

**Witness Name:** Amy Bethune

**Statement No.:** WITN0317001

**Exhibits:** WITN0317002 – WITN0317004

**Dated:** 19 March 2021

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

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF AMY BETHUNE**

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I, Amy Bethune, will say as follows: –

1. My name is Amy Bethune, and I was born on GRO-B 1983. I am the third of six children and the only girl. My mother is Pākehā, and my father is Māori. I am not linked into any tribe (my father is Ngāti Porou). I call myself a New Zealand Māori.
2. My mother is Sharyn Collis, who spent time in Lake Alice as a teenager. I'm giving this evidence to show how her experiences at Lake Alice affected me.
3. I have also included some of my ACC notes and Oranga Tamariki notes, which I think are relevant. They are listed in the table at the end of this statement.

**Early life**

4. I would describe my childhood as miserable and unhappy. It was very difficult. I didn't have a carefree happy childhood. I was born a baby but immediately had to be an adult. My mother had major memory problems and was nearly always "out to lunch" and not able to care for us children properly. She was very distant, unemotional, and cold. I was aware of this as early as when I was a pre-schooler. GRO-B

GRO-B

5. I have blotted out a lot of what happened to me in my childhood and adolescence because it was too painful to keep remembering. The biggest feelings I had was that I had to take responsibility for my younger siblings and make sure they were okay. I was also away that there was no one to support me in my times of need as a child and adolescent.

### **My mother**

6. Mum was always forgetful. She always seemed to be taking one or other of her prescription drugs. These seemed to make her more vacant. Her lack of memory created many dangerous situations for us children. For example, I recall once, when a cousin was staying, he had pushed the heater against the couch, which if it had caught fire, would have burnt the house down. My mother hadn't noticed it. In an ACC psychiatric recommendation report in 2016, I describe the way I was parented. (Psychiatric Assessment Report / Treatment Plan, dated 25 May 2016 **WITN0317002**)
7. When I was 10 years old, I had a deeper realisation that Mum was far from all right. She had taken us to the shop to buy ice cream and lollies, and as soon as we were back home, she suggested that we all go to the shop to buy ice cream and lollies. When I told her we had just been, she had no memory of it.
8. I recall Mum telling me as a child that she had been in Lake Alice and had been raped by a doctor who had given her ECT. She had woken up, and she was alone with him on top of her and he had put her back to sleep. Also, she had been gang raped by the Mongrel Mob.
9. Because of the way my mother was, I did not have a childhood as other children did. I was a good child. I never ran away from home or got up to mischief. I spent my time caring for and mothering my three younger brothers and looking out for my mother.
10. I would see that my younger brothers were clothed, washed, and fed and had what they needed for school and other activities. I would make sure that they got to bed on time. I had to look out for and protect my brothers from my mum's forgetfulness. She was always forgetting important stuff in their lives and was

unaware of dangerous situations. I also always felt that I had to protect my mother and my brothers from **GRO-B**

### **Moving homes frequently**

11. Another very damaging feature of my childhood was how many times we moved as a family. We moved from **GRO-C** to **GRO-C** to **GRO-C** to **GRO-C** to **GRO-C** to **GRO-C**. My parents were constantly separating and then getting back together, and that precipitated many of our moves. It was hard to develop friends and to have a steady schooling.

### **Police not protecting my family from **GRO-B** violence**

12. I remember once when I was about 11 or 12 years old, **GRO-B** just about killed my brother when he threw him down the stairs. Someone called the police, and when the policeman turned up, he said to **GRO-B** "You didn't touch them did you, **GRO-B**?" The police knew he had but were protecting him from any consequences for his domestic violence. We felt totally powerless and voiceless as children. There was no one to help us.

### **Sexual abuse**

13. I was first sexually abused as a five-year-old. It went on for at least a year. The abuser was my friend's father. I could not tell my parents. I recall my mother taking me to the GP regularly because I was always sore in my private parts, and he told my mother that it was a urine infection. Mum took me just about every two weeks.
14. I recall telling my auntie when I was five that I was being abused, and the police were brought in. I was made to have an extremely painful smear test. The abuser was never brought to justice. The police said that they did not have enough evidence.
15. I was abused by two older boys when I was 11. One was **GRO-B-1**. There had been problems with him for several years, and he had been placed in foster homes and in the care of **GRO-B** in Auckland. It was when he

came home in between these placements that he would abuse me. He was terrifying and would hold knives to my throat.

16. My mother was so out to it she wasn't aware what was happening, and I was not able to defend myself. I knew that if I told her, she would not have been able to help me anyway. I didn't tell anyone in the family of this abuse until six years ago. It had been an agony having him around in the family gatherings over the years as I hated being in his presence. I also had to keep looking out for my own children if he was around. After I disclosed the abuse, I now make sure that I am not around him and do not coincide with him at family events. The second abuser was my brother's friend.

### Education

17. My parenting of my younger siblings took a serious toll on my education. I was tired in class and was often falling asleep, especially at secondary school. I went to four high schools between the ages of 13 and 15: **GRO-C** High School, **GRO-C** High, **GRO-C** High in **GRO-C**, and **GRO-C** Collegiate. I was absent a great deal, and the schools did not understand that this was not because I was wagging but because I was at home looking out for my younger siblings, particularly my youngest brother.

### My adolescence

18. From the age of 13, I made half-hearted attempts to kill myself. In 1997, when I was 14, I went to a doctor and told that doctor that I felt like killing myself. It was in that context that I first disclosed to anyone that I had been sexually abused. The doctor helped me apply for ACC. However, ACC would not process my application as I was underage. On 6 December 2017, they gave me a written apology for not giving me the support I needed as a young teenager (written apology from ACC, dated 6 December 2017 [WITN0317003]). They had told me that, at that time, it was common practice not to provide cover for children and young persons who had been sexually abused.

19. In 1998, by the age of 15, I was homeless. It came about after Mum said to me one day in front of my cousin something like, "Amy, do you remember when you were abused as a four-year-old?" I had a huge reaction and shouted, "How dare you tell anyone about my abuse." A week later, she told me to fuck off and leave. I rang Dad and told him that Mum had thrown me out. He said he wouldn't take me in. I ended up flatting and was given a youth benefit by the Department of Social Welfare. Being alone in the world and left to fend for myself at 15 was incredibly traumatic and stressful.
20. About a month later, my father rang me and told me that there was a letter waiting for me from my mother. The letter is in my document bundle (letter from Sharyn Collis to Amy Bethune, undated [WITN0317004]).
21. In the letter, Mum said she was going away to sort herself out. She enclosed her engagement ring as she had no need for it any more as she had finally left my father. I was devastated by that letter. All I could think about was how could she do this to me after all I had done to keep the family safe and together and how would the three boys cope without me. It felt to me that Mum was saying that everything that happened to her was more important than what had happened to me. I felt she didn't care about my abuse and was only concerned about herself. I was so wounded and hurt.
22. I had also been kicked out of school by 16. I'd been absent so much because I was looking after my younger brothers all the time. The youngest was only three or four at that time. I recall turning up one day to school at Queen Elizabeth High and the teacher asking why I was there and saying they had signed me out of the school a week earlier. No one asked why I was not at school or thought I might be a young person in need. I just left. I stayed in a flat with my brother's ex-girlfriend for a year, and then I tried to do a nanny course for four months but could not finish it. By 17, I was also very sick with endometriosis and needed surgery. After that, I moved in with a boyfriend.
23. I took an overdose at the age of 17 and was taken to hospital where my stomach was pumped out. I was sent home a week later with no mental health assistance or support.

24. When I was 17, in 2000, I heard a conversation between my flatmates about my brother's friend who had sexually abused me as an 11-year-old. I told them what he had done to me and they supported me to make a complaint to the Tauranga Police. However, the police told me there was nothing they could do.
25. When I got the police records of my complaint six years ago, I was advised by the GRO-C Police that there was no record of me ever having made a complaint to the police in Tauranga.
26. When I was 19, in 2002, I moved to GRO-C with a man who became the father of my four oldest children. I have lived in this area ever since and have owned my own home here in GRO-C for the last 15 years.

### **My life as an adult**

27. I have six children who are aged between two and 17: three boys and three girls. The four oldest are to the same father. The two youngest have different fathers. I have recently separated from the father of my youngest child.
28. In my own parenting, I have tried very hard to parent my children in the way I wanted to be parented as a child and to learn not to repeat the mistakes my mother made. I am proud of my children and what I have achieved with them. For example, they have all gone to GRO-C Primary School and GRO-C College. They have had continuity of education and been able to develop friendships. They have lived in the same home for the last 15 years. My oldest child moved in at age three. They have all had a stable home.
29. I have never left my children when I am down and upset. I explain to them why I am down and upset. They are very loving and supportive of me. I do not have any educational qualifications, but when the children are older, I want to do something, possibly looking after foster children.
30. As an adult, I carried extreme hurt and anger that I was not protected from sexual abuse and that no one protected my family from my GRO-B violence.

Also, that I had not had a childhood. I have felt everyone was against me, my parents, the police, ACC. I never had a voice anywhere.

31. I had a near breakdown in 2015. I told my mother of [GRO-B-1] sexual abuse of me as an 11-year-old. I then rang my father and told him. That precipitated me making an ACC claim, and I have been in counselling since. I believe I have come a long way in these last six years. I have come to understand that [GRO-B-1] was very likely sexually abused himself when in the care of the state before he abused me. I still hate having any contact with him and do not trust him around my children.
32. I suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but also from major depression and anxiety. On 17 August 2016, I was assessed by Peter Claman for ACC and he concluded I have a permanent mental injury. I also had a specific PTSD assessment on 23 July 2018 from Milly Hanlon. I would like to do art therapy now to help with these mental issues. I don't know how to spell or write using proper grammar because I had so little schooling. Even when I was at school, I couldn't concentrate because there was so much stress in my childhood. At that stage, I had undiagnosed PTSD, anxiety, and depression stemming from my own abuse. I feel continually angry about the abuse I suffered and the memories that I have been left with, which haunt me every single day of my life.

## ACC

33. I was very annoyed reading an ACC note that suggested my trauma was "hereditary" from my mother. It is trauma brought about because of having a mother who was out to lunch my whole childhood, which allowed awful things to happen to me. And I believe she was out to lunch because of her terrible experiences of drugs and electric shocks at Lake Alice.
34. In the last few years, I received a backdated lump sum compensation from ACC for my sexual abuse as a child. It was four years of struggle to get it. I was almost suicidal by the time it was granted – it took so long. They made me go through two reviews and only granted it just before the District Court

hearing. I am currently supported by ACC on the minimum level of loss of potential earnings. ACC funds my counselling.

### **My relationship with my mother**

35. Many years ago, Mum apologised to me for not being a proper mum. When she heard of the sexual abuse, she apologised for not protecting me. Our relationship is now the best it has ever been. She's moved back in with me since before Christmas, and we are getting on very well. She supports me with the care of the children.
36. It was only in his last visit about one month ago that **GRO-B** said he did not think he had given me a full apology for all the beatings he had given me as a child.

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

37. I would like there to be a public apology from the government. I want the apology to be filmed and include the names of every person who wants to be acknowledged for what they had suffered in the care of the state.
38. I would like all children who were in the care of the state to be given parenting or grandparenting support and any other support they require, for example, trauma support and treatment for mental health issues.
39. By the late 1970s, the government knew something terrible had happened at Lake Alice. All children born to a parent who had been in Lake Alice should have been monitored and followed up on. The parents should have been supported and given help to get over their mental trauma.
40. I was a child bringing up children because my mother could not be a proper parent. She had to struggle on as best she could, but it was not good enough. She also could not get herself out of **GRO-B**. There was no one there to protect or support me or my siblings.
41. What happened with me was that all the trauma my mother went through got transmitted to me in all the ways that made my childhood a hell. I believe that

all children of parents who were in Lake Alice should be offered counselling and trauma support. I understand from my mother's conversations that a lot of them found it very hard to be a proper mum or dad. Those children will have suffered like I did. The children shouldn't have to prove sexual abuse to get trauma support and ACC counselling.

42. Counselling should be available to children in all primary schools, and they should be able to choose the gender of their counsellor. I have a friend who could not disclose his sexual abuse at school because the counsellor was a female. I think the same would go for race. I would like to give evidence at the Royal Commission in Auckland. I could travel up in my truck and bring one of my sons to look after my two youngest children. If any good can come out of my story, then I would like to tell it.

**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 \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

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**INDEX OF DOCUMENTS : STATEMENT OF AMY BETHUNE**

<b>Exhibit Ref</b>	<b>Document Description</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Para</b>
WITN0317002	ACC Psyc Assess Rpt /Tment plan Amy Bethune	25 May 2016	6
WITN0317003	ACC written apology	6 Dec 2017	18
WITN0317004	Letter from Sharyn Collis to her daughter Amy Bethune	undated	20