

Witness Name: Sharyn Collis

Statement No.: WITN0344001

Exhibits: WITN0344002 – WITN03440013

Dated: 19 March 2021

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SHARYN ANN COLLIS

I, Sharyn Ann Collis, will say as follows: -

- 1 My name is Sharyn Collis, and I was born on GRO-B 1958, I am 62 years old. I have six children and I am now a great grandmother. I am a survivor of Lake Alice.
- 2 I was one of the claimants in the Grant Cameron proceedings and my statement for that is attached to this statement (First Witness Statement for the Grant Cameron Class Action Proceedings dated 07 Jul 1998 “First Witness Statement” [**WITN0344002**]).

Early life

- 3 My parents are GRO-B and Ena Collis. I was born in Napier, but we moved around a lot because of my father’s job. The first home I remember was in GRO-C

- 4 I have two older sisters and two younger brothers; I don't have much to do with them and am not very close to them at all. I was the only one that went to Lake Alice.
- 5 I set out in my statement to Grant Cameron more detail concerning my childhood ("First Witness Statement" paragraphs 6 – 20 [WITN0344002]). Ultimately, I did not have a very nice childhood. I was not close with my mother and was abused by her constantly.
- 6 In 1973, Mum sent me to live in Napier with my Aunt and Uncle (not blood related, they were friends of my parents). While I was there, I was taken off the streets with two other girls I had met at a festival on the Marine Parade by the Mongrel Mob and we were each gang raped by them. I reported this to the Police, but nothing ever happened, and they weren't charged at all. In fact, they said that I was a willing participant. I was 14. After that I was sent back home. My mother's attitude was that it didn't happen and I was lying or I deserved it.
- 7 I started acting out like running away and not attending school. I was disruptive at home and swearing all the time, but that was typical of a rape victim, I guess. I was interviewed by Department of Education Psycholgists. [WITN0344003,004]

How I came to be in Lake Alice

- 8 It was my GP who decided it was time for me to get help. I also think he was the one that agreed, with Leeks, to send me to Lake Alice. I asked him for my medical files one time, and he said he didn't have any. I find this hard to believe because he was always my family Doctor, before Lake Alice and after Lake Alice. In March 1973, he sent me to Manawaroa to have Counselling sessions with Leeks for the rape and the fact I wasn't coping after it.
- 9 So I started going to Manawaroa to see Leeks for counselling. It started as family counselling and then it became one and one sessions with Leeks. These were mostly one-sided sessions, him talking and me screaming and walking out. These sessions went on for about a month and then I was sent to Lake Alice.

- 10 Leeks kept telling me when I was in Manawaroa that I would end up in Lake Alice if I didn't behave. He used Lake Alice as a tool to threaten me. I felt trapped and I did not have any protection at home either. Leeks, my GP, my mother and others were all a part of sending me to Lake Alice.

Admission to Lake Alice

- 11 I was at Lake Alice between 1973 and 1974. I have never been able to find a copy of my full nursing notes. There are only two pages. My records say that I was admitted on 3 August 1973. [WITN0344005] But they also say that I was discharged on 2 August 1973. They are obviously wrong. I recall being discharged in April 1974.(Grant Cameron Second Statement para 95) [WITN0344007]. I recall being there for Christmas as I recall decorating the tree and going home for Christmas so I was there for at least 8 months. It felt to me to be much longer than that.
- 12 I recall talking to a woman at the Wanganui District Health Board in the Records section about 20 years ago when I was trying to find my nursing notes. She said they didn't have them but she did say "you do know you were admitted twice". I said I didn't know that. But I do recall being sent to Lake Alice a few weeks into the school year, around March 1973. That date sticks in my head. So the August admission may have been my second admission. In any event I was 14 years old on my admission. No one should rely on our medical notes to find out what truly happened at Lake Alice. What we say is what happened, and we want people to believe us.
- 13 I clearly remember the day that I was sent there. I had just run away from home and had come back again. I would do this quite a bit when I was this stage as I just didn't want to be at home with Mum and Dad. A police car arrived at our home and my mother started packing my bag. She told me I was going to Lake Alice, and I just lost it. I remember bolting for the door to escape but I couldn't get it open. I knew that Lake Alice was full of crazy people and there was no way I wanted to go there.
- 14 I ended up blacking out and when I came to, I was at Lake Alice. I don't remember arriving there, I just came to in an office with a lady sitting there. I

can't remember if I was assessed or anything like that. That first day, I was locked up in my room and stayed there for most of the day. I was locked up, in my room, for the next three to four days, coming out only to be taken to have food.

- 15 I didn't understand why I was there, I thought it was because I got raped and that I kept running away.

Did I have a mental illness?

- 16 Dr Leeks recorded me having a 'reactive depression and anti social character disorder'. Dr Fernando recorded me having an 'adolescent personality disorder'. [WITN0344005] In one file record Dr Leeks is recorded as saying he only wanted me at Lake Alice for 2 weeks for 'abreaction treatment'. If that didn't work I would be sent to Porirua Hospital. [WITN0344006] Maybe that was to reassure the Education Department that it was safe to send me there.
- 17 I do not believe I was mentally ill and in need of being locked up and given unmodified electric shock and anti-psychotic medication. I was an unhappy teenager due to a difficult relationship with my mother and once I had been gang raped and not listened to or believed I became an angry difficult teenager. I needed love and support and appropriate sexual abuse counselling – not to be imprisoned in a mental hospital and treated like a worthless bad person. Dr Leek's 'counselling' was worse than useless. The only mental health problems I have now are as a result of the treatment I got in Lake Alice. Problems today include depression, trauma, migraines, memory loss and nightmares.

Accommodation

- 18 I was kept in Villa 6. There were four or five girls there and about six or seven adult women. Some were long term. One who came and went and was a married woman. She was kind to us and we called her Mum. There was quite a high turnover of girls. About four or five left and new ones came in my time. I remember an adult women in our section who came from GRO-B who was accused of strangling her little girl. She was found not guilty, but sent to Lake Alice. She was in with us sometimes and the nurses would say to us if we didn't

do what we were told, we would be put in the room with her. That was frightening – it was psychological abuse.

- 19 You could go into the laundry of our villa and see the Maximum-Security people and you could see the boys in the cage with the men that were in for murder. My understanding is that they were put there as punishment, more psychological abuse. It was horrible to see that because we thought we were going to get that too.

Drugs

- 20 I was given the contraceptive pill every morning as part of my 'medical treatment'. We were forced to have it and the nurses would check that we swallowed it. I was not, by consent, sexually active.
- 21 I got paraldehyde on about three occasions for punishment. One was for smoking and another was for damaging a lounge chair. I also got ECT for that the next day. Paraldehyde was given as a punishment to boys and girls often. I am not sure why my statement to Grant Cameron does not refer to this. I would have told the interviewer. I think it is an omission.

Being put in the drying room as punishment

- 22 There was a huge drying room on site and sometimes we were put in there for punishment. I recall after a few minutes the heat was absolutely horrible and distressing and I would be near to fainting.

Electroconvulsive therapy

- 23 In my statement to Grant Cameron, I set out my experiences with getting electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) ("Second Witness Statement" paragraphs 54 - 75 [WITN0344007]). I will briefly explain here but all the detail has already been set out in my previous statement.
- 24 I received ECT while I was in Lake Alice, both modified and unmodified. This means either with or without anesthetic to put you to sleep. This started about six weeks after I arrived at Lake Alice. I would be taken by the nurses down to

these side rooms in Villa 6. There were a number of these side rooms and they weren't used for sleeping, they were used for torture. We were tortured in that place. I knew that if Leeks came in with his trolley and a tray, I was going to be put to sleep by injection and then get ECT. If he came in with just a trolley and no tray, I was going to ECT but not put to sleep.

- 25 I would hide under a table when they would come to drag us to give us shock treatment in the small side rooms. It was always Leeks that gave me ECT. The pain was like my head was exploding. Sometimes, I would wet myself, sometimes I would vomit, and I would get the shakes afterwards.
- 26 We would get ECT as punishment. I got it a lot. The first time I got ECT, it was because we had picked a door lock with hairpins. We got up to mischief because it was so boring being there. There was nothing to do. Another time was because we had damaged a lounge suite.
- 27 I remember when they brought boys into our place to get ECT, we would have to clean up the urine and vomit after their treatment. About seven to 10 boys were brought over to Villa 6 when ECT was happening. There were more Māori than Pākehā boys. Mostly they were around 13 and 14. One was 19 and some were younger.
- 28 My Dad told me later that they never signed anything for me to get shock treatment. They didn't know anything about it. But I remember telling my mum about it after about eight weeks of being in there, she thought I was lying and making stuff up just to get out of Lake Alice.
- 29 I don't know what was worse, receiving ECT or having "sessions" with Leeks where I was raped. (paras 32-39)

Seclusion

- 30 In my statement to Grant Cameron, I set out my experiences of being put in seclusion and seeing others being put in seclusion ("Second Witness Statement" paragraphs 65 - 67 [WITN0344007]).

31 I remember one time my friend was taken away on a Friday morning for punching holes into a lounge suite with a curtain hook. She didn't come back until Sunday and I guessed that she had been taken away to isolation and given ECT. She was a mess when she came back. It was like she was drunk or on drugs.

Sexual assaults by Dr Leeks

32 In my statement to Grant Cameron, I set out the sexual assaults that I suffered in Lake Alice (First Witness Statement paras 6 to 10 [WITN0344002]; ("Second Witness Statement" paragraphs 42 - 49 [WITN0344007]).

33 I believe I was raped by Leeks and give full details in my earlier statements.

34 This happened many times. He would take me into one of the small side rooms, get the Nurses to tie me down with leather straps and give me a needle of drugs to put me to sleep.

35 I don't remember a lot of what happened because of the drugs he would inject into me. The first time he did this, I woke up and he was standing at the end of my bed, my top had been pulled over my breasts and my jeans were down to the top of my thighs. He put me back to sleep again and when I woke for the second time, he was gone. I was sore and sticky between my legs. I felt drunk and ready to pass out. I knew that he had raped me.

36 He continued to have these "sessions" right throughout my stay at Lake Alice. I knew he was raping me each time we had our "sessions" because my vagina was swollen and bruised and there would be sticky discharge when I woke up.

37 I told the staff what Leeks was doing to me, but they said I was lying. I kept telling them, but they just didn't believe me. A nurse told me it was my imagination playing up because of the drugs I was on. After the third or fourth time of him raping me, I gave up telling anyone.

38 Leeks used to live on the grounds at Lake Alice too and [GRO-C]

[GRO-C] While out of Lake Alice, I'm not sure when, I got taken to where Leeks lived. It was in Palmerston North and my mother used to clean there. At

that time, I remembered being in that house before. I'm not sure when, but I had definitely been there before.

Contemplating suicide

- 39 I was so depressed and tortured in Lake Alice, I would often contemplate suicide. I discuss these things in detail in paras 88 to 93 of my Second Statement for the Grant Cameron Proceedings [WITN344007] I would talk about it with the girls I shared my room with. We would talk about how we would do it and what would happen if we did. We thought about running away but we just couldn't escape. We would get so angry; we would end up tearing our clothes and crying ourselves to sleep. At night time, I would hear girls screaming. They were missing from the rooms and I think they had been taken by the male nurses and raped.

Staff

- 40 Dr Leeks always gave me the creeps, even at Manawaroa. He was sadistic. I don't remember all the names of all the staff at Lake Alice. Most of the nurses in my villa were women. There was at least one male nurse that would come in the evenings. Sometimes I would see Dr Fernando, but it was mainly Leeks.

Group therapy

- 41 We did not really have counselling out there. We had group therapy sessions, but they were nothing, no one said anything. How could you when the people who are abusing you are running the group therapy sessions?

Schooling

- 42 There was a school at Lake Alice, it started at 9am. Most of the kids went. I was not allowed to go the first few days of being at Lake Alice because I was locked up.
- 43 School was in another villa, close to the boys. We would do pottery and art but not much else, we were really just mucking around.

Disabled/ vulnerable residents

- 44 I remember there being a mentally retarded girl in with us. We used to tease her. She had been there a long time, much longer than me. She was Pākehā and had long hair. I don't remember her name. There was probably more, but this is the girl I remember.
- 45 There was talk that she got pregnant while she was in Lake Alice. This was talk though so I don't know if this was true. I would believe it though.

Visits

- 46 Dad visited me a few times. He bought my sister once. I found out later that they had tried to actually come inside to see where I was living but they weren't allowed to. They had to stay outside and I would just talk with them out there. I guess this was so they couldn't see how horrible it was inside and how we were being treated. Mum came once and I told her I had been raped by Dr Leeks. She told me to stop lying. I yelled at her to never come back and she didn't.

Life After Lake Alice

- 47 In my second statement to Grant Cameron, I set out my experiences once I was released from Lake Alice ("Second Witness Statement" paragraphs 97 - 116 [WITN0344006])
- 48 I don't why I was eventually let out. Maybe it was because I kept threatening to kill myself if I wasn't let out. ("Second Witness Statement" paragraphs 94-96 [WITN0344007])
- 49 I came out and lived with my parents for a small time. But that didn't last long as I couldn't put up with my mums abuse again. I had to work in shop factories because it was all I could get as a job – even though I wanted to be an accountant. I had lost my education as a result of my time Lake Alice.
- 50 The following years were hard. [GRO-C]
[GRO-C] and became addicted to drugs and alcohol.

- 51 Between the years 1978 and 1989, I had six children, three miscarriages and one abortion. I was not a very good mother to my children. I was distant and unaware of how to raise my kids. When I was bringing up the kids, we moved all over the place, GRO-C
GRO-C – this was because of the abusive relationships I was in, but ultimately it was because of what happened in Lake Alice.
- 52 I currently get ACC compensation for my neck injury which I hurt in 1994 at work when I was lifting a cabinet. In 1995, I re-injured my neck and had to give up the job I had altogether. In the more recent years, I was employed as a carer and now I do voluntary work at the Salvation Army. In another three years, I will be of national Superannuation age.
- 53 In about 1995, I became heavily depressed. At the same time, I was having problems with my son and was suicidal. I ended up seeking professional help. This was very hard for me to do. I find it hard to trust anyone and going back to Hospitals and psychiatric institutions brings back all those horrible memories.
- 54 It got so bad, that I couldn't even look after my children and I ended up sending them away so I could carry out a treatment plan. I was put on medication to help me. But after about 18 months on the medication, I ended up taking it all and overdosing. The ambulance was called but I wasn't taken to hospital. I told everyone it was a mistake, but I think it was a genuine suicide attempt. The only thing that stopped me from trying again was thinking that Leeks would win if I died.
- 55 Other staff members also need to be held accountable, not just Leeks. It's about getting justice for what happened to us and what happened to our families. Why were we sent there in the first place, very few of us would have actually had mental health issues.

Going back to visit Lake Alice

- 52 I went back to the hospital in 2005. I had asked if I could go inside and they agreed. All the villa numbers had been changed but I still recognized my villa. It was no longer numbered villa 6.

Effect on My Life

56 In my statements to Grant Cameron, I set out how Lake Alice has had an overall effect on my adult life. ("First Witness Statement" paragraphs 117 - 132 [WITN0344002], Second Witness Statement paras 97 to 132 [WITN344007].

57 I think I had kids to compensate for what happened to me at Lake Alice. I do have the biggest heart and I don't think I would have treated my kids the way that I did if I had never gone to Lake Alice. I was controlled in Lake Alice and I think I sought that out in my relationships with men. [REDACTED] GRO-B

[REDACTED] GRO-B. I've been on my own for a while now and that's better.

58 The stigma associated with Lake Alice is horrible as well. I can google my name and everything that happened to me is all over the internet. How do I tell my story but then deal with all those people judging me? I want some process to help me with that.

59 I got addicted to prescription medicine within six months of leaving Lake Alice. I had been prescribed a morphine-based tablet, DHC. I was also on pethedine for my severe migraines.

60 I have been suicidal many times. I have been so depressed over the years, constantly reliving what happened to me I there.

61 I have regular nightmares about what happened in Lake Alice. I don't sleep well.

62 It has been very hard trusting anyone and even harder to ask for help to deal with the trauma I was suffering from. I have been on and off medication for years. But I hate being on medication because I don't feel safe on it.

63 My memory is terrible. I can't recall much that happened before 13 and I can't recall much about my kids growing up. I have short term memory loss and it is a horrible thing to have. I get migraines all the time though less than I used to. I didn't have them before Lake Alice but have had them ever since. They are triggered by stress, which I am constantly under. I get nervous around people,

I don't go out much, hate being in the public and don't really have many friends. I don't like having people near me and feel safer by myself. I guess that's why I isolate myself.

64 As I said, the only thing that kept me from actually committing suicide in those really dark times, was the thought of finally seeing Leeks pay for what he put us all through at Lake Alice.

65 I am a great grandmother now. I love my grandkids and I think they love me too, but it has been a hard road. They are the only positive thing I have in my life and I am so grateful to have them.

66 What I went through in Lake Alice has had an impact on my ability to think and to process just simple things. I struggle to remember things every day.

Past proceedings

67 I was involved in the Grant Cameron proceedings. I prepared two statements. One in 1998 and one in 2000 (Second Statement of Sharyn Collis (GC proceedings) dated 28 Dec 2000 [WITN0344007]). They were done over the phone by staff. I saw Justice Gallen and told him about what had happened to me. I think I received \$35,000 in the hand and had been awarded \$60,000.00. Grant Cameron's law firm got the rest. I am grateful to Grant because without him no-one would have known what ever went on. I don't believe what I got was true compensation for what happened to me and I don't believe we should have had to pay for our legal fees. After I had gone through that process all my trauma was back and I just wanted the case to be over and I didn't care – I was willing to accept anything. My husband bought a truck with the money and gave me \$1000.

68 I am still so angry that Leeks hasn't been prosecuted. Around 2002, I went to the Police and laid a complaint of sexual abuse against Dr Leeks. It was horrible doing the police statement, I had a support person, but it was not very nice. I felt like the police were not listening to me. On 1 Oct 2004 my lawyers wrote asking to get a copy of the police complaint and report. The police had not kept records of my complaint. They never came back to me asking for further

interviews. [WITN0344008]. Why is Dr Leeks not been jailed for all the horrible things he did? Lake Alice ruined not only the people that went there but their whole families.

- 69 I also made a complaint to the Victorian Medical Board, where Dr Leeks was practising. I was going to give evidence against him but before the hearing he agreed to surrender his licence to practice. I received a letter about this on 20 July 2006. [WITN0344009] I was very disappointed that yet again Dr Leeks had avoided a public inquiry into what he did to us.

Publicity to try and get Dr Leeks charged

- 70 I was also involved in the 20/20 documentary series and investigation. I think it was in 2006 or 2007 and was organized by CCHR. I wanted people to know what happened to us all there and I was doing the best I could to bring Leeks to justice. It was hard to be involved in that and to share everything about what happened to me, but I was lucky to have the support of another survivor of Lake Alice. [GRO-B] and I were interviewed for the Evening Standard. I believe that through all of our efforts, the Government are starting to listen and is a main reason why this inquiry has been set up.

ACC

- 71 I got ACC cover for the Mongrel Mob rape but not for Dr Leeks raping me or the ECT. I did not use counselling through ACC as I was already getting counselling through mental health services.

What I want from Royal Commission

- 72 I believe we should all get compensation for the horrors we saw and went through at Lake Alice. But that is just the beginning. The Government should set up support groups for all the families that are connected with Lake Alice survivors. The help is just not there for us or our families at the moment, and it needs to be.
- 73 I think the Lake Alice survivors who got ECT and other traumatic things such as drug treatment should all have ACC cover for medical misadventure. We

should receive compensation for this and for the awful adult lives we had from it.

- 74 Even if we don't get this we should all have full mental health support for ourselves and our families. The Government needs to believe the kids, the survivors that went through Lake Alice.
- 75 I want to see Dr Leeks pay for what he did to all of us. The Police said they wouldn't extradite him because of the cost to make that happen, but how can that be right. He needs to be held accountable and for everyone to see what a monster he is.
- 76 I feel the same way about all the nurses and the staff that helped him so what he did to so many kids that went through Lake Alice.
- 77 I want to give evidence at the Inquiry hearing.

Statement of Truth

- 78 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 _____

Dated: _____

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INDEX OF DOCUMENTS : STATEMENT OF SHARYN COLLIS

Exhibit Ref	Document Description	Date	Para
WITN0344002	First Statement of Sharyn Collis for Grant Cameron Class Action Proceedings	07 Jul 1998	2,6,33,58
WITN0344003	Dept Ed Psyc Services Rpt Sharyn Collis	30 Apr 1973	8
WITN0344004	Dept Ed Psyc Services Ltr Sharyn Collis	02 Aug 1973	8
WITN0344005	Admissn notes Dr Leeks, De Fernando	10 Aug 1973	12,17
WITN0344006	Note for file	3 July 1973	17
WITN0344007	Second Statement of Sharyn Collis for Cameron class action proceedings	28 Dec 2000	11, 23, 30, 32, 39,56, 47,67,
WITN034408	Lawyers letter and police communications re SC's complaint of rape laid against Dr Leeks	01 Oct 2004	68
WITN034400	Ltr to Sharyn Collis from Vict Med Board	20 July 2006	69