

**Witness Name:** GRO-A-Ms-T

**Statement No:** WITN119001

**Exhibits:** WITN119002 – WITN119009

**Dated:** 12/03/2021

**ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE**

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF** GRO-A-Ms T

I, GRO-A-Ms-T, will say as follows:

**Introduction**

1. My full name is GRO-A-Ms T. I was born on GRO-B 1950 and I am now 70 years old. I am of Ngāti Maru descent.
2. I have four grown children. I am very proud of my children and my mokopuna are my heart.
3. My evidence is about the abuse I experienced as a child at home and while resident at Miramar Girls' Home and Strathmore Girls' (Ferry Road) Home.

*Family and early life*

4. I am from a big family. I am the second to eldest of eight kids. We all grew up in Lower Hutt. My father was British, and my mother was Māori.
5. Two of my brothers did jail. The youngest did most of the borstals back in the day. He has been dead now for 30 odd years. He was killed in car accident. He was married one week and dead the next. He was very happy go lucky. A likeable crook. He had children. I loved him very much. I have a warmth when I think about him.

6. I also have a great warmth when I think about my other brother. We've always stayed connected. He's done a lot of jail – for armed robbery mainly as well as drug importing. He ended up doing a lot of years in jail. Now that he is in his more mature years of life, it has been a good 10 years, maybe longer, that he has stayed clean. He has become very spiritual. We have spoken of our childhood, both of us with great sadness.
7. My older sister and I were sent back to live with my grandparents from a young age. We lived there until we were five, then came back to Mum and Dad. We didn't really speak English.
8. By the age of 5 I couldn't speak English, I was only speaking Te Reo. I don't know it now, I've forgotten it. We weren't allowed to speak it at my parents. Mum was fluent. She couldn't speak it because of Dad. Nobody spoke Te Reo around me. This was in the early 50s when there weren't many Māori in Wellington. They hit more in the late '50s and '60s when factories were opening.
9. I understand back in the '50s it was difficult for my parents to get housing because of Mum being Māori and my father being Pākehā. Since my father was a GRO-B GRO-B, they were granted unit homes where what is now the GRO-B is. It was called transit housing. You went there if you were transiting to get into a state house.
10. We ended up getting a state house in GRO-B. I remember that very clearly. Then I think we moved to GRO-B when I was 12 and my family continue to live there to this day.
11. Mum was from Taranaki, the Ngāti Maru iwi. She was the oldest in a family of about 19 kids.
12. I remember Mum was always a hard-working woman. She was never home; we never saw much of her. I don't remember feeling any love from my Mum, she was very distant. As kids our father taught us to stand at the door and sing a song when she came in. I wondered why that used to happen. In their marriage I think my mother ended up having an affair at some point.
13. Our father had full reign of the house. He hated work; he really hated working especially if the boss was not white. He worked for GRO-B as a fitter and turner for years, on and off. I think that's the only time I remember him having employment.

I remember him always being home, sitting at the table in the kitchen, with bike parts around him. It wasn't a comfy home. He used to sit by the fire and chain smoke. His fingers were dark, there were always cigarette butts on the tile area of the fireplace.

14. My father was a very cruel man. He certainly did a lot of damage. He was the world's best liar. I think they breed them over there in England. He reminds me of the father who hid his daughter under the house. He could be a victim out in the world, the neighbours thought he was cool – but I found out later in life that wasn't quite the truth.
15. He used to insist me, and my sister go march into the hills to go shooting with 303 rifles. We had to march. Nothing he did was with the love of a father. He used and abused all his kids in one way or other - sexually, but a lot of it was also mental. In many ways I still see it in all of us today. We've learnt you've got to be strong within yourself.
16. The house was never very clean. My sister and I used to do our best to look after our younger siblings. There was no one else there to do it. My oldest sister has passed away now.
17. My father used to call us kids black huas and niggers. We were brought up with that, so it was very normal to us. He also used to call us little black bastards. That was how he used to talk. When he and Mum used to have arguments that racist thing would always come up. And she would give it back to him. That was the environment we were raised in.
18. I didn't see love between my parents growing up. I never saw hatred – there was no hitting. But I never saw anything that now, as I have grown up, I have learnt to see as love between a family, husband and wife.
19. We were brought up to mistrust each other very much. My father started it within the house; he would have everyone reporting on each other. He would get the young kids to tell him what the others were doing. If I went to shops the young kids would have to follow and shadow me. He was turning us siblings against each other.

*School*

20. I don't know whether I loved school. I started at  School. I ran into racism there actually. The teachers didn't treat me very nicely.
21. I remember the hanky checks at school. All the Pākehā kids had fancy folded handkerchiefs; I remember I always had a bit of rag. I always felt at school that we never fitted in. I was treated as the dirty little girl. 'Don't go by her she's got fleas; don't go by her she smells'.
22. There was only one nice teacher, Mr Keenan. He told the kids in the class to stop picking on me. I nussed off one day, I remember that I was going to kill them all in the class.
23. I remember Mr Keenan because he was such a nice teacher. When he was leaving the school, I took him a box of chocolates, I think to say thank you. But I felt too ashamed to give them to him. I felt they would be dirty. I felt that about myself. Anything that I touched. So, I went outside and hid the chocolates until I could be by myself and quickly put them in his hand then run away.
24. I stayed at  until I went to . Mum still wanted my sister and I to go to a good college. Or that's what she said. She wanted us to learn things.
25. I think Mum felt proud she got us into  and bought us all the uniforms – it cost a lot back in the day. But I didn't feel much encouragement from her. I think it was maybe her way to make up for things. This is my way of looking back at things - why did we end up with such a shit bag father? But then you learn the world is full of shitbag fathers.
26. For me it didn't work. I played up and didn't fit in. My sister did her best to fit in. I got expelled. She left because she chose to, but I don't think she really fitted in either. My older sister always played the good girl, she wouldn't swear. Whereas I always played the shit. I couldn't take what she did. She would take it, whereas I would get in and bash them.
27. I got expelled because of a bit of that, at 13. So, I was barely at school. I wasn't at  for long. I couldn't learn, when I think back now, I wanted to. I wanted to be like everyone else but couldn't. I was extremely anxious all the time. I didn't know if my father would be outside the school. It was like I was living

two lives - Mum wanted us to go to a nice ladies' college, on the other hand I was living a life that was hell for any young girl to go through.

*Abuse by father*

28. My father started with me when I was young. I think around 4 or 5. He just did all sorts of things to me. When I was growing up. He used to molest me with his hands for many years. He would tell me I was daddy's girl, give me lollies. He wouldn't give the other kids lollies.
29. That's what I thought, but it turns out he was doing the same back to them. I didn't know at time he was doing it to the others. I didn't find out it was happening to my other siblings until I was in my 30s.
30. I remember most of my life I had to sleep with my father in his bed. Most of us kids didn't have our own beds. Pretty much all my life he had his way. He would tell ghost stories; we would be very frightened of spookies and all that when we were young. He would get all the kids in one room huddled together then do what he was doing to me.
31. When I was a very early 13, my brother saw what he was doing to me. He remembered me screaming to stop it. When I ran away and ended up being put in a home, our father beat him. He was really badly beaten and didn't go to school for a few months. That was the rage my brother carried through his life.
32. I think the sexual abuse got worse as I got older. It was very much in the mind; my father would put the fear in your mind. As I developed, I started thinking this had to stop, that it was wrong. I just hated him. Everything about him coming anywhere near me.
33. That's when he'd be threatening, 'if you've got a boyfriend, another boy'. He'd get on the school bus and humiliate me. We'd get on a bus at one stop, he'd get on a stop further up. He would tell everyone I was a little slut and empty my bag out in front of everyone. I was 12 or 13 when this happened.
34. I was desperate to stop what he was doing. When I told my mother later in life, she didn't want a bar of it. Even though I know that she knew. I never spoke to her about it. She quite possibly could have seen what was going on. I would like to think in my heart she didn't see. But I know that she knew.

*Running away*

35. It got too much when I was 13. I had to run. I heard about social welfare, that they helped you – it was either 'go to social welfare or the nuns and they'll help you'. I headed along the road and went to social welfare in Lower Hutt.
36. I got talking to a lady there, she wouldn't have a bar of me. She told me I was lying. I told her my father was interfering with me. I asked her to help me. I probably told her he was being rude to me. I tried to say something. She kicked me out and told me to get out. She called me a liar. There is a note on my social welfare saying that I went to the the Lower Hutt Child Welfare office in November 1964 to complain about my father [WITN119002].
37. I remember a girl at school who was there one day and never came back. The police came one day, and I found out she gassed herself at a house. I wished I knew where it was so I could do it myself. If there was nowhere for me to be, I didn't want to be there.
38. I understand once I got removed, my older sister started working at a place that made electric blankets. My mother was instrumental in getting her out of the house. But then there were all the other kids – six of them. When I was down in Christchurch, I used to think about those kids every day. I never dared say anything.
39. I ran away at about 14. I think it was a Friday, with a girl called [GRO-B] She was a lovely young girl but didn't want to be at home. I never told her why I was running away. I think we spent one night at bus stop in Newtown. The next night we ended up in Petone. We met about four guys who had a flat somewhere in Petone. They invited us back to their flat. To me, they looked after me I had no sexual contact. But my friend did. I still had my school uniform on and had been reported missing.
40. I remember Sergeant Frost came along; there I was very identifiable when I look back now. He asked me my name, I told him. I was taken to Petone police station. I told the policeman why I ran away, [GRO-C]  
[GRO-C] [GRO-C-1-Social Worker] She became case manager for me. The police made a complaint to Child Welfare about me running away on 4 April 1965. The complaint document records that I told police about my father sexually abusing me [WITN119003].

41. I remember GRO-C-Social  
Worker asked me all these questions. I told her everything. I wasn't believed though and my mother defended my father. My mother said I was no good and I was a 'boy chaser' always looking for boys.
42. We stayed the night in the police cells.
43. I ended up being taken to Miramar. My friend got picked up by her Mum. I would have been saying I didn't want to go home.

### **Miramar Girls' Home**

44. I got taken to Miramar. My records show that I was admitted on 9 April 1965 under a police complaint of not being under proper control [WITN119004]. I'm sure I came across a letter the other day that said they thought my story about my father was not the truth and that I needed to go into training. They thought something was wrong with me. I've never read the files. I've taken them out for burning.
45. Nothing was explained to me when I was taken to Miramar. I would have gone to the moon if it meant I didn't have to go back home. I didn't know where I was going, I can't remember how I got there or who took me.
46. I remember when I got there I was locked up and put in a cell. I stayed there until I went to Court. When I arrived at Miramar, I was still in my school uniform. After that I had to wear their clothing. I was given nothing – no shower, no medical.
47. I'm not sure how long I was in the cell. I remember I had one visit from my mother when I was there. She wanted to know why I told lies and was causing trouble at home. I remember her using words like I should think about everybody.

### *Secure*

48. The cell was horrible. It just had a bed in it, and maybe a potty. No one came near me. No one came to see if I was alright. They only came down to bring me food. Nobody mentioned what was happening to me. I never saw welfare or anything like that.
49. I can still remember a really creepy guy who was in there. He brought me a meal once. It was the way he was looking at me. He didn't do anything to me. But there was something about him that made me back into the corner of the bed.

50. I made friends with a girl through the wall when I was in secure. I don't know what she was in there for. Her and I ran away from Miramar together. We were not very good at it – we got caught by the same cop again. I can't really remember how it was, we had an opportunity and were going to do it regardless.

51. I can't remember every tiny detail now; I remember the bigger picture.

52. There was a matron there – Tucker or Taylor. Something like that. An old lady from memory. She was nice. But anyone who was kind to me would have seemed very nice, because no one was nice to me as a child.

### *Court*

53. I went to the then Children's Court in Lower Hutt from Miramar. I can just remember going into the courtroom and my father in there with all these medals on. I reckon they'd be fake. He had a black beret with a British symbol up top and was carrying a bible.

54. I remember that creep the magistrate up behind the desk. His name was Mr GRO-B He called me a juvenile delinquent and a liar. How could I tell such filthy lies about my father. He told me I was lower than the earth itself. Those words I do remember. Anything else I don't.

55. The magistrate made me feel full of hatred. I really felt like no one cared.

56. I was made a ward of the state in that hearing that day, 9 April 1965 [WITN119005]. Having now seen my social welfare files, I know that I was committed to the care of the Superintendent of Child Welfare as a 'delinquent child and was not under proper control' [WITN119006].

57. I can't remember if a social worker was with me. I was taken back to Miramar and then locked up again. I stayed there until GRO-C-Social  
Worker, my case manager, came and I'm sure she accompanied me on the plane. I was absolutely petrified because I had never been on a plane. I didn't know where I was going. No one said anything to me.

### **Strathmore Girls' Home**

58. I think it was night-time when I arrived in Christchurch and was taken to Strathmore Girls' Home on Ferry Road. I was absolutely terrified as I had never been on a plane.



59. I was at Strathmore Girls' Home for about a year.

### *Arrival*

60. The house was huge and full of teenage girls, my age and older.

61. There were no procedures in place when I arrived. I never saw a doctor or anybody. I remember waiting to be placed into a school.

### *Staff*

62. I remember the matron – Mrs GRO-B. She was a bit of a dragon.

63. Then another staff member – Mrs GRO-B<sub>7</sub>, she was horrible, a real bitch. She was mean, one of those women who always had an apron on, and she was always jangling her keys. Her whole demeanour was 'I'm impatient, move'. We were all terrified of her.

64. Mrs GRO-B-7 was very physically abusive. She was like a hitwoman. She was the punisher. If you were going to get locked up, she would be the one dragging you. She was a very strong woman. We were all frightened of Mrs GRO-B-7

65. She would pin you up against a wall if you got smart or if you said something like a shirt didn't fit you. I got pinned up quite a few times. It was for things like not folding the laundry correctly, not concentrating on where the lockers were, not putting knickers or bras away properly. Everything had to be in certain cubby holes.

66. There was the old cook. I think her name was Mrs GRO-B-8. She was like a little gestapo. She ruled that kitchen with an iron rod. You knew if you let a pot boil too much she'd hit you over the head. It happened a lot. She was always giving you a whack with a frying pan or a lid - anything in her kitchen. We were in there helping to do the vegetables. But even that was better than putting up with being abused by my father.

67. I had heaps of knocks from working with the cook in the kitchen. I felt like putting my head in a pot one day. It was very, very painful. You'd be hearing a buzz in your ears from the whack for a lot of time afterwards. All the staff were around when it happened, so we just thought it was normal. It was the norm to be treated like that.

68. The staff were all European. I felt discrimination from Mrs GRO-B-7 I think she had overlays of prejudice. I can't recall if she ever said anything. I just remember how mean she was. Her and the cook.

69. Installing fear was a major thing for the staff in those homes.

*Other residents*

70. The age range of girls at the home was from 13 to maybe 17 or 18. I think we were mainly Māori.

71. The other girls all came from sad backgrounds as well. Although one hadn't, her name was GRO-B-1 I understand she went on to Burwood and then GRO-D  
GRO-D She was a beautiful, intelligent girl.

72. I can remember one night, Mrs GRO-B-7 was going to teach us a lesson, and made us shave our hair off. GRO-B-1 put up a huge fight and ended up in a cell. I can still remember the thumping and banging. There were 2 secure cells. They were padded cells. I never saw GRO-B-1 again after that. But I understand she went to Burwood. That thumping noise wasn't unusual to hear from the secure cells. Everyone was getting locked up at some stage.

73. I can't remember all the names of the other girls. I also remember GRO-B-2  
She was a hard case. I understand most of them are dead now.

74. There were some girls who were brought up able to play music and sing with a guitar. They would spend a lot of time singing together. There was a sisterhood in there.

75. There was a hierarchy amongst the girls. Some were tougher than others. I could look after myself by then but I wasn't that high up the hierarchy. I was probably in the middle somewhere – certainly not at the bottom.

76. When I have reflected back over life, it's clear to me that some of the girls in there had a life before being in there. They had gone out and had relationships with people – experiences in life I hadn't yet. So they knew how to protect themselves.

77. There was some violence between the girls. We all had our punch ups. Some girls would get very physical and you had to defend yourself. If you couldn't, you had to learn quickly.

78. The staff knew when girls were having fights, absolutely. You'd see them standing by the door when it was happening.
79. Sometimes young children would be brought in during the middle of the night. Us girls would have to get up and give the kids a bath when they came in. They were little, children under five. I can remember doing it a couple of times.
80. We never saw the young children during the day but we knew they were there. I think they slept at the house as well, in a different area. Maybe in the staff quarter. I don't know if they were there long. You would see them when they first came through doors, then I can't remember seeing them after that. I suppose they were there until they were placed in another home.
81. Some girls from GRO-B turned up black and blue. They told us the nuns beat them up. I wondered how this could have happened back then. As an adult though I know the Church can be extremely cruel.

#### *Daily Life*

82. The day would start with hearing the call 'get up!' and you could hear the keys jangling and coming as staff approached. Staff would say things like 'this is not a holiday resort'.
83. We would only get so long to then have a wash. At a certain time we had to get to the breakfast table. But if you were on breakfast duties you had to get up very early to make toast and porridge and set the table. Then we would wash the dishes. I don't think there was a dishwasher - we were the dishwashers.
84. After that, nothing happened. I can't really remember anything. Just going into the big room in the house.
85. We had to do a lot of work. We did all the gardening – I remember being out there raking, scrubbing concrete drives, scrubbing steps. We had to do a lot of scrubbing. The outside of the home was really beautiful and immaculate. We spent most of our time maintaining that home like slaves.
86. We would sit around at the home if we were not working. Some of the girls would sit there and sing. We sometimes went for outings in a big van to the beach. Not very often. We would never go to the movies or anything like that. Most of us never left the premises. We were there all the time.

87. Most of us got up to all sorts of mischief. But we weren't caught.

88. I stole some fruit once by making a stick with a hook on it. I could fit it through the kitchen window to pinch fruit – pears and apples. We were so hungry. I think I was caught once.

### *Education*

89. I went to [GRO-B] High School while I was at Strathmore. It was a waste of time sending me there. My brain was not going to absorb anything.

90. I remember biking to school. I can't remember if I had a lot of time at [GRO-B]. It wasn't a requirement to go to school while at the home. A lot of girls didn't go to school when they should have been at school.

91. I remember a science teacher talking about the stamen and stuff. It would do my mind in. I would start banging my pencil on the desk. I was just very angry and didn't want to know about it. I would get made to stand in the hallway.

92. At Strathmore itself there was no education at all. There were no cultural activities.

93. The only thing I can remember was the lovely PE teacher. She brought a sewing machine and taught us girls how to sew. There was nothing else.

### *Punishments*

94. If you *really* didn't do as you were told, you would get locked up in the secure cells.

95. There was one thing that always petrified me, which was that they would put a pressure hose on you. I never saw it, but I remember being told this by other girls. It has very much stuck in my mind.

96. Hair cutting was also a form of punishment. It was a 'cut the mane off' type of thing. They would cut our hair like a boy's haircut – short back and sides. They would especially use it if we were slacking off on duties or getting mouthy. I think I got it once for pinching fruit through the window. Mrs [GRO-B-7] would do it. I was lucky I never had my hair cut really short.

97. Getting the haircut was another form of rape really. I just sat there. Some of the girls would put up a hell of a fight.

98. Some of the girls were just devastated by the hair cutting. The cuts they got were hideous. Especially [GRO-B-1] – she had honey blonde hair with a beautiful curl to

it. I can understand how the hair cutting would have made her feel. She was a young, very intelligent teenager. She was there because she ran away with her boyfriend. Her parents must have said to put her in the home.

99. It all changed for GRO-B-1 there. She wouldn't go along with it like rest of us did. She knew it was wrong from a very early age. So every time she fought, she got deeper in the system. The system grabbed her a bit more. She ended up at Burwood Hospital.

#### *Threat of Burwood Hospital*

100. You didn't want to go to Burwood Hospital. That was the place you heard was not a good place. I remember just quivering at the thought of Burwood. They used it as a threat – 'shut your mouth GRO-A-Ms-T, do you want to go to Burwood?'. I went with the flow of things there. I certainly had moments where I reached boiling point, but the threat of Burwood shut it down.

101. All of us got threatened with Burwood. A lot of girls who were in Strathmore with me did end up there. GRO-B-1 is the one that stands out.

102. I think when I look back all those girls wanted to do was get out of there. You knew to get out of there you had to tow the line. If you started to get staff up in arms against you, you would go to Burwood. No one wanted to.

103. We heard stories about what happened at Burwood. That you were always getting locked up and beaten there. Some of the girls had moved around different institutions and would tell us what happened to other girls. We heard those places were the final straw. If I had ended up in Burwood I probably would have taken a different course in life.

#### *Psychological abuse*

104. There were other forms of abuse at Strathmore – psychological and emotional. You were constantly fed fear. It was a place of mental torture. I was called a liar quite often at the home.

105. I remember the cook used to say things to us like 'you're all rotten little swines'.

106. When I reflect back on life at the home, it was a place of mental torture. It was a place where young girls were just dragged around. It was a horrible, horrible place.

*Visit from father*

107. One time, I had a visit from my father when I was down there. He got me to write a letter saying I'd lied so I could get out. I was desperate to get out, I would have done anything. So I wrote the letter.
108. How this led to him being able to see me in Christchurch I'm not sure. All I know is he came for a visit and was able to take me out. He had a hotel room in the city. He took me back there and molested me.
109. My father was somehow allowed to come to Christchurch and take me out. There is a record in my file dated 6 April 1966 of him visiting me at the home [WITN119007]. Having seen my file, I know that social welfare were aware of the allegations against my father and believed them. A letter dated 3 August 1965 from the Superintendent of Child Welfare to the Minister in Charge of the Child Welfare Division states:

Mr GRO-B-3 is said to be irrational and mentally unbalanced and I have little doubt that his daughter's allegations of misconduct have some basis in fact. Her good progress since her removal from home supports the belief that her former behaviour had its roots in unhappiness at home. [WITN119008].

110. When I told the staff they told me I was a liar. You just shut up when you are told that. The staff knew my story. I refused to see my father after that.

*Contact with family*

111. My mother never came down as far as I can remember.
112. I wrote to my family. I wrote to my father's sister in England and told her what he had done. He made me look like a liar there. I think she believed me though. She didn't have any communication with him after that. It made me feel like everything I say causes trouble.
113. I had no contact with my siblings. They never wrote me letters. It was horrible being away from my siblings. I worried about them all the time. Who was going to be looking after them? I didn't know what was going on at home and I feared for their safety with my father around. I later learnt I was right to be fearful.

*Dentist*

114. I was begging to see the dentist because I was in pain. I had an abscess, and my face was swollen. It was very painful. It took ages to get it looked at. The lovely PE teacher would let me draw on her cigarette because the nicotine helped with the pain.
115. I had to beg to see a dentist. They sent me to see a psychopath. He was calling me a little black thing on the chair. He completely destroyed my teeth, he filled them up with big black fillings. He was a monster.
116. The dentist looked like one of those dentists you see in those Nazi movies. He was a horrible person, a very cruel man. I think he treated me like he did because he knew I was from social welfare.
117. I never had any painkillers at the dentist. I would be paralysed with pain and he wouldn't give me anything. He would say things like 'you're meant to be a hard little bitch, aren't you?'. I wouldn't say too much because my experience of talking made me think he might hurt me more. I had to go back to see him, and it was the same type of thing.
118. Going to see dentists through my life, they would be horrified by my black teeth and ask why they were like that. I have no evidence of it, but I'm pretty sure he destroyed my teeth. I never said anything to anybody about it.

*Social worker visits*

119. I don't recall any visits from a social worker while I was in the home.

*Leaving*

120. I think I was 15 when I finally left Strathmore for good. I remember wearing a suit I made myself very proudly. But I can't remember how that day was for me. Probably because my mind was out of that environment.

**Family Home (Christchurch)**

121. I used to go to the Catholic Church with a family in Christchurch while I was at Strathmore. Through this, social welfare people were able to get me into a family home with them. The family were really religious. I used to go with them to the

Cathedral in Christchurch. I learnt a lot about the bible and living life as a Christian. I really enjoyed it.

122. I'm not sure why I went to this family home in the first place. I don't remember anyone explaining anything to me back then about what was happening in my life. I think I was with them maybe three to six months.
123. I can't remember their names. They had their own children as well – a daughter and a son who were older than me. They were going to be good influences on me. There was also a younger girl.
124. They were a beautiful family when I think back about them as an adult. They always had breakfast, lunch and dinner together. Everything was done in fear and grace.
125. I didn't feel comfortable there and I never felt safe. I had never been in a home environment like that. The mother was extremely kind which made me suspicious. I didn't know how to come out of myself to slowly trust people. I think I might have told the mother about what had happened to me, but I can't remember exactly.
126. The father was a very strict father toward his own children. I knew never to put a foot out of line around this man.
127. They were nice people. I blew it in a way myself. I went to the pictures with a boy in the city and let him give me a love bite on my neck. They didn't want a bar of me after that.
128. A social worker came and picked me up and I was taken back to Strathmore. I remember thinking, 'my god I'm back here again'. I can't remember how long I was back there for. I know I did everything I could to get out. I would have back flipped 1,000 times if they wanted me to.
129. There was always a steady stream of girls coming through so there were lots of new people when I went back.

### **Life after leaving**

130. When I left Strathmore for good, I had to go back to my parent's home. I think I really did believe things might be different and change. It didn't work out for me. I thought I was out for good. I didn't know it was meant to be a test. I wasn't aware that Social Welfare had full control of me until I was 21, but I know from my records



that I was discharged from the control of Social Welfare in 1968, when I was 18 [WITN119006].

131. I got myself a job. I loved my job. My mother took all my pay. Life just continued – I went to work during the day and then came home.

132. It was not good being back home. My brothers and sisters didn't know who I was. My parents had told them I died. They honestly thought I'd died. They were all still very young then. So they were all wondering how come [GRO-A-Ms-T] was home when she had died. My father was a master of confusing us.

133. One night my Mum was next door, drinking with the neighbours. I was home with the kids. I think my father may have been next door, or in the lounge. He tried to sexually assault me and there was no way I was going to let that happen. I think I attacked him with a pair of scissors. I was going to kill him. In many ways I regretted that I didn't. I was so enraged.

134. I remember the neighbours and my mother rushing over and calling the police. Then I was taken away by the police. They took me to a family home in Upper Hutt.

135. My records show that I was admitted to this family home at my father's request. [WITN119009] The next thing I knew, once again I was a bad person. My father reckoned I was a nut case. He used to tell everyone I was boy crazy. A Māori woman ran the family home with her husband. They were lovely people.

136. I think I came out of the homes a different person. I'd hated what my father had done to me. I would have rather been dead than have that happen again. Or him be dead. I felt pure hatred and had no tolerance. I was at end of my tether with him.

137. I stayed at that family home for six to eight weeks. It was the beginning of my journey to finding independence. I liked the people there. Her maiden name was [GRO-B]. He was a Dutch man, and worked as a traffic cop.

138. After the family home in Upper Hutt, I stayed at my electrical engineering job. I worked there for quite a few years. I had a good boss. I got myself a flat and started going to a dance hall in the city. I met up with other people.

139. I eventually left the electrical control and engineering company. I did a lot of waitressing around Wellington. I did what every teenager did, I went out drinking and dancing. I had flats all over the place [GRO-B] Street, [GRO-B], [GRO-B] Street.

140. I started working as a support worker in Lower Hutt, which I did for 19 years. I worked in disability, with people who couldn't do things for themselves and needed support and help. I miss it. I worked until I was 67. I'm 70 now.
141. I had to give it up because of my health. I ended up finding out I have cancer while I've been living in the Bay of Plenty, so that's probably why I wasn't feeling my best in Wellington. I often wonder whether I got cancer in my throat because I had so much to say and didn't say it. It was all locked in there.
142. My younger sister charged my father later in life in the late '80s or early '90s. The case went to trial and he got off scot free. [GRO-C-2] and [GRO-C] represented my father. I remember ringing [GRO-C-2] one night and he told me on the phone he was doing his job. [GRO-C]  
[GRO-C] [GRO-C-2] had been my lawyer well before then.
143. My older sister had led me to believe it didn't happen to her as well. My older sister, she was drinking a lot and eating whole cakes of chocolate in Pak'n'Save just after the court case finished. I went to see her, and it broke my heart to find out my father had also abused her. I asked her why she didn't come to court to help, she said she couldn't do it.
144. I had to go to court and give evidence. When the verdict came back they said there was a lack of corroboration. It was devastating. My father became really untouchable. There were 14 other girls – my sister's friends, who had all been molested at some point. A lot of parents wouldn't let their kids come to court. My older sister wasn't involved in this trial.
145. I had gone my own way in life and so had my own family. It broke my heart to have that validation the sexual abuse had also been happening to my sisters. I had so much anger towards social welfare and the magistrate.

## Impact

### *Psychological damage*

146. I can trace a lot of psychological damage to my time at the girls' home. For many years after when I came out, I would still see the girls' home in the present. Sometimes it is still within me.

147. Sometimes you don't want to put a foot wrong and then think why do you let your life get so trapped like that. I lived in fear as a child then was put into this environment built on total fear. It's like being lifted off the table and put into a cage of lions. Every day you're fearful because you don't know what's happening next and you don't know where you fit in.
148. There was no one around to just to be kind and listen to me while I was growing up. To say 'I understand'. I never had any of that. As I get older I still think I've lived quite an isolated life. I am quite mistrustful and I hate being that way. I am always waiting for something to happen. My brain convinces me something will happen.
149. I didn't realise at the time, but my fears about what my father might be doing to my siblings while I was in Christchurch caused a lot of built up stress. It was a lot of stress for a young girl to be dealing with. Later in life you realise you've been carrying all of this.
150. I was so humiliated and lost in everything. I felt that I couldn't tell the truth to anyone. That's why I feel so humiliated today. I wonder why if others can say it, why can't I say it to anyone. I haven't been able to do that. The first time I told my story was to the Confidential Listening and Assistance Service (CLAS). And then now to this Inquiry. I've never been able to say my story to anybody before now.
151. Why can't I get to a mountain top and shout it? I feel the shame in my heart. I walk around and try to grab the proudness within me. Inside of me in my heart, it has been so damaged and broken because no one believed me when I was young. And I've had to walk around with that all my life.

#### *PTSD*

152. When I was a support worker, I wasn't sleeping for a couple of weeks. I had been having terrible flashbacks. I could smell my father. I had no idea what was going on. I remember thinking I dare not tell anyone though. I was thinking about leaving my job and running away. I was having major panic attacks.
153. One day at work I killed a mouse in the bath with a fly swat. There was a mouse that had been irritating me for ages, and I got it. It was only a mouse but you'd think I'd murdered a person. I had massive guilt. My brain wasn't thinking.
154. The next morning while I tended to my duties, I knew something was wrong. I knew then I wasn't coping. I had a long shift ahead of me. My sister was part of the

same company. I called her and said something was wrong, that I couldn't work that day. I was a senior support worker. I couldn't tell her as well, I was so ashamed to say these are the thoughts I'm having. So I tried to harden it up.

155. I went home and was becoming quite unwell. I was fearful and jumping. I went to a doctor who kept saying 'oh I think it's a mental problem'. It went on for a few weeks. I was going to the doctor every other day because I didn't know where to go. I needed to feel safe.

156. I went to see a psychiatrist at a place in Naenae. She was absolutely lovely. I started talking to her and from the first visit it started to calm down. I was diagnosed with PTSD. I know when it is happening to me now. I know to take deep breaths. But I still don't have a lot of tools to cope with it.

### *Relationships*

157. I loved my husband with all my heart. Things started going rocky after maybe 10 years in.

158. I did love my husband, but he broke my heart. He passed away 18 years ago now. I would never trust another partner in my life, ever. It took a lot of trust for me to marry someone in the first place. I trusted him with all my heart.

159. For me personally, every person I have had in my life that I have had feelings for has betrayed me. I protect myself at all costs now. I don't let anyone near my front door step.

160. I don't trust myself to be able to make those sorts of decisions about what is good for me. I am so suspicious of men that the sweetest person to me could actually be the complete opposite. Whereas someone who swears and has tattoos could be perfect.

161. I look at my son's partner's family and I don't see the fractures in them. They know how to turn around and talk about memories of their children when they were young. Where they have travelled together – England, China. Their lives have been together and connected. When you come from a background like I have, and a marriage like I had as well, you realise you are in the presence of real decency with those kinds of people. They haven't harmed each other – no doubt they've had their bridges to cross. But to me that's true love. Trust probably doesn't come into their minds, it's just there.

*Loss of cultural identity*

162. I've always felt a loss of a sense of cultural identity.
163. I am one of the elders now in my iwi yet I don't have the language. That is quite humiliating for me. I don't have the concentration to be able to learn now.
164. I have <sup>GR</sup><sub>O-B</sub> children. They are all great, good kids. I don't believe it's been easy for them having a Mum like me. I probably held them back a lot because of my own fears. In some regards I wrapped them up in cotton wool.
165. I've never told my kids about any of the abuse I suffered from my father. I think they suspect to some extent. They just know my family is very divided. How do you tell your kids that? I want to. But I can't - I would hate them to carry any of that filth on them. People say it's not your fault and I know that, I understand they say you are a survivor not a victim. But it still leaves a blanket on you.

*Spirituality and strength*

166. All of my trauma has deepened my heart. I am spiritual and believe there has to be something there on my shoulder, always. That's what I truly believe. I could have seen myself heading another way when I was younger. But I didn't want to go down that road – to prison and that kind of thing.
167. Coming where I came from, I look at my children like if only you knew how blessed I see your lives. And how proud I am - for me to be their Mum and they've done so well. I can't get over that. Sometimes I think I don't deserve it. I have hauntingly mixed emotions. I've never felt good enough for me, let alone to have these children doing so well and then my grandchildren.
168. You don't realise these journeys you have gone on and survived while it is happening. Because all you are doing the whole time is surviving. Inside of me on another side there is a lion. And that's how I've gotten through life, copying people and trying different ways of getting through. So I can be part of this life.

**Redress***CLAS*

169. The first person I told about the abuse I suffered from my father was Judge Henwood during CLAS. It took years to get to that point and to have that meeting

with her. I contacted them when I saw it advertised and thought it might be my chance. I'd always thought I wanted to do something about it.

170. I thought I was done a terrible injustice by the law itself. There was a lawyer in Auckland who dealt with a lot of young people falsely accused of things. I knew about him but I didn't do anything. Then the next thing I knew he was dying.

171. So when I saw CLAS, I thought 'right I am going to talk about it. They are the people I needed to say it to'. The system had wronged me.

*Historic Claims and receiving social welfare file*

172. No one explained the historic claims process to me. I had two ladies from the Ministry of Social Development meet with me quite a while after I spoke to Judge Henwood. They came out to Lower Hutt. They were absolutely hopeless and seemed to have no idea. They were there to do a job and that was it. They lacked heart. They lacked knowledge and being able to do something.

173. Those women had the perfect opportunity with me being there to ask me anything. But they didn't, it was just to say they believed me and that I was brave – 'let's move on'. So I was really angry about that once again. I really don't know what the purpose of that meeting was. It was a waste of time. It's not what people want to hear.

174. I got my social welfare file as a result of speaking with CLAS. I think my file was delivered to me by courier. There was no explanation of how to make sense of the file. I wondered why so much of it was blacked out. How are you meant to get the flow of it from that? I ended up severely depressed after receiving my file.

175. After looking at my file I realised the things my father had said about me. How he had got different women he was having affairs with to rubbish me. I could only read a little of my file. It sickened me. It was lies and lies and lies. I was clearly seen as this no good person. I was trouble. It was like a horror story. When I first saw it I was frozen in fear after the first couple of pages. I thought, 'My God this has all been written about me and I've had no say'. I got very, very angry. I've had my file sitting there for about five years, and then I turned it into compost.

176. I went through the fast track system with Historic Claims. They sent me a letter offering \$20k which also said if I took the money, my mouth would have to be closed forever and there would be no further redress. I think the letter also said my story

was believed and the government would release an apology to all of us. I told them to shut it. Money was not what this whole thing was about. I was seeking justice for my spirit, my heart.

177. Then someone called me from the Historic Claims financial side – I'm sure she was a Māori girl. I know she was a social worker. She said 'what do you want from us? What else do you expect us to do?' And that was the end of it. I just thought, 'you rude cow'.

178. At the time I thought things might change for me. There was so much wrong so I thought I wouldn't do anything until there was a change of government. I thought there might be something exactly like what is happening now with the Royal Commission.

### **Looking forward**

179. I would get rid of Oranga Tamariki for a start. They do more damage than good. But in same breath I know places have to exist for children to be taken to that must be safe. A lot of those places aren't safe. Nothing has changed. In many ways it has almost become worse. People are less caring now, more lost. Family units are more broken down. They really need safe places. I don't know how they will look. I don't think you'll find them in institutions, that's for sure.

180. When places are open up to care for young children, and they put the culture in the places, it changes the kids. It gives them identity. When you are brought up as I was, with a Pākehā father and Māori mother, we were told and felt like we were half cast idiots. If you can bring cultures into these places it would make such a difference, no matter what ethnicity the child is.

181. I have often thought, if I was 20 or 30 years younger I would love to open a place just to be able to help. Especially for young ones from sexually abused backgrounds. It takes years of unravelling. It's not only your body that gets stripped, it's your mind as well.

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

12. 3. 2021