

Witness Name: Maureen Taru

Statement No: WITN03150001

Exhibits: WITN03150002 - WITN03150013

Dated: 22/03/2021

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF MAUREEN TARU

I, Maureen Taru, will say as follows:

Introduction

1. My full name is Maureen Taru. I was born on 1950 and I am now 70 years old.
2. My evidence is about the abuse I experienced under State care and
 while growing up and how this has impacted my life.

Early Life

3. I came from a dysfunctional family. I grew up in Levin. Moore was my family name. There was sexual, physical and emotional abuse going on in the house growing up.
4. There were 13 of us living in a two-bedroom house. Although it was a two-bedroom house, the back doorstep and front doorstep were turned into bedrooms, as well as the washhouse. It was horrendous looking back on it.
5. I never referred to my mother as 'Mum,' she was always GRO-B-1. She was an evil, horrible woman. GRO-B-1 was asked once if she had to get rid of one of her kids, who would it be. She did not hesitate to say Maureen.
6. Dad was a Victorian gentleman. He was very softly spoken and never argued with GRO-B-1. My father was prominent around town. He worked at Kimberley Hospital all his working life. He was a supervisor in the GRO-B. My mother's son from a previous marriage was sexually, physically and emotionally abusing all of us girls. His name was Billy. I refer to him as 'Him or He' for the rest of this statement. GRO-B-1 would not stop the abuse, she said 'oh well it happens in every household'. He was about ten years older than me. I think he was always working age.
7. There was Him, then another brother who left home when he was 12 and we never saw him again as he went to work on a farm. From what I can gather the people at the farm knew what was happening at our house, so they let him stay there.
8. Then there was my sisters GRO-B-3, GRO-B-4, GRO-B-5, GRO-B-6, myself, GRO-B-7, GRO-B-8 and four boys after that. GRO-B-6 and I are twins for two weeks of every year. GRO-B-7 is about a year younger than me.
9. My parents were not married until after GRO-B-6 was born. GRO-B-1 wanted Dad to adopt Him, but Dad would not.
10. I only really got along with GRO-B-7. I call her Aunty GRO-B-7. She is the only one of my siblings I have contact with now. Growing up I found her very weak. I remember her as being terribly overweight and she was always just rocking and sucking her thumb. She was always crying. GRO-B-1 used to call her fat, she was horrible to GRO-B-7.

11. Our house was absolutely filthy. GRO-B-6 and GRO-B-7 used to wet the bed. We were teased as kids at school because we stunk. We slept with three kids to a bed, and He would sleep wherever He wanted to sleep.
12. There was always somebody crying and always somebody getting a hiding. There was never enough food, so someone always had to miss out. It was usually me. I didn't care at the time.
13. We all went to the local primary school. We never had a school lunch. I can never remember GRO-B-1 getting groceries. I think Dad brought things back with him from Kimberley, leftovers maybe.

Abuse

14. GRO-B-1 was horrible to all of us girls. She was spitting kids out every year and she couldn't afford them. She didn't work because she was too busy having kids. Apparently, she worked for a couple of years before she retired.
15. Discipline in the house was carried out by Him and GRO-B-1, never Dad. He never went to school from what I remember because he was that much older than us. He was working for GRO-B in Levin. I remember He did not bathe very often.
16. I remember one time walking down the hallway and He punched me in the face. Auntie GRO-B-7 used to say they were scared He would kill me. He had a problem with me. My other sisters had a problem with me because I didn't back down. He didn't scare me and neither did GRO-B-1.
17. GRO-B-1 used to use a jug cord, or anything else she could get her hands on. He was more with his fists. They were both mentally abusive as well.
18. Things had always been going on with Him. I just remember it was always happening.
19. Auntie GRO-B-7 was always picked on. She ran away once. He was an animal. The police picked her up in Shannon and when she got back she was beaten with a willow switch by GRO-B-1 and Him. She would have been young. She was running away because of what was happening to her. And no-one believed us.

20. I told anybody who would listen to me what was going on at home and continued to tell people while I was in care. GRO-B-1 used to say we were liars. I told Mrs GRO-C-1 who lived across the road. She didn't do anything, she just said, 'Ooh, have you told your mother?'. After that we were told by Mrs GRO-C-1 we couldn't play at her house anymore.
21. There was another woman in town whose shed I used to sometimes hide in. She used to leave me biscuits. So she also knew about what was going on.
22. I also told a teacher called Mr Holden. He had a daughter. He gave me some dresses that belonged to her. I never got the dresses though, GRO-B-6 got them. I think the whole of Levin knew what was happening in our house. Nothing was ever done about it.
23. Dad used to sit outside with GRO-B-6 and I and tell us how much he detested Him. I used to think he said he wanted to 'test' him. Now I understand the word. I found a deed poll document when I was 21 which showed GRO-B-1 changed his name to Moore. But my father always refused to adopt him.
24. I am pretty sure Dad knew what was going on.

Shooting incident

25. One incident I do remember, which it is not recorded in my file, but is vivid in my memories. I thought I was around 10 years old, but I concede I could be wrong about my age. What I do remember is He was in bedroom with GRO-B-7. She came out crying and was sucking her thumb and rocking. He had obviously had her in the bedroom and had been doing stuff. I just knew.
26. I snapped. There was a gun in the cupboard, a rifle, and bullets in a square box. I had watched how to load a rifle on Laramie. He came out on to the drive, I was there with the gun and said, 'I am going to kill you'. He just laughed. I tried to shoot him, and he ran.
27. When I fired the gun, I never allowed for the kickback so of course it threw me back. GRO-B-1 was sitting at the kitchen table, smoking and drinking coffee when this happened. The whole street came out when they heard the shot.

28. I was still standing on the driveway when some people who I think were plain clothes policemen or detectives arrived. Mr George Brown was one of them. They took me in their car to the police station, one of them was driving and two were in the back with me. Lots of people were out on the street watching, I remember waving at them like the Queen as I went down the road.
29. We went to Levin Police Station and they asked what happened. I told them. I told them about Him. I told them about the abuse. They were nice. GRO-B-1 was not with me, I was just by myself.
30. There is a house on Queen Street in Levin, opposite the swimming pool. I was taken there to stay overnight by the plainclothes police. A family looked after me and gave me chocolate cake and a cup of cocoa. I can remember I loved the cake, but the cocoa was gross.
31. I went to the courthouse the next morning. I didn't go to court, but I remember there were people in a room, sitting around a table. GRO-B-1 was there, He was there, and a man called Mr GRO-C-2. I am not sure what Mr GRO-C-2's role was at the time, but I later found out he was the GRO-C-2 in Levin. My father was not there. GRO-B-1 said I was lying throughout the meeting. She also called GRO-B-7 and GRO-B-8 liars.
32. Mr GRO-C-2 said I had to apologise to Him. I refused, I just would not. I was not going to sit there and tell a lie. Mr GRO-C-2 got quite sharp with me so eventually I said, 'I'm sorry I fucking missed'. After that Mr GRO-C-2 said, 'we can't have you in the community'.
33. I had told them all why I did it. I think my sisters also told, but no one believed us because GRO-B-1 denied it all. My Dad didn't open his mouth. He was so downtrodden.
34. I should never have been in that courtroom. Why were they not asking questions about why I snapped?
35. I understand that there is no recording of this incident in my file. It has been a dark family secret for years. I thought I was made a state ward at the time, but this could be wrong. I do remember going straight from the courthouse to GRO-C. I recall Mr GRO-C-2 telling me I was going to GRO-C because I was a liar. It's possible

that I may have gone to [GRO-C] as an older child. There is a record on my file which records I was at [GRO-C] after a shoplifting incident in July 1964, for a period of nine months. [WITN03150002]

36. I was surprised to hear about this shoplifting incident when I saw my file. I do not recall this incident. The note says I was there with five other girls. I would not have had five friends as [GRO-B-1] didn't let us have friends at home.

37. I was so young and wondering why I was being called a liar, when I was telling the truth. Instead they were believing my mother. Nobody stood up to [GRO-B-1]. She used to say to me, your honesty is going to be your downfall in life. I think it has been. This lying theme followed me my whole way through care.

[GRO-C]

38. The file on my records referred to at paragraph 35 shows while I was at [GRO-C] I ran away on three different occasions. My parents were asked to take me home as a result of my behaviour.

39. [GRO-C] was the worst place I have ever been to. It was hell. My records show I was at [GRO-C] for nine months. I know there were other kids at [GRO-C] whose backgrounds were not very healthy either.

40. I still do not know why I was sent to [GRO-C] as my parents were not religious.

Arrival

41. The home was run by [GRO-C]. When I first arrived, I had to go through a big grey stone building. I was then taken over to the first house which you could see from the road and was put in the Infirmary straight away. I remember [GRO-C] [GRO-B-9] grabbed me by the back of my neck and pushed me in.

42. I was told I had to stay in the Infirmary until I started telling the truth, because otherwise I was going to Hell. The truth to them was I was lying and making everything up. They never asked why I was shooting somebody. Why would I lie about those things?

The Infirmary

43. I was locked away all day and night in the Infirmary. You spent the days in the Infirmary by yourself. I had no contact with anyone and there was no way to escape. There was nothing in there except for the Bible. I didn't know what the Bible was about.
44. I felt scared in there. No one told me why I was there, other than that it was because I was a liar. I was told I was a liar often. Not every day but I remember it being often.
45. I went out of the Infirmary to attend [GRO-C]. They would come and get you. I had no idea what was going on, I wasn't [GRO-C]. I also had to [GRO-C]. I got in trouble again because I had no idea how to do it. I would get yelled at by [GRO-C] [GRO-B-9]. She was the devil in disguise.

Staff

46. You got food in the Infirmary if [GRO-C] [GRO-B-9] remembered. There was also [GRO-C] Andre and [GRO-C] Aidan. I think [GRO-C] Aidan felt sorry for me. She was a soft twittery [GRO-C]. One of them put casserole and mashed potatoes on grease proof paper and pushed it through my door. I don't think they were meant to because it wasn't on a plate or anything. After they pushed the food through the door, they locked it again and went away.
47. [GRO-C] [GRO-B-9] disliked me from the moment she saw me. I was sure she was a man. She was ten foot tall and built like a man. I used to call her the horse – she was just so big. She used to tell me I was going to Hell because I lied, that it could all be over if I told the truth. She used to stride around a lot.
48. I remember sitting in the Infirmary, looking through to what would be called the drug room, and you could see the girls and [GRO-C] walking down the passage. Whenever I saw [GRO-C] [GRO-B-9] walking down there, my heart used to stop.

Running away

49. I ran away from [GRO-C] three times with other girls. I can remember we ran down the drive and a girl called [GRO-B] said you should run the way towards Wellington, so when the [GRO-C] were getting the van to catch you, you could turn the other way.

Then they would be driving in the opposite direction. Eventually after running away, the [GRO-C] would find you and you would be sent to the Infirmary.

Other comments

50. When I was out of the Infirmary, we slept in a dormitory style situation. But the other girls didn't seem to talk to each other. It was not normal. I think it was mainly Pākehā girls there.

51. The punishments at [GRO-C] were isolation in the Infirmary or being yelled at. The yelling would be in front of everybody, and it would make you feel stink.

52. I do not remember any schooling while I was at [GRO-C]

53. I never saw [GRO-B-1] or my father while I was in any of the homes. A social worker never visited me at [GRO-C]

54. Further to this, the same record referred to above in paragraphs 35 and 38 indicates that when I was released from [GRO-C], I returned home for a period. I have no recollection of going home at this time. My file also shows that during this time I worked at a restaurant in Levin through to April 1965. I have no recollection of working in the restaurant at all. I remember He worked at the restaurant, not me.

55. I was also placed in various foster homes and family homes. Once again, I have no recollection of this. The same record indicates on 10 May 1965 I was taken on warrant by the Levin police as not being under proper control because I was running away. Subsequently, I ended up in Margaret Street Girls' Home.

Margaret Street Girls' Home

56. My records show that I was admitted to Margaret Street on 20 May 1965. [WITN0315003] I thought I was around 12 or 13, but my records show I was 15. When I went to Margaret Street, I was also told I was there because I was a liar. I could never understand why they kept calling me a liar when I was telling the truth. This followed me all the way through care.

57. I was not told beforehand that I was going to Margaret Street. I think I went there by car. I was there for just over two months.

58. It wasn't so bad at Margaret Street, compared to [GRO-C]. The home was run by Miss Sutherland.
59. The main difference was I was allowed to go to the dining room table at Margaret Street and could interact with the other girls. We all had jobs to do, and it was quite fun. There was no abuse there either.
60. It was mainly Māori girls at Margaret Street. Some girls would only be at the home for a couple of days and then be gone.
61. Lots of girls ran away. It was always exciting when they came back, because they would tell stories of where they had gone and what they had done.
62. I ran away a couple of times. I remember somebody I was with bought some cigarettes and we ended up at a flat with some boys. Mrs Bellamy, my social worker, used to pick us up from there. A report on my file dated 13 January 1966 records that I was picked up by police on one occasion from that flat.
[WITN0315004]
63. I received no schooling there. We used to do a lot of sewing. I also did a lot of laundry.
64. Other girls had visitors. I never did. I think I was out of sight and out of mind to my parents. [GRO-B-1] didn't care at all. Dad was like a Victorian gentleman who didn't want to buck the system.
65. I had no idea what was happening back home while I was in the homes. I later learned from [GRO-B-7] that she went to Porirua Hospital because she couldn't take it anymore. The doctor there gave her electric shock treatment because she was telling 'lies'. She was sad, she still is a sad lady.
66. I understand from my records, Dr Pugmire of Lake Alice Hospital started to see me as a patient. Apparently, I was complaining of the noises at work. The same record I referred to in paragraph 35 shows I was seen by Dr Pugmire on 10 December 1965. He noted that I was exhibiting somewhat difficult behaviour. I was heavily sedated and as a result I was prescribed some mild anti-psychotic drugs. I was then

allowed to return to Margaret Street. Once again, I do not remember any of this at all.

67. The same records indicate I was prescribed sleeping pills, Librium, a type of tranquilliser, and a second tranquilliser.

68. According to a note on my records dated 20 January 1966, my behaviour escalated to a point where I was seen to be exhibiting emotional disturbances. This was assessed as me having an attack of some sort. I was then seen by Dr Pugmire on 17 January 1966. He prescribed a change of medication and also a preparation for injections of paraldehyde, should I have another attack. It is also noted that the recommendation was that my admission to Kingslea, still proceed. **[WITN0315005]**

69. Once again, I do not remember any of this. Looking back, maybe I don't remember because of all this medication. I was shocked to see paraldehyde was considered in my treatment plan.

Kingslea

70. Again, with Kingslea, I had no idea I was going.

71. Mrs Bellamy, my social worker, took me there. My records show that I was admitted to Kingslea on 26 January 1966 **[WITN0315006]** We went into town to get new shoes and clothes before we left. The shoes I got were hideous, they were an orangey mustard colour. She didn't tell me where I was going.

72. I would describe Kingslea as being a terrible place. It felt like I was there for two or three years, and at least two Christmases. My records however indicate that I was at Kingslea for 9 months.

Arrival

73. I remember we went down to Christchurch on the boat. I had no personal items to take with me.

74. When I first arrived at Kingslea it was around 3pm. I was met by Mrs Ford and taken straight to Keller House. I only remembered her name the other day. She was a

very professional lady, who sat behind a desk. She took me over to one of the houses.

75. I remember I arrived late in the afternoon. There was a group of girls sitting in the dining room having a cigarette. They would have been around 16 and were allowed four cigarettes a day. I had a puff. I think I got the attention of the staff because I coughed or something.

76. After that, I was made to sit at the table by myself while everyone went upstairs. I had broken the rules by smoking because I was too young. I was then sent to a secure cell where I slept the night and then moved to the "Clinic".

The Clinic

77. When you went through the front door at Kingslea you would first see the doctor's office and then through another door was Clinic, which was like a jail. There was just a big line of cells which they needed big keys to open.

78. Each cell had a window which comprised of two plastic sheets. The window looked out to a courtyard which had a brick wall going around the outside.

79. The cells were always full. There were seven girls in Clinic at a time. Five girls were in the cells, then there was the blanket room and another room with a bed. So, you moved up through the rooms and got more privileges.

80. I made it to the blanket room once, not because they wanted me there but because some girls ran away. I never made it to the end room. That was the goal. It had two beds and was just like a bedroom, without a locked door.

81. I cannot remember ever being in a dormitory at Kingslea or sleeping in a bed. I never got to see the whole place. I know in the dorms there was a bed and half a wall separating each bed. I saw them on my way to the bathroom. But I never went in there, so I cannot comment much on what life was like outside of the Clinic. Every night I spent at Kingslea was in a cell.

82. I had feelings of wanting to die all the time while I was at Kingslea. I didn't do anything but if I could have, I would have. Being in isolation, it plays with your head.

83. On 5 September 1966 I wrote a letter to Dr Pugmire at Lake Alice. The letter shows at this time I was asking for help as I felt like I was going insane in the Clinic. **[WITN0315007]** The letter records I was in the Clinic for two months, then I went to the main centre, then back to the Clinic.

84. I do not remember writing this letter to Dr Pugmire, or the events I wrote about in the letter. I have never liked crowds or being around too many people. Not liking loud noises goes back to my family home, with lots of children around. Maybe this is part of the reason I would not have coped in the main area. It would have been a big contrast to the isolation I was used to in the Clinic.

Daily routine

85. In Clinic, the morning would start with all the lights going on. You would have to get up and fold your blankets, roll up your mattress and put Velcro round it. Then you would have to take it all down to the blanket room and put everything on a shelf. Clothes would be put outside your cell to get changed into. Then it would be the girl in the next cell's turn.

86. The clothes we were given could have been any of the other girls from the day before. So, you might end up wearing the knickers worn the day before by the girl from the cell next door. They were washed, but we didn't have our own set.

87. We would then be given breakfast which was toast with hard butter which made holes in the bread and marmalade. It was like biting into a bit of sugar. You would sit and eat your breakfast on the floor.

88. Then we would have lunch and go to the toilet. There was nothing to do all day, no books or anything. You just built a shell around yourself. When they told you things like you were filthy and dirty, you just built that shell around yourself.

89. Then we would have tea and go to the toilet, have a wash, put a nightie on and you would leave your clothes from the day outside the door. We took turns to get our blankets and mattresses back down.

90. I used to make my mattress up to sleep on the floor. The bed was screwed to the floor and it was more comfortable on the ground. The mattresses were the ones with big, wired springs and they were lumpy.
91. Every day was the same and it became routine. I am not sure what the purpose of any of it was.
92. I often had to go for a wee in the corner of my cell because the staff never came to let me out for the toilet in time.
93. We had a bath every Sunday, for about five minutes. Each girl would take her turn. When you went, you got in the bath, washed and then got out and ran the bath for the girl who was going after you. There was never a lot of water in the bath.
94. While I was in the Clinic, I picked up an imaginary friend. It was a coping mechanism. I used to say things when I was eating on the floor like, 'you can have that' as if she really was there. She didn't have a name. We used to count the bricks on the wall and do handstands. It was as if she really was there.
95. She was there the whole time at Kingslea. Perhaps she is still with me, I sometimes find myself still saying things. That was how I coped. She was the only stable thing in my life then.
96. When a new girl came into Clinic, even if it was in the middle of the night, they would turn one light on which meant all our lights went on. Then they would turn up this screeching music. We would have to get up, put our blankets away and show the girl who had just come in what it was like. It was a bit stupid; they were just punishing all of us for what one girl did.

Staff

97. One of the staff was called Miss Wright. I think she had polio or something. I used to sing 'these boots were made for walking' to her when she walked past my cell. Mrs Wright was a strange lady, she was forceful, but she wasn't mean. I don't think you would buck the system with her. We weren't all that nice to her.

98. There were some other staff there who were nice. But they only did what they were told.

Being called a liar

99. I continued to be called a liar while I was at Kingslea. The lying theme followed me everywhere. Staff would look at me and say, 'are you telling the truth or are you lying?'

100. In the end you just don't say anything to anybody. They just saw me as a liar because I still wouldn't say that what had happened to me in my family home, was not the truth.

Schooling

101. I never received any schooling while I was at Kingslea. I had no books to read or anything while I was in Clinic. I effectively stopped school at an early age.

102. There was one time when I had schoolbooks brought into me from 10am and then they were taken out at 2pm. But I couldn't take anything in.

103. A progress report from Kingslea on my file for the period of June 1966 notes "Maureen has spent most of this term in either Clinic or Isolation so that it is difficult to form a patterned impression of her classroom behaviour." **[WITN0315008]**

Other girls

104. There were a lot of Māori girls at Kingslea. All the other girls in the Clinic with me were either Māori or Islander. They all seemed much older than me. I didn't say anything to other girls because I wasn't able to mix with them.

105. There was one girl called [GRO-B], [GRO-B]. I never met her, but she was in one of the cells.

106. There was also a girl I used to talk to in Clinic who was in the cell next to me. Her name was [GRO-B-10]. She told me she ended up in there because she ran away and beat up Mrs Ford.

107. Once a week I might be allowed outside to sit in the courtyard for about half an hour. We took turns in Clinic and were allowed out one at a time when this happened. When I was out there, I could see some of the girls. I was never allowed to talk to them though. I could hear them down the hallway when I went to the toilet.
108. Since Kingslea I have always grown my thumb nails long. Everyone had long thumb nails at Kingslea. I think I asked GRO-B-10 about why that was. You could hear girls fighting a lot from the cell. A lot of girls ended up in Clinic for fighting and you could tell because they would have scratches on their faces from the long nails.
109. I could also see the girls' nails when I was in the courtyard if some of them were walking around. Their nails looked like weapons.
110. I can remember something happened in the cells one time. Some girls came in and there was a huge ruckus going on. I think it was the staff who unlocked my cell door and opened it a tiny bit, just a few centimetres. I never went out. I remember there were a lot of people down there and girls were crying and screaming. It was a big incident and happened just before they sent me to Ferguson.
111. I could tell I was gay at Kingslea because I was attracted to the other girls. But I wasn't going to say anything because what would have happened to me if I brought that out in the open? It was the 1960s.

Health

112. I don't think my mental health was good while I was at Kingslea. I'm not sure how I survived. I never saw a counsellor or social worker while I was there. My file contains a letter from Dr Pugmire sent to Mrs Ford while I was at Kingslea, recommending I should be admitted to a psychiatric hospital. In this letter he recommends I should be put on a 'heavy dosage of anti-schizophrenic drugs more than it would be safe to prescribe on an outpatient basis'. [WITN03150009]
113. When I learnt this was recorded on my file, given my nursing background, I was surprised to hear an adolescent would be prescribed these drugs and not continue to need them as an adult. I find it very strange.

114. I was never physically unwell while I was there. I didn't get my first period until I was 18 and out of care. But I never thought about it at the time. I realised later when I started nursing how late that is.
115. As I have stated above, I have no recollection of being in family homes and foster homes, or working before going into Margaret Street, as is reflected in my file. I believe this may be due to large gaps in my memory, which I think is due to the trauma I suffered as a child and teenager. Or potentially due to the tranquilisers I was prescribed, the long periods in isolation, or a combination of all these factors.

Ferguson Psychiatric Unit

116. My records show that I was admitted into the Ferguson Clinic at Sunnyside Hospital on 5 September 1966 [WITN03150010]. There is also a letter in my file from Mrs Ford to Social Welfare confirming I was transferred to Sunnyside as a minor. [WITN03150011]
117. I think I was sent to Ferguson because they probably thought I was nuts talking to my imaginary friend and because they thought I was a liar. My file contains a letter I wrote about myself to Dr Pugmire while I was at Kingslea. [WITN03150012] I do not remember writing this letter. When I saw this letter, I was confused. It sounds like it has been written by a sick child. I suppose it shows how the long periods of isolation affected me.
118. I was not told why, and they didn't tell me I was going to a psychiatric hospital. Ferguson was part of Sunnyside Hospital.
119. I was at Ferguson for ages, I think at least a couple of Christmases. So I spent a few years there drugged out and doing what I was told.
120. I slept in a dormitory. There were four beds per dormitory. We were in proper beds and there was no isolation or secure.
121. To start with, I wasn't sure what the hell was going on. There were a lot of very sick people there. But to me at the time, they weren't sick they were just scary. I was told there was a lady there whose baby had died, so she stole someone else's.

Then there was another lady who would beat herself up with oranges to get bruises. It did scare me at the time but now I wonder if I was more curious.

122. Everyone else in my ward was very old. I am sure I was the youngest there by quite a few years. I used to go outside and think about running away. The whole place would be locked at night. It might have been to keep us secure from the outside.

123. I got a couple of tattoos on my feet and arm from a girl who was there. She had lived in the mountains with Bob Dylan and had become a tattooist.

Medication and treatment

124. When I arrived, I was assessed by a doctor. He told me he was going to put me on medication to keep me calm. He may have thought I needed to be kept calm because I came out of Kingslea. I remember he asked me why I insisted on telling lies. I said I was not lying, and he said, 'you really are, think about it'. So then I just shut up.

125. We had to take our medication twice a day. I think it was meant to make me sleep. I operated on auto-mode while I was there.

126. We had to go to a room to get our medication that had a half door so they could watch you to make sure you took it. One pill I took was a blue triangle. The other one was yellow. I wouldn't have a clue what they were, but they made me feel dozy and sleepy. I know I used to lie on my bed a lot.

127. I also had to attend some sort of group therapy. I remember being in sessions where everyone was talking. I didn't take much notice. There were other patients in there as well – it was how I learnt about the lady who stole the baby.

128. I never received electric shock treatment and I don't think I saw it used on other patients while I was there.

129. I did not go to school while I was at Ferguson. During the day I would just walk around and then I had the group therapy sessions.

Staff

130. The staff were mainly nurses. They all wore uniforms. The treatment from the staff there was all fair and the food was much better.
131. The charge nurse at Ferguson was called Lorraine. She was lovely. She took me out shopping a few times. I would go driving with her.
132. I cannot remember being told I was a liar so much at Ferguson, in the same way it happened in the homes. They asked me about the abuse when I was there. I told them exactly how it was, and they listened. When I told them, I remember leaving the room thinking it was a waste of time. Nothing ever happened after I told them.
133. I remember writing to my family while I was there. I never heard anything back.
134. I am not sure how I got to be released. I think maybe they decided I had been there too long and I aged out of the system. They arranged for me to get a live-in job in the kitchen at Burwood Hospital and then I was able to go.

Life after care

Burwood Hospital

135. My records show I started working at Burwood Hospital in October 1967, when I was 17. [WITN03150013] During this time I was still attending day clinic at Sunnyside. When I got my first pay, I bought soap powder, shampoo and conditioner because for the first time I was able to wash my own clothes.
136. I worked hard while I was there. I was not on any medication while I was working at Burwood. I'm not sure I would have been able to work like I did if I was on the medication. I would take any overtime or extra shifts they asked me to do. While working at Burwood, I became interested in nursing.
137. I rang Aunty GRO-B-7 from Christchurch at one stage, I think it was when I was still working in the kitchen at Burwood. She was still at the family home. When I called her, it was obvious she was still being abused.
138. I paid for GRO-B-7 to come to Christchurch by boat. I don't think she told them she was leaving. Then the two of us went fruit picking together for a season. Afterwards she went to Auckland and I went to study nursing and got myself a career.

Nursing

139. It took me a long time to do nursing. I flew through the hands-on side of the course, but I wasn't very good at the written side of things. I had to do three summer schools.

140. I finished nursing and did an endorsement in geriatrics in Palmerston North. While I was there, we had to live in the nurses home for the first two years. I love old people. Some of them have gone through things people just do not even think about. I can pick those people out.

141. I was going down to Wellington then and mixing with the gay community. One of my biggest regrets is not coming out as gay then. But then I wouldn't have my children, so it is not really a regret.

Back in Levin

142. I think I went back to Levin where I met GRO-B-11, my ex-husband and had my babies.

GRO-C

144. None of my other siblings came back to Levin. It didn't worry me coming back. I was about 23 when I had my first child, then GRO-B-11 and I got married and the other three children were born. I had my two older boys and then my daughter GRO-B-12. My youngest boy GRO-S B-13 16 years younger than GRO-B-12.

Bringing charges against Him

145. I never saw GRO-B-1 when I returned to Levin. But I did see Him on the street. I just used to stare Him out. He used to make me physically sick because he was so gross.

146. GRO-B-7 and I had been talking and I went to visit her in Australia. She moved there when she was 16. You didn't need a passport in those days, and she didn't have

to tell anybody. We got talking during that visit and admitted out loud to each other what had happened to us growing up.

147. It is a bit of a joke between GRO-B-7 and I that I tried to shoot him. I remember saying to her I don't know why they put me away and no one else. GRO-B-5 denies that the shooting incident happened, but the other girls know it did.

148. When I came to bring charges against Him with my sister, the police officer in charge of the case was Mr Hudepohl.

149. When He was arrested, he worked for GRO-B's in Levin. The police officer let me know he was arresting Him so I could go down and watch. It was good to watch, and He knew I was watching.

150. He never married, but He did have a couple of kids.

151. Unfortunately the case never went ahead. The reason the Courts gave was that He was sick and close to the end of his life. He is dead now.

Family

152. In later years I told my children what happened to me and about the abuse I have survived.

153. My children love me to bits. One of my boys lives four houses down the road from me and is round here every night. Another is in Australia; he has been in the army since school. He wanted me to go and live with him in a cottage over there, but that meant I couldn't see my other two boys. I feel blessed with all my grandchildren.

154. Through the years my house has been a place for children in the community to come and live when they are having problems at home. A bit of a drop in centre for local boys. There are three boys who come around for coffee every week. My kid's friends put me on a pedestal because I looked after them when they needed it. It wasn't much really, I just gave them food and a bed. I created a safe space where anyone was welcome if they did not feel safe at home.

Health

155. I first got sick about five years ago. We didn't know what was wrong. We found out eventually that I had an overactive thyroid and cancer cells on my vocal cords. It plays havoc with you.

156. I got sick on a job when I was nursing, I don't know how I got home, or got to hospital. After that they found I have a brain aneurysm.

157. I also had undiagnosed cancer which was discovered few years ago. I have had one breast removed on 12 March 2020 and the other one removed at the start of February 2021. My health in between has been up and down. I have had some massive asthma attacks. I also had bowel cancer a few years before this lot and had some of my bowel removed.

Sexuality

158. I knew I was gay while in care. I am gay today. Not long ago I broke up with my partner who I was in a relationship with for 15 years. I was still married at the time we got together. I didn't class it as an affair because it was with a woman. I have had another relationship break up more recently.

Impact

Not being believed

159. Not being believed about the abuse I suffered has had the biggest impact on my life. If they had just believed what I was saying about Him, I would never have been in care. I would have had a different life. I will be forever grateful to my counsellor, Alexa. She is the first person who ever said 'I believe you' face to face.

160. If someone had believed me then, I would have had a totally different life. I could have done so much. If I was able to get into nursing on my own after my time in care, who knows what I could have done.

161. I believe anything anybody says to me now until it is proved they are telling fibs. I trust people too much because I always believe people. A family member stole my retirement savings for drugs. It was about \$28,000.

Building relationships

162. I don't mix well with people, I would rather my own company. I like to be alone because then people cannot lie to me.

163. I have found it difficult to build relationships, but I still have the same friends today. My friend GRO-C I have known for 50 years and I see her every day.

Anxiety and panic attacks

164. I get anxious and I have panic attacks. I make myself get up if I start thinking about it. Not so much from my time in care, but from experiences I have had since.

165. I think my mental health has been impacted. Sometimes I wonder if I am bi-polar. But I can usually talk myself out of being sad. I walk around the backyard often and force myself to do it if I am feeling sad.

Parenting

166. The way I grew up really affected the way I parented. I have worked all my life to give my children the life I never had. So they never have to live like I did.

167. I make sure my grandchildren (and my children when they were little) get everything. Even things they do not want. I got my daughter's dresses handmade. I never had that, and I thought they were so pretty. I always buy shoes from a proper shop for my grandchildren. I go to Nike or Rebel Sport for them because I know I would have loved those things.

168. I buy things for my boys every year. I do washing and ironing for my sons. I do for my children what I never had.

169. I have been an over-protective parent. When my daughter was younger and GRO-B-11 got up in the night to go to the toilet, I used to get up too. Just to make sure she was safe in her bedroom was near the bathroom. He knew I was there, and I know he would never have touched her. But I just wanted to make sure. I also took the doorknob off so nobody could get in there if she shut the door.

Resilience and determination

170. I have been told I am strong and resilient. I have had a sheer determination throughout my life. I only gave up work three years ago when I became sick. Otherwise I would still be working, and I am 70 now.

Redress

171. My doctor sent me to see a counsellor about 10 years ago, and I saw her twice. I went to see him at one stage when I was feeling really down and depressed. The abuse I had suffered when I was younger by Him had always been on my mind. Through that, ACC pay me \$7,000 every five years, but it's a pittance really. I think I have had two or three payments so far and I always spend the money on my children.

172. I have not been through the historic claims process. My cousin came to see me a while back. I didn't know who he was because my family never mixed. I had to ask him who he was. He asked me if I had put in a claim for all the abuse I have suffered. I didn't know what he was talking about. He asked me because he had.

173. My cousin had been in Epuni. Until then I had never thought about making a claim, then I thought why bother because they won't believe me anyway. Now I have had my private session and spoken with Sandra and the other ladies, I am thinking about it.

174. Since engaging with the Royal Commission, I have started the historic claims process.

Looking forward

175. All those places should be burnt down. When you are putting children into places like I went, all you are doing is breeding criminals.

176. We need to believe children. Children cannot make things up. How does a child come up with what they say has happened to them, if it is not happening to them? Just believe them. If someone had believed me, my life would be totally different. My sisters' lives would have been too.

177. Everybody has a different story, and every kid is vulnerable. Children feed off each other, so what they do not know they soon learn.
178. I believe strongly in the Māori culture. All my children have married Māori partners, so I have a lot to do with the culture. I think Māori are more open and loving. You do not find many Māori who are so far up themselves they are inside out – you get that more with Pākehā. I believe it.
179. I'm not sure if foster homes are the best things. You hear about so much abuse in them. Even though carers are vetted, they still seem to slip through the system.
180. I feel better now because I know somebody believes me. It is a big weight off my shoulders. If someone did what I did today, they would be believed.

Statement of Truth

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and was made by me knowing that it may be used as evidence by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

Signed:

GRO-C

Dated: 22.03.2021