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

Statement of Witness 79a

Reference Code:	CLANN/WIT79a
Status:	Adopted Person
Institution(s)/Agencies:	Bessborough Mother and Baby Home, Blackrock, Cork; Cork Health Authority; Southern Health Board, Cork
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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 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 an adopted person.

Circumstances of my Birth and Early Life

4. I was born on [redacted] 1965 at the Bessborough Mother and Baby Home, Blackrock, Co. Cork ("**Bessborough**"), and remained there until on or around [redacted] 1966. I was adopted by my adoptive parents, who lived in Cork, [redacted] My birth was registered in my original name, [redacted] I am now 52 years old [redacted] **Page 1]**.

5. I understand my birth mother, [redacted] arrived at Bessborough, pregnant with me, in [redacted] 1965 and left in [redacted] 1966, after I had been adopted. I was adopted in [redacted] 1966; there is some discrepancy around the exact date. I was initially handed over to a [redacted] before being handed to my adoptive parents. I have not been able to confirm who [redacted] was, where I went with her, or how long I spent with her. I was in Bessborough for approximately 181 days. Neither any of the records (I have been able to obtain) nor my adoptive family have been able to confirm the exact date, but I understand that on or around [redacted] 1966, my adoptive mother and adoptive aunt collected me from Bessborough to take me home. I was given to my adoptive mother on that day by a nun.

6. I have very little information about the time my birth mother spent at Bessborough, as unfortunately she passed away before we could meet. However, my birth aunt has been able to furnish me with some background details about her time spent at Bessborough. After I was born, my birth aunt visited Bessborough to see my birth mother and me. My birth mother was not allowed to leave the hospital, so my birth aunt went to the shops to buy me an outfit to wear on the day I was to be adopted.

7. I was baptised in Bessborough on [redacted] 1965 and my birth grandparents and birth aunt were present. My birth aunt was my sponsor. I do not have a copy of my baptism certificate, but was told this by my birth family.

8. My birth aunt told me that she only ever had one conversation with my birth mother about her time at Bessborough, as like many other women in my birth mother's situation, they did not want to talk about their time at the mother and baby homes, as it was too painful to remember. My birth mother had told her that her time there was very hard and that it was a cruel place to live. She recalled scrubbing the floors at Bessborough when she was heavily pregnant. My birth mother also spoke of the day I was adopted. She told her that she was standing at the window watching me in the car being driven away. If the car turned left, then she knew I would be heading to [redacted] but if the car turned right she had no idea where I would end up. She recalled being told on that day that she didn't need to feed me and that I would be fed when I arrived home, so she knew I could not have been going too far.

9. I have been able to obtain a copy of the adoption consent document which is dated [redacted] 1966. The document is a form of consent which surrenders me up to the Cork Health Authority for adoption. My birth mother's name has been blanked out on the version of the document I have in my possession [redacted] **Page 4]**. All other documents relating to my adoption also have third party names blanked out.

10. I have always had concerns about the food and supplements I received while at Bessborough. I have spent significant amounts of time trying to obtain information around the food and vaccine trials. The reason for this is that I was told when I was adopted I had a very severe issue with nappy rash, which was one of the symptoms and side effects from the food supplement tests that occurred in the mother and baby homes. In addition, I also had a fit/seizure after I left Bessborough. I am not sure of the exact timing, but again it was a known side effect following the trial vaccinations that were carried out at the mother and baby homes, e.g. temperature spiking out of control resulting in fits/seizures. I have been able to obtain a list of the vaccines that I did not receive when I was at Bessborough, but unfortunately I do not have a list of all of the ones that were administered [redacted] **Page 5]**. Apparently, I was very lucky to have survived the fit/seizure and if it wasn't for the quick thinking of the paediatrician, I would have either suffered from severe brain damage or I would have died. No one at the time knew what caused the seizure and I have not suffered from any since that time, so it would support the suggestion that it resulted following a trial.

11. I have some paperwork around my adoption but not a significant amount. My understanding is that the process of my adoption was fairly straightforward for my adoptive parents. There was no agency involved or other institutions. The paperwork I have refers to the Cork Health Authority. The mothers who were at Bessborough would give birth to their babies at St Ann's and then would be moved to the mother and baby

home within the same grounds. In reality, it was all the same place and not a separate hospital.

12. My adoptive mother and adoptive aunt visited Bessborough to choose a baby. There were rows and rows of cots with babies in them. Some of the babies' heads had been badly burned as the cots had been left too close to the radiators. The nun told my adoptive mother to "pick a baby". She picked one baby who was [redacted] like my mother, in her hair and complexion, but the nun said that the baby was not a suitable choice for her. I had [redacted] as a baby, which would not have been my adoptive mother's first choice, but I smiled at her and she picked me. It turned out that my adoptive mother and I shared the [redacted] and when she knew that she wanted to take me away that day. I asked my adoptive mother if any money was ever exchanged and she said that she could not remember. Unfortunately, my adoptive mother could not take me away that day as she had a cold, so she went away and returned for me again.

13. I understand that there was a follow-up visits by a social worker to the house. My mother worried that the house was messy but she made sure I was clean and presentable. I don't have any more information on how many visits there were from social workers or other individuals.

14. At the time, the mother and baby homes did not follow the ordinary rules of adoption. From discussions with my adoptive mother, Bessborough were happy with my adoptive parents as my adoptive father had a nice house and a good job – we weren't a wealthy family, but would be considered a step above working class by the nuns. My adoptive parents said there was no paperwork involved at the time.

15. I always knew that I had been adopted. My adoptive mother had been told that I was born in Dublin and then was "shipped" to Cork. When I started to trace my birth family in 2002 I found that I was in fact born [redacted] at Bessborough, [redacted] which I found very distressing. My short form birth certificate, adoption cert and my passport both say I was born in Dublin and that has made me always feel that that there was something uncertain about my identity and where I was born. When I discovered I was born in Cork, it was quite a shock to me and a lot to deal with at the time. I used to play on the grounds of Bessborough as a child all the time. Looking back that was a very strange thing to have occurred – perhaps I was drawn to the place.

16. In my adoptive family, I have [redacted] older brothers who were not adopted. I had a good upbringing, but I had difficulties in my childhood which I acknowledge now. The problems I had centred around being adopted and [redacted] My adoptive parents certainly did the right thing by telling me I was adopted, [redacted]

[redacted] I had friends who were adopted and they were only told when they were 21 or they have never been told but everyone in the area knows. That is not right.

17. [redacted] was carrying a double-sin, original sin as stated by the Catholic Church, and the second sin of being illegitimate as my birth mother was not married when I was born. That was very hard to deal with as a child and even now as an adult I still feel some shame around [redacted]

18. [redacted] am sure it was difficult for them. They were seen as "extraordinary" at the time for adopting someone's illegitimate child, which is so strange (and frankly difficult) to hear.

19. My adoptive mother was told that my birth mother was in a hurry to give me up as she had to go back to work, which was untrue. The nuns had warned my adoptive mother to be very careful of me. That phrase worried me for years because I didn't know what it meant. When I reached out to the nuns for further information, they would not give me my birth father's name. This made me worry about how I had been conceived and if there was something that my adoptive parents had not been told. I was hoping that my original birth certificate would have provided my birth father's name, but that section was unfortunately left blank [redacted] **Page 1]**. I was refused my birth cert by the Birth's Marriages and Deaths Office after I had traced my birth family. I then gathered the courage to go in there and use my birth name to get it. I felt like I had broken the law.

20. The hardest thing about being adopted for me was looking different. The first thing people say when someone has a baby or a child is that it looks like one of the parents or a grandparent or another relative. I often had older people in Cork tell me that I looked nothing like my mother or father. They sometimes knew I was adopted but were looking for a reaction I suppose – it was mean and nasty.

21. I co-wrote and performed in a play about the tracing of my family and dealing with being adopted. Among other things the play explored what it felt like not having any physical resemblance to my adoptive family and how I often wondered what my birth family looked like. I was often told that I was "lucky to have been adopted" and it is still being said to children being adopted now – it is an awful thing to say to a child.

22. If I had children of my own, I think I would have begun tracing sooner.

Information and Finding Out about my Birth Parents

23. In 2002, I decided to start looking for some basic information around my birth parents. I'm still not entirely sure what prompted it, but I remember talking to a colleague at work who told me a story of a friend of his who had traced their birth parents through Barnardos. After that discussion, I picked up the phone and called the Barnardos' information line. They gave me a number for the Southern Health Board in Cork. I called a number of times and left messages on the answerphone for over three months. Finally I managed to speak to a nun, who I believe may have been Sister [redacted] She who was incredibly rude to me on the phone. She told me that I wasn't allowed access to my file or any information in it unless I physically visited the location/site in Cork for counselling with her. I told her I was really uncomfortable with that situation as my adoptive family lived in Cork and I hadn't told them that I had begun to trace my birth family. She was adamant there was no other option but to come to Cork.

24. After that interaction, I dropped it for six months or a year and then decided to go back to Barnardos. I explained to them what had happened when I contacted the number they had given me. They were furious and reached out to Sister [redacted] explaining that I should not have been treated in that way. Sister [redacted] then had a knee-jerk reaction and contacted my birth aunt and told her that I was looking for details around my birth mother, bought her in to meet her and gathered a large amount of information from her about my birth family. That is not what I wanted. All I had asked for was basic information around my birth and birth mother and then when I was ready I would reach out, if at all. It was a lot to take on board at the time.

25. At that stage, I was still missing my birth father's name. When I requested details around my birth father, Sister [redacted] refused to give them to me and denied they had any record of him. They said all they held was his first name and a brief description of him. It was only in [redacted] that Tusla, who I had been in touch with, regarding my adoption file, suddenly "discovered" his information, his full name and partial [redacted] asking for information about the Vaccination Trials in Bessborough and whether I was part of them or not. They made no mention of having my birth fathers details before I went [redacted] It was only when I was [redacted] talking about how poorly they had treated me that they decided to say they had them. When I asked for the details they said I would have to go on a two and a half year waiting list, after which time they would contact him on my behalf. It is not good enough. They had been sitting on that

information for years and denied it existed. My birth father could have passed away in those 18 years. I have no way of knowing.

26. When I finally got my file, there was a lot of correspondence in there from 2002 when I had made my original requests for information. There is a lot of internal correspondence signed by Sister [redacted] I want it to be made clear that it was all at the direction of Sister [redacted] She has negatively impacted so many people's lives that have come out of Bessborough, whether mothers or babies. She has destroyed lives and continues to do so. Her involvement and misdemeanours are all over the files; in the letters, particularly in the denial of my father's name and address. The reason I have not been able to track him down until many years later is all down to Sister [redacted]

27. In 2002, after the home had contacted my birth aunt, I decided that I would write to her. We exchanged correspondence for a couple of months and then I agreed to meet with her and my birth uncles. They were lovely people and really wanted to make me part of the [redacted] of my half-brothers reached out to me on Facebook. He was living in [redacted] at the time. We had been writing to each other for two years. He explained that he had always known about me, as he had overheard my birth mother talking about me to her husband when he around 14 years old. He died suddenly, so I never got the chance to meet him. [redacted] husband. He knew about my existence. He told me that she got very upset every Christmas and whenever she gave birth to another child. He said she thought about me [redacted]

28. [redacted]

29. Unfortunately I never had the opportunity to meet my birth mother – she passed away at a young age from [redacted] A friend of my birth mothers told me that she did ask a lot of questions about how to trace an adopted child shortly before she became ill, but once she had the information she didn't take it any further. Rather bizarrely when she passed away in [redacted] she was in a hospital in Dublin. I was also in the same hospital at the time in the [redacted] with my adoptive father who was ill at the time. It is very odd, but there have been a lot of strange

coincidences like that over the years and I have met people through work who knew her. It is a shame that we never had the opportunity to meet. It wasn't until nine years after her passing that I began to look.

Access to Information

30. It is clear from the story set out above that it was difficult to obtain the requisite information about my mother and that Sister [redacted] was deliberately obstructive in the process. The information provided by Sister [redacted] was inadequate and did not aid the process of finding my birth mother or birth father. It was only once Barnardos got heavily involved and later when I was [redacted] that the information began to flow down and she agreed to help. I have seen managed to obtain my file from Tusla after many years of asking. A lot of important information has been blanked out. It has left me feeling angry, upset and lacking basic human rights as an Irish Citizen.

I believe that the contents of this statement are true.

Signed [redacted]

Date 31-10-2018

Redactions carried out by original data controllers marked ODC.
All other redactions have been carried out by the Clann project.

EXHIBIT [redacted]

Deimhniú Breithe / Birth Certificate

Arna h-eisiúint de bhun na hAchta um Chlárú Sibhialta 2004 / Issued in pursuance of the Civil Registration Act 2004

Éire / Ireland

Clár Uimhir / Registration Number [redacted]

Breith a Chláraíodh i gCeantar / Birth Registered in the district of **Cork Rural 1**

i gCeantar an Chláraitheóra Maoirseachta / in the Superintendent Registrar's District of **Cork**

i gContae / in the County of **Co. Cork**

Uimh. / No.	Dáta Breithe / Date of Birth	Ainm / Name	Gnéas / Sex	Ainm, Sloinne agus Ionad Chónaithe an Athar / Name and Surname and Dwelling-Place of Father	Ainm agus Sloinne na Máthar agus a sloinne roimh phósadh di / Name and Surname and Maiden name of Mother	Céim nó Gairm Bheatha an Athar / Rank or Profession of Father	Sinú, Cáilíocht agus Ionad Chónaithe an Fhaisnéiseora / Signature, Qualification and Residence of Informant	An Dáta a Chláraíodh / When Registered	Siniú an Chláraitheora / Signature of Registrar	Ainm Baiste má tugadh é tar-éis chlárú na Breithe agus an Dáta / Baptismal Name if added after Registration of Birth and Date
[redacted]	1965 (Aug) [redacted]	[redacted]	F.	[redacted]	[redacted] formerly		Sr. [redacted] Occupier Sacred Heart Hospital	[redacted] 19.06	[redacted] Cláraitheoir / Registrar	

Sacred Heart Hospital Cork

Deimhnítear gur thiomsíodh na sonraí seo ó clárleabhar coinnithe faoi alt 13 den Acht um Chlárú Sibhialta 2004/Certified to be compiled from a register maintained under section 13 of the Civil Registration Act 2004

Eisithe ag / Issued by [redacted] **Authorised Officer** Dáta / Date Of Issue **15 August 2007**

Is cion trom é an deimhniú seo a athrú nó é a úsáid tar éis a athraithe / To alter this certificate or to use it as altered is a serious offence

ip deimhnithe de thaifid ins an gClár d'Uchtleanaí.

rtified copy of entry in the Adopted Children Register.

ÉIRE IRELAND

F [redacted]

an ntry.	An dáta a rugadh agus an tír ina rugadh Date and Country of birth	An ainm baiste nó an chéad ainm Christian name or first name	An Gnéas Sex	Ainm, Seoladh agus slí bheatha an uchtóra nó na n-uchtórí Name, address and occupation of adopter or adopters	Dáta an Orduithe Uchtála Date of Adoption Order	Dáta an taifid agus sini Ard-Chláraitheora Date of entry and signat An tArd-Chláraitheo
	[redacted] 1965 (Sixty-five) Ireland.	[redacted]	Female	[redacted]	[redacted] January 1967.	[redacted] 1967

eimhnítear gur tógadh é seo ó chlár leabhar atá a choimead ag an Ard-Chláraitheoir.
ertified to be taken from a register in the custody of an tArd-Chláraitheoir.
rna thabhairt faoi Sheala Oifig an Ard-Chláraitheora.
iven under the Seal of Oifig an Ard-Chláraitheora.

An [redacted] lá seo de [redacted] 19
Thi [redacted] ..day of ... [redacted] ....
Scrúdaithe
Examined .....

(8158)C2197.138016.1,000Bks.7/82.WSM1. Tend.

EIRE IRELAND

Uimhir Number G [redacted]

No. [redacted]

DEIMHNIÚ BREITHE
BIRTH CERTIFICATE

Na hAchtanna um Chlarú Breitheanna agus Básanna 1863 go 1952
BIRTHS AND DEATHS REGISTRATION ACTS 1863 to 1952

Ainm agus Sloinneadh
Name and Surname [redacted]

Gnéas
Sex female

Dáta Breithe / Date of Birth

Lá
Day [redacted]

Mí
Month [redacted]

Bliain
Year 1965

Míle gCéad
One Thousand nine Hundred and Sixty five

Ceantar Cláraitheachta
District of Registration N.C.H.

i gContae
in the County of Dublin Éire / Ireland

Uimhir an Taifid
Number of Entry [redacted]

Deimhnítear gur tiomsaíodh ó thaifead atá á gcoimeád ag an Ard-Chláraitheoir
Certified to have been compiled from records in the custody of an tArd-Chláraitheoir

ARNA THABHAIRT faoi Shéala Oifig an Ard-Chláraitheora,
GIVEN under the Seal of Oifige an Ard-Chláraitheora,

Baile Átha Cliath, an [redacted] lá seo de
Dublin, this [redacted] day of
[redacted], 1967

[redacted]ithe
Examined [redacted]

Is cion trom é an doiciméad seo a athrú nó é a chur chun feidhme taréis a athraithe
TO ALTER THIS DOCUMENT OR TO UTTER IT SO ALTERED IS A SERIOUS OFFENCE

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CORK HEALTH AUTHORITY

FORM OF CONSENT TO SURRENDER OF CHILD TO THE CORK HEALTH AUTHORITY.

This is to state that [redacted] ODC of my own free will, and with the full use of all my faculties, do consent to give complete surrender of my child to the Cork Health Authority with a view to placing said child in a suitable home for adoption.

Signed: [redacted] ODC

Date: 10. 1. 66

Witness: [redacted]

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Telephone: [redacted]

CORK HEALTH AUTHORITY: CITY HALL,

CONFIDENTIAL:

MEDICAL PARTICULARS OF CHILD CORK.

1. Name of Child.....[redacted].....Sex...F.....

2. (a) Date of Birth. [redacted]5....(b).Weight at Birth (state if premature).8lbs.8oz:.

(c) Present weight.12lbs.3oz. (d) Was the mother's confinement normal or instrumental.....NORMAL...

3. Condition of child immediately after birth and for first few days.SATISFACTORY....

4. Was the child (a) entirely breast-fed..YES..... (b) Partially breast-fed.....

or (c) entirely bottle-fed.....(d).type.of.food.BOTTLE FED ON DISCH.

..FARLEYS MILK & RUSKS.....supplementary feed.....

5. State of nutrition (good, fair, poor) .V. GOOD.....

6. Is there or has there been any evidence of syphilis?..NO..... State the results of serological tests in child and mother..NEG.....

7. Colour of child's hair..FAIR..... Eyes..BLUE..... Complexion..FAIR.....

8. Has the child had B.C.G. accination?...NO.....

Has the child had Polio Vaccination?.NO.....Whooping..Cough Vaccination...NO....

Tetanus vaccination..NO.....Small-Pox Vaccination?..NO.....

If so, please state dates.....

9. Has the child had fits....NO..... If so, state nature.....

..... Is there a history of epilepsey....NO.....

10. Is there, or has there been any infection of the skin?.SORE BUTTOCKS.....

Eyes?...NO..... Lungs?...NO.....

Chest x-ray result if necessary.....

11. Is the child's mental and physical development normal for it's age..YES.....

.....

13. If the child has been neglected or improperly fed, do you consider it's constitution such that good nursing and proper care would make it suitable for adoption?.....

14. Give particulars of any condition not mentioned above about which an adopter should be informed. SORE...BOTTOM...ADOPTERS...INFORMED).....

15. Is the child now suffering from any infectious or contagious disease?..NO.....

16. Has the child had Scarlet Fever..NO.....Measles..NO.....Mumps...NO.....

Chicken-Pox...NO.....Whooping Cough...NO.....Diphtheria...NO.....

or any other infectious disease?.....NO.....

17. Has the child been immunised against Diphtheria?..NO.....When.....

18. Has the child any birth marks or deformities?...NO.....

19. Is the child receiving any drugs or other form of medical treatment?.....

.....NO.....

[redacted]66.

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