

Witness Name: Hemi Thomas McCallum
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ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HEMI THOMAS McCALLUM

I, Hemi Thomas McCallum, states as follows:

Introduction

1. My fill name is Hemi Thomas McCallum, I am currently 58 years old born on the GRO-C of GRO-C 1963 in Invercargill. I currently live in Christchurch.
2. I have recently been diagnosed with Pancreatic cancer and I have been told by doctors that I only have a few months left to live.
3. It is therefore very important to me to be able to have my story documented as I had wanted to write a book but that is not going to happen.
4. My Iwi is Ngāi Tahu, that comes from my father's Iwi and Ngāpuhi, which was my mother's Iwi.
5. This statement is the story of my early life and the effects that the bad things that happened to me while in care have had on my life.

Early Life

6. I was the youngest of seven children, my parents were GRO-B & GRO-B. We lived in GRO-C Street in Invercargill.
7. We were all put in care early in life because of the once were warrior's lifestyle my parents led. My father was very violent towards my mother and my siblings, but he never touched me.
8. I understand that we were put in care and I accept that it was necessary. I understand that I was taken from my parents under a warrant and placed in care.
9. I was made a ward of the state when I was two years old, I was sent to health camps in Southland because I was malnourished and then fostered out.
10. I have clear memories of my life from a very young age, so I am able to detail what I recall.
11. When I was first fostered out, I remember my first welfare officer was a Miss Allen, she was good to me.
12. I remember I cried uncontrollably for the first three months because I just wanted to be with my own flesh and blood. Because of this I could not and would not get with the families I was placed with.
13. I believe I was in around 12 foster homes between two years and nine years old.
14. The only contact I had with family while in care was that I would get to meet with my mother and brothers and sisters once a year at my Auntie GRO-B's place.
15. I know that there was no family that me or my brothers and sisters could have been placed with because they all lived the lifestyle that my parents did.
16. By the age of six I had admitted defeat and begrudgingly accepted my lot. I became a hard little bastard. Although I was nice on the outside, being taken away from home and put in care had a big effect on me. To take someone off their mother, as

bad as my home situation was, is like taking a kid's heart and throwing it out of the car window and letting trucks drive over it.

17. At that time, I vowed not to cry anymore and not to trust adults or the world in general.

18. I do not recall any abuse or bad treatment in the first foster homes. It wasn't until 1969 that changed.

Time in care

Placement with [GRO-B-1] and [GRO-B-2] in Orawia

19. The worst of my nightmare started when I was about nine years old when I was placed with the [GRO-B-1
GRO-B-2] family in Orawia just north of Tuatapere in Southland. It did not end until I was removed urgently by my social worker four years later in 1973.

20. I had wanted to write a book about my abuse, I would have titled it "Am I going to die today?"

21. There was [GRO-B-1] who worked for the pest destruction board, his wife [GRO-B-2] his daughter [GRO-B-3] who was a few years older than me, and son [GRO-B-4] who was the same age as me but I was very small and he was much bigger than me. They treated their kids like humans. I was treated like a slave.

22. I understand that they had other kids in their care before me, because my sister [GRO-B] was in their care for a period, but she ran away from them.

23. I would refer to [GRO-B-1] as an alcoholic, gambling nutcase.

Physical abuse

24. I was beaten regularly if not on a daily basis by [GRO-B-1]. He would use his fists, kick me with steel capped boots, hit me with hunks of steel, wood, chains, deer antlers, pipes, straps, the vacuum cleaner tube, and dog collars – anything he could get his

hands on. I hated when the dogs got new collars as the new ones hurt more. I had welts from the buckle as well as stab wounds from the pin of the buckle. It looked like I had been shot.

25. GRO-B-1 would often hit me with objects on the legs, shoulders and collar – he would save my head for his feet and hands.

26. He would make me strip off before he smashed me up, I was only allowed to keep my singlet on, like it was a piece of armour.

27. This abuse was almost every day. If he grew tired and was panting from beating me, he would get GRO-B-2 to beat me. If she was too tired or not around, he would get GRO-B-3 to beat me.

28. GRO-B-1 would often shoot at me to scare me. For example, one day he was showing off in front of a group of hunters GRO-B-4 and I were down on the river bank putting bricks on a walkway for them to shoot at, and GRO-B-1 was shooting them out of my hand from 300 yards away with his high-powered rifle.

29. GRO-B-1 always had firearms around because of his job doing pest destruction, he would sometimes fire his shotgun at the ground near my feet, that was really very frightening and added to my belief that he could or eventually would kill me.

30. I wet the bed regularly. If GRO-B-1 found out he would beat me, so I tried to wash and dry the sheets in secret, but he would still find out.

31. GRO-B-1 forced me to fight GRO-B-4, who was much bigger than me. GRO-B-1 never hit GRO-B-4.

Sexual abuse

32. GRO-B-1 and GRO-B-2 never sexually abused me, but I found out later that GRO-B-1 had been raping his daughter and girls that he had fostered.

33. GRO-B-1 and GRO-B-2 mainly fostered girls even when I was there, one girl at a time. They would mysteriously get a problem and then they would be gone.

34. When I look back, it makes sense, as when [GRO-B-1] started spinning out and was being brought home from police for beating people up, [GRO-B-2] would say "be careful [GRO-B-1], as though she had ammunition ready if he wanted to play up [GRO-B-1] never hit [GRO-B-2]

Unpaid labour

35. I was a glorified slave for the family. My regular day would be getting up between six AM, lighting the coal range, cooking breakfast for them all, timing it all so that I would be pouring their tea as they came in to eat, I would then do the dishes afterwards, clean the house and then do my chores - I would have to feed 20 dogs, pigs, chickens, move the cattle, whack a fence down, things like that, all before school time. I would then come home from school and do more chores like chopping wood to fix the house that was covered in bullet holes from [GRO-B-1]'s violence towards me and the animals. My chores were endless.

36. I would do chores on the weekends too, but the good part was that I got some time to hunt for food for myself. I was not fed properly, so I became a brilliant fisherman, great at eeling, and good at pinching sheep and lambs to cook on the fire.

Seclusion

37. I was not allowed inside the house (apart from cooking and doing chores), I had to sleep in an old hut, like a storage shed, that was the size of a prison cell. It only fit a bed.

38. I was never locked inside the hut, because then I would have been protected from [GRO-B]

Psychological abuse

39. [GRO-B-1] was the cruellest man to animals. He would beat them and shoot them and would force me to watch. One day he hit a dog against a trailer until it was pretty much dead, he then threw it on the ground, grabbed his shotgun (which was always

close by) held it like a pistol and shot him at close range. He always shot at close range.

40. A lot of people knew about GRO-B-1. If an animal came on to our property, he would take it over to their house, knock on their door and slit the animals throat so that when they opened their door, they would find that their beloved pet had been killed.
41. GRO-B-1 would never use my name. He would call me the C word, or "black ass". Not being called my name added to the feeling of being worthless.
42. The verbal abuse was constant and being threatened with death happened on a regular basis. My frame of mind while living there was one of terror. GRO-B-1 would threaten to put me "up on the hook" like the sheep when they were slaughtered. GRO-B-1 was always killing animals.
43. I believe a lot of people in the community knew what he was like, everybody seemed terrified of him.
44. There was never any birthday or Christmas for me.

Schooling

45. I was unable to think or concentrate at school because I was always worried about what was going to happen to me when I get home, am I going to die today?
46. In saying that, school was my sanctuary for six hours a day. It was like being let free - I would then act up and be the class clown. Because of my behaviour I would get the cane and the strap regularly.

Visits from social welfare

47. Social welfare visits were all orchestrated, they were a big set up. GRO-B-1 and GRO-B-2 would put on a banquet and finally give us some new clothes to wear. It was a joke. We weren't even allowed to eat any of the food, it was just a prop.
48. The social workers never got the chance to speak to us alone. Abusers design it this way.

49. I believe that regardless of my situation, all my Welfare officers did the best job they could, and I am very grateful to them especially Miss Allen, Mr Bruce and Lucy Sanford.

50. I think that with [GRO-B-1] reputation in the area, the fact that he was often dealt with by the police being drunk or in fights and the fact that the house had bullet holes or shotgun pellet marks everywhere would have raised some concerns.

Reporting the abuse

51. While I was at [GRO-B-1], I definitely did not think I could tell anyone about the abuse, I was so scared that he would kill me and I am not sure that I would have told anyone if they had asked.

52. In 1973 I was sent on my only holiday while I was in care, I spent the Christmas holidays with the [GRO-B-5] family in Riverton. I couldn't believe it, they had kayaks, motorbikes and caravans, and spent every weekend camping, spear fishing, duck shooting – doing all of these fun activities.

53. When we had our first meal, I put a little bit on my plate, enough for a mouse. Mr [GRO-B-5] grabbed a whole piece of meat and put it on my plate. We ate crayfish, oysters and blue cod. It was absolutely magic with the [GRO-B-5]

54. I told their son, [GRO-B], about the abuse and told him not to tell anyone as I thought [GRO-B-1] would kill me. [GRO-B] told his parents who told my social worker Lucy Sanford. She spoke to [GRO-B-1] and told me I was lying but the [GRO-B-5] family didn't accept that and wanted answers. I believe that they agreed to me going back to the [GRO-B-1] [GRO-B-2] s as long as [GRO-B-1] was questioned about my allegations of abuse.

55. Lucy took me back and dropped me off at the [GRO-B-1] [GRO-B-2] s. [GRO-B-1] wasn't home, so she said she would go and visit some other kids then come back to speak to [GRO-B-1]

56. [GRO-B-1] was actually down the road, hiding and watching.

57. As soon as Lucy left, he came flying up the driveway and threw me in the car. He drove at 100 miles an hour to the Tuatapere police Station. He handed Dick Hibbs the Police officer a cashbox I had stolen from Orawia Cement Works.
58. Dick wrote out the details and charged me with burglary, as we left the station GRO-B
1 walked out first and Dick screwed up the paper he filled out, winked at me and threw it in the rubbish bin. Dick knew GRO-B
-1 as he had had to take GRO-B
-1 home after drinking and smashing adults on many occasions.
59. GRO-B
-1 drove back at really high speed and stopped on the way, he said to me "I should get out and kill you, you little cunt". That was what my name was when I was in his care. I was only ever called Hemi or Jimmy (my nickname) when social welfare was present.
60. Lucy arrived back to speak to him and was questioning him, he had notes written on his arm that referred to everything I had ever done wrong there. I'm not sure what Lucy said but he was triggered – he leapt up, was swearing, threatening me with death and about to beat me up. He was so angry he forgot Lucy was even there.
61. Lucy jumped in and intervened – she stood in front of me to protect me and tried to calm things down. Then she got me in her car and we left. She had to stop down the road a bit because she was shaking so much. She burst out crying, she had seen a glimpse of the man I had seen every day for four years.
62. Then she took me back to the GRO-B
5 They had a big talk and I was signed over to them pretty much straight away. The GRO-B-5 really wanted me, they really wanted to help me. That was the day that I was saved. I was 13 years old.

Placement with the [GRO-B-5] in Riverton

63. Life with the [GRO-B-5] was really good, they were a great family. I found it hard to accept their genuine love and honesty.
64. I remember the first cuddle I ever had was from Mr [GRO-B-5] when, it felt very strange because I was not used to that.
65. They were a hands-on family with some grown up children and younger kids. They were always hugging and kissing their parents and vice versa, it was amazing.
66. From there I went to Apirama College and finished school, I never passed any School Certificate exams because my schooling had been so affected by my time at the [GRO-B-1
GRO-B-2] S.
67. I lived with the [GRO-B-5] for the next three years and went to live in Gore when I got a job on the railways.

Life after care

68. I was still living with the [GRO-B-5] when I was discharged from care, I think I was only 15 at the time. Because I had never been in trouble through all of my homes, social welfare made an exception for me.
69. My life took a turn for the worse when I started drinking. I went down a path of my own destruction, I committed a lot of offences, most of which was for violence.
70. I amassed over 70 convictions, 43 of those were for serious assaults.
71. I spent a lot of time in prison in the 1980's for serious violence, I had become what [GRO-B-1] had taught me, a very violent abuser, but never of children.
72. The first time I went to prison was when I was 18.
73. It was in prison that I decided to do something about my anger and violence issues and with the help of NZ Care in Dunedin I completed Stopping Violence programs.

74. I have worked in fishing, the building industry and successfully as a self-employed painter until for many years, I have had the good fortune to meet and work for some very successful and very nice families. I have painted big buildings across the country, such as Bayfair shopping centre in Mt Maunganui, and Invercargill prison. I have recently stopped working because of my diagnosis.

Impacts

75. The impact on me of being placed at the [GRO-B-1
GRO-B-2]s was devastating. I was already emotionally and physically defunct but managed to be reasonably happy in myself.

Violence

76. The violence was what I knew from [GRO-B-1] to be dished out whenever I wanted to men or women in my violent years.

77. My learning through my formative years at the [GRO-B-1
GRO-B-2]s was the daily violence being inflicted on me, fear of death, threats, abuse and neglect, it was what I carried through my relationships with women

78. Alcohol was my vice not drugs, I drank a lot for a long time, that only made things worse.

Trust

79. I have always had trouble trusting adults, I had been let down by my parents, I could not bond with the foster families I was placed with for the first few years and lived a daily hell with the [GRO-B-1
GRO-B-2]s.

80. I did bond with the [GRO-B-5] because they took me in and were so good to me.

Education

81. My education was pretty much non-existent because I could not concentrate at school and achieve because I was so scared of what I would go home to at the [GRO-B-1
GRO-B-2]s each day.

82. This has affected my financial state because of the lack of education and limited opportunities as a result.

Family and relationships

83. I have three boys, one that is in the Chatham's that I do not see and the other two have gravitated to the gangs. That is not what I wanted for them but they naturally fell down that path because of the communities they lived in. I wasn't violent with my kids – I didn't see them when they were growing up.

84. I met my partner [GRO-B-6] eight years ago, we have had our ups and downs, but we both know what each other has been through and understand each other. I know that I am so lucky to have her in my life, she is my rock.

85. Before I met [GRO-B-6] I was pretty much a loner. I didn't want to hurt anybody. By being alone, I don't put anyone in jeopardy or in harm's way, but now I have my head sorted out.

Cultural

86. Although both my parents are Maori, there was no Maori culture at home, so being placed with Pakeha families pretty much all of the time did not have an impact on me.

87. There was no cultural stuff at the [GRO-B-1
GRO-B-2]s, except for [GRO-B-1
-1] showing me how to put a hangi down. That was a good thing that he showed me.

88. Any culture or language that I know I have learnt later in life.

89. I don't feel like I missed out on anything by being brought up Pakeha. I now understand my culture, but I don't really want to be part of it.

Redress

90. I have never put in a claim for any form of compensation from either ACC or Social Welfare, but I want to put a claim in and if any money ever came to my estate as a result, I want GRO-B-6 to get the money and give it to Starship Hospital or to help prevent abuse of kids in care.

Recommendations for the future

91. Before putting kids in the care of strangers, social welfare need to get to know the family properly. They have to live with the person to see how they interact with children on a daily basis.

92. Installing cameras would be helpful, and if the caregiver has nothing to hide, why not? That would have helped me – surely, they would have been asking why there were bullet holes all over the house.

93. I understand that cameras would be against privacy laws, but in this world, I don't see another way. It's impossible to properly screen someone when you tell them when you will be visiting, as abusers will play their silly little games.

94. I also feel that the New Zealand meth epidemic has made things worse and increased the amount of assaults. I see it happening here in Christchurch. If we didn't have that drug in this world, a lot of kids would be better off.

95. In order to prevent kids being taken into care in the first place, we need to hammer this parenting thing in. They are starting to do it in prisons, where a lot of blokes never learnt anything about children or cared about it.

96. Information is also important. The government needs to write the stats down and document everything to understand just how big the problem is.

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: 1 December 2021