

Witness Name: **GRO-A- MS Y**

Statement No.: WITN0338001

Exhibits: [WITN0338001]

Dated: 24.03.2021

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

---

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF **GRO-A- MS Y****

---

I, **GRO-A- MS Y** will say as follows: –

**Introduction**

- 1 My name is **GRO-A- MS Y** I was born on **GRO-A** I live in the Wellington area and am a personal assistant to a **GRO-A** **GRO-A** My mother is **GRO-B-Ms LL** who died in **GRO-B** Mum and I link to Tūwharetoa. Mum was a survivor of Lake Alice. She died after she had made a statement to her lawyer about her time in Lake Alice but before she had finalised it. I am the youngest of Mum's three daughters. I am a second-generation survivor from Lake Alice. My awful childhood and adolescence was, I believe, a result of my mother's awful childhood and the neglect and abuse she suffered in her childhood and adolescence.
- 2 I am giving this evidence today to make sure my mother's distressing life is not forgotten and big lessons are learned about how to support and protect children who are being emotionally, mentally, and sexually abused and to ensure

children never again suffer like my mother. I am also wanting to let the Commission know about the impact of her life on my own childhood and adolescence. I want the Commission to learn how to support and rehabilitate adults living with mental health problems like trauma and PTSD as a result of abuse as children.

### **My mother's statement and what she told me about Lake Alice**

- 3 After Mum died GRO-B, her friend and neighbour told me that Mum had a lawyer and was making a statement to the Royal Commission about her time in Lake Alice. She explained that it was still in draft and Mum had not yet signed it as they were waiting for her personal file. In the discussion, the issue of inter-generational impacts of abuse came up, and as a result of that discussion, I am making this statement.
- 4 I contacted my mother's lawyer after she died. As a result of this discussion, I have decided to make a statement about inter-generational abuse.

### **What I knew about Mum's Lake Alice experience**

- 5 Mum always said that her mother didn't like her and would go out of her way to be cruel to her. She had a very nasty streak. Mum was closer to her father, but he was away on the road a lot for work. He put her with his family when she was around 11 as he could see what Nan was doing to Mum. However, Mum was raped when in the care of her father's family by her favourite auntie's husband. Then she was committed to Lake Alice by her mother. So she had three traumas to deal with: cruelty and neglect from her mother, rape, and then what happened to her at Lake Alice.
- 6 Lake Alice haunted Mum. It consumed her. She didn't like talking about the details much – just snippets. When I was a teenager, she told me this was a place she hated. She said they had done things to her and her friends in there. When I was older, she told me about the shock therapy that went on there and being taken to a room and not remembering the next few days. She told me about begging Nan to take her out. When she spoke, I could hear the deep pain

in her voice. She spoke of her friend's experience as if it were a third person. It felt as if the shame and hurt was just too deep for her to bring forward.

7 I recall Nan (Mum's mum) telling me as a child that she had sent mum to Lake Alice because she thought it was a great place. Then another parent told Nan about the stuff that was happening there and that parent got her child out and warned Nan. Nan said that Mum had also told her what was happening. Nan said she wasn't sure what to do, but she did get Mum out of there because of her concerns.

8 I also overheard a conversation between Nan and her sister when her sister said that Mum should never have been sent there. They were yelling at each other. I think Nan felt very guilty for sending Mum there.

9 When I was 26, Mum asked me if I could go with her for a visit to Lake Alice. She said she was scared and didn't want to go alone. She wasn't even sure if she wanted to see it again. I wouldn't go with her. From what she had told me, I was scared shitless of the place.

10 The impression Mum gave me when she talked about it was that she had been given electric shocks and she was scared all the time of getting them.

### **My childhood**

#### *My relationship with Mum*

11 I am the youngest of my mother's three daughters. She had no sons. Mum's oldest daughter, who she gave birth to at 16, was raised by Nan. We younger two were raised by Mum. We were raised in a systematic train wreck of a childhood, which I believe is a direct result of the emotional, mental, and sexual abuse Mum was subjected to in her childhood.

12 Mum would talk of her childhood as a living hell. She made ours the same – not deliberately, but she could not get free of her own demons and could not parent us. It's so emotionally sad then and now to see a person who could have been amazing be so unwell.

- 13 On the positive side, Mum was intelligent and had a heart of gold. She would do anything for anyone and was very compassionate. She was the opposite of her own mother in this way. I know Mum had lots of regrets at how she had brought us up, but she found it very hard to change her patterns.
- 14 I had not seen Mum for six and a half years when she died. In my younger adult years, I felt a lot of pain and confusion at our childhood and how Mum behaved. I didn't understand why she was the way she was. It wasn't until later when I was a mother myself and working in health care that my eyes were fully opened. It was not an easy task for anyone carrying the trauma Mum carried. I now wish I could have done more to help her, knowing about PTSD, mental health, and the impact of abuse as I do now.
- 15 However, I did reach out to Mum by email in [GRO-B], three months before she died. I said I truly forgive her for our upbringing. I said I knew she always tried her very best with the tools she was provided. Mum did email me back and said thank you. I do hope she knew that I loved her.

*My early years*

- 16 Mum was 23 years old when she had [GRO-B] and she was 25 years old when she had me. Mum and Dad's relationship was never stable. My parents regularly fought, separated, came back together, and were unfaithful to each other. Both had major addictions to alcohol and drugs. I believe [GRO-B] was born with alcohol dependency from my mum's addiction during her pregnancy. Their relationship was also extremely violent. Dad was mostly abusive to Mum. Once he broke her jaw and ribs in front of us as children. We were terrified at home because of the violence. It scarred my childhood.
- 17 Though the relationship was terrible, things took a turn for the worse after Dad left the family for good, when I was five and a half. It was very sad as a child to see Mum so depressed. She might get up and have a shower, but then she would go back to bed. She spent months in bed. When she did get up, she would start drinking and/or doing drugs. She would drink until she vomited, and then us children would have to clean up the vomit. She was a severely, severe

alcoholic. She would disappear for days on end. I think she was most depressed in her mid-30s – drinking was her way of coping.

### *Schooling*

- 18 We went to school in [GRO-B], [GRO-B], [GRO-B] along with other places. I never recall being in school longer than a few months. Most times we didn't have pens and paper. There was never any food for lunches (or dinners), and so my sister and I would come home every lunchtime and sit on the doorstep eating nothing but being away from the shame of the other children knowing that we had nothing to eat.
- 19 When we would come home from school at the end of the day, Mum was usually incoherent as she was so pissed or she wouldn't be there at all as she would be away for days at a time. I recall one time her vomiting everywhere and all over herself, as well as soiling herself, and we had to bathe her and clean the vomit and bedding, and so on. This is one of many very sad memories. She regularly tried to drink herself to death or overdose to death.
- 20 I think the most traumatic thing I endured as a child was at six years of age coming home from school and discovering that Mum had overdosed. There were paramedics in the house. She was taken to hospital and was there for months. [GRO-B] and I were sent to live with Mum's friend. She was good and kind to us. She supported Mum her whole life. They had been friends since primary school. She told me that Nan had told her that, when Mum was taken to Lake Alice, Mum had run away to a farm and had not to come back again and that she couldn't understand it as they weren't bad kids.<sup>1</sup>
- 21 Mum was friendly with a lot of gang members and all sorts of other people, and we had a lot of them in the house at all hours. I recall at times being scared.

### *Australia*

---

<sup>1</sup> I am still really close to her. She continues to mentally support me.

22 We went to Australia when I was 11 years old. Mum worked 12-hours shifts when we first went there, so we barely saw her. When she was not working and unemployed, she would just disappear for nights and days at a time. We barely had food. We barely went to school while Mum was away because we had no food and no one to say otherwise. She kept me off school a lot as she hated being alone. I recall once Mum had been missing for about five days and she was arrested because she was drink driving. She called me from the police cells and asked if I could bring some clothes because she had pissed on her own clothes.

23 I was around 11. I biked to the police station and dropped off her clothes. No one approached me about whether I was all right having a drunk mother or if I was home alone. Most of our life had been like this, children who had fallen between the cracks.

24 Mum would also abandon us with friends and associates for weeks and months at a time. We knew we were often unwelcome and unwanted. Mum had a few failed relationships, many of which were violent and abusive. Some of them were kind. We were subjected to this environment. We were also never a priority in life. We felt that deep within us. We were constantly rejected.

25 I ran away from home when I was between 11 and 12. I told mum I hated her and I hated living with her. I lived on the streets and stayed with some school friends and Mum's friends. I remember one of them being a hard-core drug user. I went back for a while, but by 13, I had left home and school completely. It felt safer for me to be homeless than at home with Mum sadly. It also felt a relief for me to be in control of my own emotions. No longer burdened on someone.

26 After about six months my father paid for an air ticket for me (and **GRO-B**) to be brought back to New Zealand.

*Coming back to New Zealand*

27 Dad dumped me at **GRO-B** with his side of the family. I never went to school there. I didn't like living there. His family believed I wasn't his child and I also

believe this. When I was around 14, I tried to commit suicide. I was hospitalised. During this time, Mum's father passed away and I went to Levin to stay with Nan.

28 Nan gave stability and food but not love. She had a very nasty cold side. It was hurtful seeing the love she had for our older sister (who she had raised) and for my mum's brother and his daughter, but not Mum or us. I felt Nan only took us in because of her guilt about how she had treated Mum, especially sending her to Lake Alice. I think she knew that was why Mum was the way she was.

29 I got a job working as a gib stopper for cash in the hand. About six months later, Mum came back to New Zealand. She got off the plane completely out to it with alcohol. Mum could get very nasty and cruel when she was wasted.

30 Mum started having a go at me when I was around 14 and a half. She told me to "fuck off". I left Nan with nothing but a few clothes, which was Mum's wishes. She said I could only take what I had bought. I left there with a pair of shorts, slippers, and a T-shirt.

### **Meeting my husband and starting a family**

31 I met my children's father when I was 15 years old. He was 27. We had two children: my son was born when I was 16 and my daughter when I was 18. My parenting method was to do everything the polar opposite of how I was raised.

32 My partner was extremely mentally abusive and controlling. The first thing he did after I met him was to move us to Christchurch so I would be completely isolated from what family I had and friends. I wasn't allowed a phone, and he would jot down the kilometres in the car or disconnect the battery. Despite all this, when I was with him, I had food, a home, and some stability. I suppose that is why I stayed with him until I was 21. I didn't know any better and was afraid to leave. I didn't want a broken home or any type of life that I had had as a child.

33 It was my mother who helped me leave him, saying to me not to stay because of the children – she said I would wake up in 20 years and be just as miserable

and so would the children, and I would be too old to move on. While Mum was there, he followed me to town and let the tyres down so I was stuck. When I did leave him, he sent his brother around to the house to stay with me for a few days with a sawn-off shot gun. I was actually afraid I was going to be killed. I eventually moved back up north and stayed with my oldest sister, GRO-B

- 34 When I left my partner he fought me through the courts for the children and used that process to harass and control me for around 10 years.

### **Coping with addiction**

- 35 When I was around 12, I started smoking cigarettes and marijuana. At 14, I would try most drugs. At 21, I started drinking also. By 28, I was a full-blown alcoholic. I recall drinking three bottles of wine and 1 litre of vodka a night. It took a lot of personal strength to fight those addictions because of my childhood trauma and the memories of what I had been exposed to in my childhood. I am now drug, alcohol, and cigarette free.

- 36 Around that time, I decided I wanted to make more of my life than what my mother had. I wanted to study, and I wanted to choose the type of people I wanted to be around. I would not be around people who drank and had addiction issues. I went to Ucol and studied for a Diploma in Business Management. I then did some admin courses, which led me into work in hospital administration. From here, I keep upskilling. I still want to pursue more study.

- 37 I got engaged when I was 24 to a man I went to primary school with. He died when I was 26. That brought out grief of all sorts. Once again, Mum came back from Australia a few months later to try and emotionally support me but was wasted and pissed. She got off the plane with drugs in her bra. She made some comments about "us cunts destroying her life" and wishing we had died and accusing us for being the reason why she was in so many violent relationships. In general being nasty. I asked her to leave, and when she didn't, friends of mine told her she had to leave. She returned with her friends asking them to beat me up. They didn't and were shocked at what she was doing. She was simply unable to support me. It was the last time I saw her before she died.

## Counselling

- 38 Through victim support (related to my fiancé's death), I was eligible for counselling. I have been in counselling with a serious trauma crime psychologist for seven years, and it has been incredibly important and helpful. For years, I was never able to open up and tell him about my childhood. He has asked many times and I have told him bits.
- 39 I feel freer to tell my story to the Royal Commission than to my counsellor, as a part of me is so pissed off and angry at what we as a family went through. I can only imagine all the other families and their stories. It has taken this long for the Crown to set up an inquiry. There are so many second and third generations of people whose lives have been blighted by their parent's inability to be parents because of the trauma they carry from being abused in the various forms of state care. There has been no public recognition of this. The Crown must take responsibility.
- 40 I have worked in the **GRO-A** Hospital **GRO-B** and in the **GRO-A** **GRO-A** Hospital. Currently I am working at **GRO-A** as a personal assistant for **GRO-B**. I have an enormous role that requires very careful planning for them and their patients. I have taken a lot of training courses. All of this work has inspired me and made me self-aware. It has been hugely empowering for my life. I have found that the clinical staff are supportive and give me aspiration to do more with my life.
- 41 I see a lot of people coming through the hospital system who have PTSD and trauma-related mental health problems and drug addictions. I always try to spend time with them. I instinctively understand them. Not all my colleagues do, and some are often scared. I have an ability to connect and relate to all walks of life, but especially the "broken". I would like to think I share a connection on one level or another. The only thing separating most of us in life is luck and the starting foundations.
- 42 Currently my children and I have permanent protection orders against their father. He has only left me alone since those orders have been in place. My son is now **GRO-B** and my daughter is **GRO-B**. My son is working as an engineer in

**GRO-B** and my daughter, who has done very well academically, has just left home to go flatting with him and work and study.

43 With huge effort and resolve, I have stopped the cycle of violence and neglect, but my older sister, **GRO-B** has not been able to. She has had a very hard life. At 14, she was taking drugs and sleeping with older businessmen for money – getting money for food. She has had seven children and could not parent them adequately. They were all taken into care over time. When I once visited my sister's home, it reminded me of my own childhood. There was no food in the fridge. At the moment, she is living in a WINZ motel with a partner who is in the Nomads. The "system" will never consider help for her because "why should they?" I hate seeing **GRO-B** live the life she is living. I have tried to help her, but with a big mental cost to me. Her children also suffer. Their life has been very hard. Most are now teenagers who struggle with addiction and housing problems.

44 Abuse and neglect in childhood mostly destroys that child's ability to live a good and happy childhood and adulthood. It destroys their ability to reach their full potential. Worse still, it destroys their ability to parent and so destroys another generation's life and potential. I know the inter-generational abuse in my family is more than four generations. My Nan, who was so cruel to my mother, told me that her mother was raped by her father, most of her children were raped by him, and her mother did nothing to stop it. My grandfather's mother and her partners were violent to him and the other children when they were young. He left home to work at 13.

### **What I want from this Royal Commission**

45 I want this Commission to make sure that other survivors and their children are able to live free from trauma and can get the help they deserve so they can let go of their stigma. I want the Commission to make sure they know they are not broken, weird, or bad people or unworthy of love and support – that there are many others like them out there. They are not alone with their broken and estranged family relationships. I want them to be able to get help and to know that what happened to them is not OK, that their stories are important and their

voices will be heard. They should know that their lives have been hugely affected because of system failures that have failed children and continue to fail them.

- 46 These are the things that I believe need to happen to make this come true:
- (i) There have got to be lots of protections to stop children and adolescents who are not mentally unwell being put into psychiatric institutions, and they must be given the power to consent to treatment.
  - (ii) There has to be a robust employment process that weeds out people with power issues, paedophilia, anger problems, and emotional problems from working with vulnerable children and adolescents.
  - (iii) There needs to be public education of the symptoms of PTSD, neglect, and trauma in children and adults. There needs to be professional training of anyone working face to face with people, such as all health professionals, education professionals, legal professionals, and all public service staff, such as people in MSD, who work in face-to-face roles with people. This is so people can understand rather than judge them.
  - (iv) There needs to be publicly available intensive mental health and trauma support for all adults who have experienced abuse in care as children and abuse at home in their childhood. Ironically I had to be a victim of serious crime before I became eligible for counselling. That has changed my life for the good, immensely.
  - (v) There need to be intensive but nurturing parenting training available for all parents who have been neglected or abused as children.

- (vi) Where abuse and neglect is detected in relation to a child, that parent should be offered support and parenting training and ongoing support.
- (vii) A person who has experienced trauma should have psychological support until they no longer feel it is required. They should not just be entitled to a fixed number of sessions.
- (viii) There should be groups for survivors to reach out and mentor each other and share stories and bonds.
- (ix) There needs to be a nationwide apology, not one behind closed doors, and letters to everyone affected. New Zealand needs to come together to support one another and realise these people are the way they are because of a medical misadventure, a cover up by the state.

47 When I think of how my mother's life was destroyed, in part by how her care was handled as a child by the government, I believe the government owes the children she raised compensation and a lot of ongoing psychological support.

### **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 State Care.

Signed

**GRO-A**

**This page has been left blank intentionally**

**This page has been left blank intentionally**