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

Statement of Witness 81a

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Status:	Adopted Person
Institution(s)/Agencies:	St. Patrick's Guild; Temple Hill Infant's Hospital, Blackrock, Dublin
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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. I make this statement as an adopted person.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF MY BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

3. I was born on [redacted] 1977 at an unknown location, although I expect this was at a hospital in Dublin. I know I was moved to Temple Hill but I don't know on what date. I was adopted out through St Patrick's Guild when I was a little over two months old. I was collected by my adoptive parents on [redacted] 1977. I am now 41 years old.

4. My Mam and Dad have told me that their contact at Temple Hill was a 'Sister [redacted]' Sister [redacted] interviewed them before I was adopted and visited their home. Sister [redacted] visited our house a number of times during the first six months before the adoption was finalised. My parents signed papers but they never got any copies as it was all kept by St. Patricks Guild. Temple Hill no longer exists, as far as I know, and I have no information on the process by which my parents applied to adopt me.

5. I have only recently learned that I spent time at Temple Hill and it's been extremely upsetting to read about how babies may have been treated during their time there. I am now beginning to understand the impact of being separated from my birth mother and the neglect I most likely experienced during the first two months of my life. My whole life I have felt alone and isolated, like I don't fit in anywhere. I have no idea what it feels like to have the unconditional love of a family and for me to feel that way about my own family. I am incredibly sad that this was taken away from me and there are days when the pain of adoption is unbearable.

6. I have always known that I was adopted, but have no memory of being told. My adoptive parents were strongly advised to tell my sister and I that we were adopted. One of the main reasons was because there were [redacted] older, biological children in the family (my brothers) and my parents were told that, kids being kids, they could be mean and shout something out. My Mam and Dad do not like to discuss adoption at all. Whoever made them tell us, I'm so glad they did, because to find out something like that later on in life would be awful.

7. My childhood was fine, until I hit my teens. From age 12 or 13 onwards it all got a bit messy. I've read now that if there are two children in a house where they're both adopted, one is probably really passive and quiet whilst the other one acts out. I was definitely the acting out one and my sister was definitely the passive one.

8. Once I hit my teens my Mam and Dad kind of lost me and I lost them. My Dad was definitely a dictator and extremely strict with us. There was a lot of confrontation between us and one of my favourite sayings growing up was 'you're not my real parents.' But that was the environment I grew up in.

9. I know my Mam and Dad meant well, but they are probably a typical old school Irish family in that they don't talk about emotions and wouldn't be in tune with people's feelings. They wanted to hide our adoption and it was by no means an 'open' home for talking. They aren't bad people. I had a good education and nice holidays, and didn't really lack anything materially but it's glaringly obvious that myself and my sister who is also adopted

are so different to our adopted parents' sons. I know our adopted parents loved me and [redacted] however our relationship was just lacking that 'bond' that other children have with their parents. As far as I'm concerned they're my family, but they're essentially the family I just got stuck with. Being Irish – with 'Irish guilt or 'Catholic guilt', whatever you want to call it – I hang in there out of some sense of duty or loyalty. But it's more of a chore than a family you love and really want to be a part of. It may sound crazy, but unfortunately that's the reality.

FINDING OUT ABOUT MY BIRTH PARENTS

10. When I was 20 my Mam told me that she had some news – my birth parents had come looking for me. From what I was told they came looking for me when I was 16 but nobody told me until I was 20. This was probably because as a teenager I was a bit 'wild' – let's just say I didn't cope very well with the whole 'adoption and stuff.' Rightly or wrongly, my Mam and Dad decided not to tell me. They eventually did, but they really just wanted to pretend that I wasn't adopted. That was their approach to it.

11. So, my birth parents came looking for me and I met them twice. I've been trying so hard to remember this, because I do think that I have blocked a lot of it out of my mind. This is really digging deep into my memories. We met at the St Patrick's Guild office on Haddington Road, Dublin, around 20 years ago. [redacted] was my point of contact at St. Patrick's Guild and it was my understanding that she had been dealing with my birth parents for some time. I've seen [redacted] name crop up quite a bit in things that I've read about St Patrick's Guild.. I think that I met with [redacted] once on my own and then following that there were two meetings with my birth parents. I don't remember much about our encounters. I also felt that [redacted] was on their side, I never felt that as the 'child' I was being put first.

12. I found out that my birth parents actually stayed together in the end, got married and went on to have [redacted] more children. They were 15 when I was born and as I understand it they were made to give me up to St Patrick's Guild for adoption – they had absolutely no choice in the matter. From my point of view, it was a shock to ever think that they would still be together and had gone on to have more children.

13. After those meetings I basically just walked away from the whole thing – it was too hard, it was too strange. It is only now that I am beginning to think of this again. I have pretty much blocked it out of my life for the last 20 years. I just felt that my birth parents were too pushy, I felt like they literally wanted to take me and bring me home with them and that wasn't going to happen. My interpretation could be all wrong, but that's how I felt at the time.

14. Since meeting my birth parents, I have really struggled to associate myself with the fact that I am 'their' child. I believe that the baby they gave birth to died as soon as she was taken away from them. It's only recently that I have learned that this is something some adoptees can feel like. It's heart-breaking to feel like this but also good to know that I'm not the only one that feels like this. Now that I have this knowledge and I can articulate these feelings I now realise that I am mourning the loss of this baby.

CONTINUING IMPACT OF ADOPTION ON MY LIFE

15. Ten years ago I moved to [redacted] just as social media was kicking off. I had a Facebook account for around one year before my birth family began to approach me online. I was approached through Facebook by one of their children and eventually by my birth mother. My birth parents had apparently been advised by Barnardo's that they would be able to find my adoption birth certificate on the adoption register at Joyce House, Dublin. In this

way they found my surname and (because they knew the names of my adopted siblings and boyfriend from the letters I had written to them years ago) were able to identify me on Facebook. I didn't think they knew my surname, so never imagined that they would find me before I was ready to find them. I feel that that opportunity has now been taken away from me.

16. A number of times over the years my birth family have contacted me on Facebook and it has felt like a complete invasion of my life. It has been quite unpleasant. My approach has been to ignore it – literally to pretend that it's not happening and to not respond. I understand that for some people social media has probably been great in trying to trace their past, but for me it has been the complete opposite. It has allowed people into my life when I don't want them to be there.

17. As a result of choosing no contact with my birth parents I have been left with such shame and guilt for the decisions I've made. Maybe if I'd been given support throughout my life things could have been different for me and for them. Perhaps if my adoptive family had been more open, supportive and encouraging I could have had a relationship with my birth family. I have also struggled with my health and have had ongoing problems with my [redacted] since I was in my twenties. I've tried everything I can think of over the years to fix my [redacted] problems and I've finally come to the conclusion that there is nothing I can do, it's all psychological.

18. I do believe that being adopted has caused me more problems than I've ever realised. All those years of acting out as a teenager, I do think it was because I was adopted and didn't feel any reason why I should have to listen to these people. As I went into my twenties the relationship with them completely deteriorated. For a good four years I was told not to come home and we never spoke. I didn't hear from my brothers at all over those four years. To me, that spoke volumes about where I fit in the picture. I am 'that adopted child' and if it had been a biological sibling they would have made contact. That's just my belief. Eventually we patched it up, but that's all it has ever been, a 'patch.'

19. I definitely think that my adoption has had an impact and continues to have an impact to this day. As I'm becoming more aware of it, I'm becoming more aware of the things that it's causing me problems with. I've got a wonderful boyfriend, we've been together for around 20 years and he has a great family, but I'm literally on the outside. I feel that it's my fault, I can't let myself go in there and I think it is a fear of rejection that comes back to my childhood experiences.

20. Adoption robbed me of the opportunity to grow up with my birth parents who did want me. I understand that they were still children themselves at the age of 15, but the profound effect adoption has had on my life and the impact it continues to have is so painful. Adoption has left me unable to celebrate any of the nice things in life such as birthdays and Christmas.

21. I've also chosen to not have children and for years I thought it was my choice, but I now realise that I never had a choice. I'm so damaged, that the fear of having a child and that child rejecting me was more than I could bear.

22. I think anyone that's adopted has had difficult times, just in different ways.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

23. I only discovered that I spent time in a Mother and Baby Home in the last couple of months. I listened to an adoption podcast with [redacted] who was also adopted through St Patrick's Guild and went to Temple Hill. I asked my adoptive mother whether this was the same for me and she confirmed that I was indeed adopted from Temple Hill.

24. I suppose I am in a different situation to many adoptees, because I had the 'good fortune' of my birth parents coming looking for me. But at age 20 I was so young and so naïve that I have no idea what I even spoke to them about. I didn't have the sense to ask the questions that I should have. I don't have records of any of the communications that were sent around that time (there would have been a few letters exchanged between us).

25. I'm at the stage where if I wanted information tomorrow I could go on Facebook and message my birth parents. I know their names, roughly where they live, and the names of their [redacted] children. But I don't want to go through them. I'm not ready to do that yet, and whether I will be in the future I don't know. At the moment there are only so many questions I feel I can ask my adoptive parents because they're not comfortable with the topic.

26. I went to Tusla (Child and Family agency) and they offered to dig out my file. However, they said the only thing they'd be able to give me was non-personally identifying information. This is despite me knowing who my birth parents are and that they came looking for me. I am very curious to see what information Tusla will be able to provide. I've also been told it will take some time to retrieve the file, I've already been waiting a couple of months.

27. In my opinion St Patrick's Guild were just awful. They didn't give me any support. Twenty years ago in Ireland nobody ever said a word to me about maybe trying to get some counselling. There was literally no support network. No doubt it was partly my own ignorance in not knowing to go looking for support, but there was definitely nobody to guide me through that.

28. All I can think of is that there are these people out there (my birth family) who are really traumatised, just like I am, and in Ireland there is no real support for us to go to.

I believe that the contents of this statement are true.

Signed . [redacted]

Date ..18/12/18.....