption. I have worked at letting go the guilt and shame which was wrongly placed on young, single, pregnant girls in Ireland in those days. I will have to continue to work on my personal development to manage the huge void that losing my daughter to adoption created. I am kinder to myself these days as I know that at that time in 1980s Ireland I really had no option other than adoption.

What should the Commission recommend?

24. I am now a [redacted] and believe that the Commission should be aware of the trauma suffered by those mothers who gave their children up for adoption and the trauma of the children who were given up. More work, training and support needs to be given to individuals who reunite and specialist counselling is required to help people get through this. In many ways it is a truly great thing when a mother and child are reunited but all sorts of feelings come to the surface at that time and professional help is required to help people through it.

25. In addition, I would urge the Commission to give adopted people access to their records without restrictions. Everybody has a right to know their origins and at present the balance between an individual's right to know their own history is being unnecessarily subordinated to the privacy of parents and/or the beliefs and values of the church. I would also recommend that social workers and all other helping professionals working with clients in search and reunion should be obligated to receive specialised training in adoption loss and trauma.

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

Signed: [redacted]

[redacted]

Dated: 12-4-2017



All redactions have been carried out by the Clann Project



[redacted] 1983

[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

This is just a note to my that I heard from [redacted] that you had a lovely baby girl. I was sorry to hear that you had such a hard time. You must be feeling miserable at the moment. I won't be able to get up to see you until Monday week (25th) but a girl from the office will go up for the baby the day you are discharged.

Looking forward to meeting you again and I hope you will be much better by then.

All the best, [redacted]

[redacted]

Social Worker.

ST CATHERINE'S ADOPTION SOCIETY
CLARECARE
Incorporating Clare Social Service Council
HARMONY ROW, ENNIS, CO. CLARE, IRELAND.
TELEPHONE: [redacted] FAX: [redacted]

INFORMATION GATHERED FOR [redacted]

[redacted] '83
[redacted] called to see you at the Family Placement, You discussed the adoption process with [redacted]

[redacted] '83
[redacted] visited you at [redacted] after [redacted] birth. You spoke about option of placing [redacted] with [redacted] You seemed confused about your decision and spoke about possibility of a member of your family adopting [redacted]

[redacted] .'83
[redacted] took you to [redacted] to see [redacted] in her foster home. You were delighted with her progress.

[redacted] '83
You visited [redacted] again. You were arranging to go home to consider your decision.

[redacted] 83
You phoned [redacted] to say you had made up your mind to place [redacted] for adoption.

[redacted] '83
You sent a letter to [redacted] (see enclosed)

[redacted] .'84
You met [redacted] in Galway to sign the adoption papers. You were having second thoughts because they were to be sworn before a Commissioner for Oaths. You both spoke a lot about [redacted] and you asked for a photo of her. You did not sign the final adoption papers on this day at [redacted] suggestion.

[redacted] '84
You met [redacted] n Galway. You had made your decision about adoption and signed an adoption Form called Form 10. (25. 8. 83 SIGNED FORM 10)

[redacted] '84
Letter from [redacted] to you. (see enclosed)

[redacted] '84
You sent a letter to [redacted] (see enclosed)

Christmas 1983 - You sent a Christmas Card to [redacted]

Christmas 1984 - You sent a Christmas Card to [redacted]

Christmas 1985 – You sent a Christmas Card to [redacted]

Also Enclosed:

- Photocopy of St. Catherine's Adoption Society 'Child's Social Background' – information supplied by you to [redacted]
- Relevant Adoption Forms

Foster care Details

[redacted] was placed in foster care on [redacted] '83 until [redacted] '83 with [redacted] in [redacted] She was baptised on [redacted] '83 in [redacted]

[redacted] was placed with her adoptive parents on [redacted] 83.

Signed [redacted] Date: 26 / 5 / 06

Social Worker