

Witness Name: ANN-MARIE MAY GABRIEL SHELLEY

Statement No.: WITN0002001

Exhibits: WITN0002002 - WITN0002009

Dated: 06/08/2020

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF ANN-MARIE MAY GABRIEL SHELLEY

I, Ann-Marie Shelley, will say as follows: -

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. I am 64 years old. I am a survivor of both State and faith-based abuse.
- 1.2. I was born in 1955 and left at Hutt Hospital, Lower Hutt, until I was placed for adoption through Catholic Social Services. Monsignor Kennedy from Christchurch arranged my adoption.
- 1.3. My parents GRO-B and **GRO-B** adopted GRO-C children through the Catholic Social Services.
- 1.4. Strict Catholicism dominated every aspect of home life. Many of my parents' extended family were either priests or nuns. Dad even began training to become a priest, but due to ill health he did not complete his studies.
- 1.5. As a family we attended the St Joseph's Parish in Upper Hutt. We were all entrenched with the Church and my parents held the priests in high regard.

1.6. I started school at St Joseph's primary school in Upper Hutt in 1960 and was taught by the nuns of the Sisters of Mercy.

2. THE ABUSE

Abuse at Primary School

2.1. The worst nun at St Joseph's was Sister John Bosco. I remember one incident where I was punished after she heard me tell a boy to "shut up". She dragged me by my hair, all the way from the playing fields across to the toilet block.

2.2. She turned on the tap, shoved a cake of dirty soap into my mouth, and yelled that she was going to wash the filthy words out of my mouth.

2.3. She then slammed my head down hard into the basin and held me down with her hand on the back of my neck. I gulped mouthfuls of running water until soap bubbles frothed out of my mouth and nose.

2.4. I was terrified I was going to drown. To this day, if I accidentally get soap or shampoo or running water anywhere near my nose, I panic.

2.5. After her punishment Sister John Bosco told me not to tell my parents, because they would not believe me. Parents believed nuns, she said, not bad little girls.

2.6. In the early 1960's St Joseph's Primary was booming. I believed that it was because of this I was moved to another school.

2.7. I was transferred to Sacred Heart primary school in Margaret St in Lower Hutt in 1964 and was taught by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions.

2.8. I had piano lessons every week from a nun who hit my hands with a big long stick or smashed the piano lid down on my hands whenever I played a wrong note. I dreaded the lessons but was too scared to tell Mum I didn't want to go.

2.9. In Standard Four, in 1966, our teacher was Sister Lucine. Her way to punish us was to grab the three-foot wooden ruler that had a metal strip down the side edges, and make us stretch our arms out in front, palms upward. She would then repeatedly whack us with the metal edge of the ruler, across the veins on the inside of our wrists until the whole area was swollen and raw.

2.10. I was scared she would rupture all the blood vessels in my wrists and that I would be left bleeding to death in the back of the classroom.

- 2.11. I still have unbearably sensitive wrists. I don't like to button the cuffs on my shirts, or wear wrist jewellery, and can only wear a watch very loosely.
- 2.12. One day I found the courage to stand up to Sister Lucine and said I was going to tell my parents she was hurting us.
- 2.13. She hissed at me that she would ring Mum before I got home and tell her I was an evil little liar and whose word did I think she would believe.
- 2.14. Sister Lucine told me that parents believe nuns, not little girls. I had apparently descended from bad girl to evil girl. I was 11 years old.
- 2.15. We had Sister Helen for the two years of Forms 1 and 2. Every day at the front of the classroom she would cough up phlegm into a big brown handkerchief, and some days she coughed until she vomited into it. Her favourite instrument of pain was a huge black leather strap that hung on the wall behind her desk.
- 2.16. I would be made to hold out one arm at a time stretched in front of me and she would whack the hell out of each hand. The number of whacks depended on how I reacted to either the prospect of pain, or the pain itself.
- 2.17. If I cried or flinched, I got whacked more and harder. I learned to detach myself – I became an observer of my own strapping, rather than the person occupying the body being strapped.
- 2.18. When Sister Helen wasn't strapping, she whacked me and other girls in the head with her fist. It wasn't unusual to be punched so hard that you would end up on the floor.
- 2.19. Another favourite of hers was to sneak up on a girl who was looking for something inside her desk. She would creep up on the unsuspecting victim and slam the wooden lid hard down on your head. And then she would laugh.
- 2.20. I remember a group of us girls hiding behind the music rooms to discuss what to do about the violence. We wondered if maybe we could go to the Education Department, but we didn't know how to do that. In the end we decided to do nothing, as we feared what she might do if she found we had been plotting against her.
- 2.21. At this time of primary school years, I was under a lot of pressure to be a high achiever. My mother constantly made me feel that I had to repay the debt of my existence in the family.

2.22. Despite my efforts my mother would say “you could have done better.” I felt extremely guilty that no matter what I did, it was never good enough to make Mum and Dad glad they had adopted me.

2.23. I would never dare tell my parents about any abuse as they would have given me a hiding.

2.24. I always felt my mother never wanted any of us, but rather was pressured by the Church. I am sure we GRO-B children were only adopted because Monsignor Kennedy told our parents to take us.

Secondary School - Sacred Heart College, Lower Hutt

2.25. I started in Form 3 at Sacred Heart College, Lower Hutt in 1969. I worked hard in class but, as the year wore on, I became aware that what happened in our house didn't happen in my friends' houses.

Not relevant to the NJ process

Not relevant to the NJ process

The priest Father Peter Hercock

- 2.38. Hercock was the school counsellor and chaplain at Sacred Heart College. I was suspicious of him at first, but gradually let my guard down. He seemed genuinely interested in knowing why I was miserable and for the first time ever, I could not only talk, but finally be heard.
- 2.39. The sessions were in a room off the sick bay upstairs at school and lasted for around two years, during school time.
- 2.40. I completely trusted Father Hercock, to the point where there was literally nothing he didn't know about me. Eventually I believed him when he said he knew me better than I knew myself.
- 2.41. He not only acknowledged my contempt for the hypocrisy of Catholicism but encouraged it. He made it very clear that I must never tell anyone that he agreed with my views. It had to be one of our secrets. He also told me, no one would believe me if I said a Catholic priest was anti-Catholic.
- 2.42. Hercock told me I was right to hate Mum and Dad and that I should continue to despise them. When I spoke of running away, he actively encouraged me to do so, as he said it would teach Mum and Dad a lesson.

- 2.43. I couldn't get him to understand that I did not want to hurt my parents, I just wanted them to see me and acknowledge my pain.
- 2.44. But I did run away, many times. I slept in phone boxes, parked cars, barns, ditches, subways and shop doorways. The worst running-away was when I was on the run in the central North Island in the middle of a bitter winter.
- 2.45. I developed what I later realised was pneumonia and walked into the Rotorua police station just to get out of the cold. I would have been 15 years old. A male police officer made me strip and get into a shower in front of him and stood there watching me the whole time. I was too grateful for the hot water and too unwell to care.
- 2.46. I refused to go home to Upper Hutt, so I was driven to a Social Welfare Home and dumped in a room with many other children and just left overnight to fend for myself. I don't think there was a bed for me to sleep in.
- 2.47. The next day the police came and told me that if I refused to go back home, that I would be driven down to the Upper Hutt courthouse and would have to testify that Mum and Dad were bad parents and that I would have to do it in front of them.
- 2.48. I couldn't do it. The prospect of so publicly committing the sin of disloyalty was too overwhelming to contemplate.
- 2.49. The first thing Mum and Dad did when they arrived in Rotorua to pick me up was to drive to a church and force me to go to Confession. I had to sit through a Mass with them. All the way home they kept saying "how could you do this to us?"
- 2.50. I was sent back to Hercock after all my running away episodes. Over the course of that two or so years I was subjected to an insidious process of grooming that occurred so gradually that I was not aware of what was happening.

Refer EXHIBIT WITN0002003 – Form 5 Class photo

- 2.51. But still I kept going to him, because he always found ways to remind me that no one cared about me, except him. I was convinced that continuing to see him was the only reason why I was surviving my horrible life.

After College

- 2.52. After I had left school, I became pregnant in 1973, when I was 17 years old.

Not relevant to the NJ process

Not relevant to the NJ process

2.54. I turned 18 and was both homeless and penniless and my only option was to go to Bethany, the Salvation Army Home for Unmarried Mothers, in Wellington.

Bethany, Salvation Army Home for Unmarried Mothers, Wellington

2.55. I think there were about sixteen of us girls living there at that time. We were aged between 14 and 21 and were either wards of the State or had been abandoned by our families.

2.56. I cannot adequately describe the atmosphere of desolation in that place and the piteous sound of so many of us crying quietly into our pillows at night.

2.57. At Bethany I was told by the Department of Social Welfare social worker that there was no way I could keep the baby, as there was no financial support whatsoever for single mothers.

2.58. I later discovered this was a lie, as the Domestic Purposes Benefit had recently been introduced and I would have qualified for a range of assistance.

2.59. While at Bethany I received a Sickness Benefit of \$25 a week and we all had to pay half of our benefit to Bethany. We therefore had only \$12.50 left to spend per week.

2.60. Usually this money was spent on food to supplement the terrible slops we were given. Plus, we had to provide the nappies and clothing for our babies to wear until they were adopted.

2.61. The social worker also told me that the only thing I could choose for my baby was the religion of the adoptive parents. I had only one right, so I decided to exercise it. God knows why, but I insisted the adoptive parents be Catholic. I thought better the devil you know than the devil you don't.

2.62. Bethany was a decrepit old Dickensian building, riddled with fleas. The fleas were in our pillows, in the mattresses, and not even the toxic kerosene flea bombs the exterminators regularly put through the place could get rid of them.

2.63. The food was scarce and atrocious. The milk was off, the butter was rancid. We often vomited after meals. But there was nothing we could do. None of us had anywhere else to go.

- 2.64. **GRO-B** who oversaw Bethany, made sure we never forgot that we were delinquents, deviants and sinners who had nowhere else to go.
- 2.65. We were all rostered to do the domestic work. No matter how advanced your pregnancy was, you still had to scrub floors on your hands and knees with a scrubbing brush, scrub the baths and toilets, do all the washing of the bed-linen in the Wringer washing machines and hang the heavy sheets out on the lines.
- 2.66. No matter how nauseated you were, you still had to do the cooking, do the pig buckets. We were exploited as free labour to staff the day-care centre that was attached to the Bethany building.
- 2.67. We were only allowed visitors on Sunday afternoons. **GRO-B** and **GRO-B** did not visit me, not even once. To them, I had ceased to exist.
- 2.68. We received zero instruction on what to expect during labour or delivery. I was very frightened. The bigger the baby grew, the more scared I became. I couldn't understand how something so big was going to come out of me.
- 2.69. I was left alone during my labour at Wellington Hospital. The **GRO-B** had ordered an ambulance and I was dumped at the door. I gave birth in a room of strangers. I was then sent back to Bethany, by ambulance, with my baby to await the adoption.
- 2.70. Once back at Bethany I cared for my son. The time was a blur of being ill from a birth-related infection and trying to spend as much time with him as I could.
- 2.71. When he was a few weeks old, I was sent into town to run an errand; I rushed back to be in time for his afternoon feed, raced up the stairs to the nursery, but his bassinette was empty.
- 2.72. The adoptive parents had come and taken him. He was gone. I was dazed. In complete shock. The dead emptiness I felt was as though I had been hollowed out. I couldn't believe any human being could be as cruel as the staff who sent me up town, knowing I was coming back to nothing. I hadn't even said goodbye to him.
- 2.73. I had no photo of him. No last cuddle. No last kiss. No last touch of him. No last smell of him.
- 2.74. I have no memory of how much longer I stayed at Bethany, how I left, or how much later **GRO-B** had frogmarched me to the lawyer's office up Courtenay Place in a dingy little upstairs office to sign the adoption papers.

2.75. I have no memory of any lawyer speaking to me, anything being explained to me, I just remember being a zombie and a paper was pushed across a desk and there was a large X to mark the spot where I had to sign. Afterwards, Mum took me to a coffee lounge, and I sat there crying. "Don't be silly" she said, "it's all over now. Just put it behind you. Drink your tea."

The rapes by Father Peter Hercocck

2.76. Six weeks later in 1974, I started my nursing training at Hutt Hospital. Over the following months I experienced overwhelming grief and when my tutor found me unable to stop crying, she told me to get some counselling. I turned to Hercocck.

2.77. He was living in the Wainuiomata Catholic presbytery.

2.78. Sometimes he would come to the Nurses Home during the day and other times he would pick me up and take me to the presbytery in the evenings. One night, during the so-called grief counselling, he raped me.

2.79. I felt dirty, ashamed and shocked and told no one. I was convinced it was my fault. My mental health deteriorated, and I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety.

2.80. I had daytime hallucinations and night-time terrors. There was no way to get my head around the fact of sex with a priest.

2.81. I was terrified that if I gave in to the horrible feelings of panic coursing through me, that I would be swallowed up by those feelings, packed off to a mental hospital and never let out. I had to shut all that down, just to survive and pretend to be normal. But things were not normal. A priest had raped me.

2.82. Hercocck rang me several years later when I was married and acted as though nothing had happened at the presbytery. He wanted to talk about his problems and said he didn't know if he still wanted to be a priest.

2.83. I felt guilty and responsible for his turmoil. He said he had been instructed by his superiors to go to Australia and see a psychiatrist who specialised in dealing with priests who were "losing the faith".

2.84. Hercocck said he was falling apart and didn't know what to do. I subsequently couldn't cope with the hideous notion that I had caused the downfall of a priest.

Not relevant to the NJ process

Not relevant to the NJ process

3. REDRESS

- 3.1. Many years later I discovered that I was not the only victim of Peter Hercock. Once I began discovering he had hurt other girls, I was overcome by anger, but the energy that came from that anger gave me the strength to make a formal complaint.
- 3.2. I also found out from GRO-B that Hercock had preyed on her at College as well. She was staunch and said she had told him to “fuck off”.
- 3.3. In September 2002 I laid a complaint with the Abuse Protocol Committee of the Archdiocese of Wellington against the former priest Peter Hercock, under their “Te Houhanga Rongo, A Path to Healing” process.
- 3.4. I received an acknowledgement of my complaint from (then) Bishop John Dew who wrote: “Peter Hercock has left the priesthood ... therefore we no longer have jurisdiction over him. It is possible that he may refuse to take part in the process...”.

Refer EXHIBIT WITN0002004 – Letter from Bishop John Dew

- 3.5. I wanted to know who else, apart from the two investigators, was on that Committee and was refused an answer.
- 3.6. I was aware of the investigation process by the Church and knew they would not investigate if I indicated I was going to the police. When asked if I intended to involve the police, I said I would decide that later.
- 3.7. I assumed the Protocol Committee used investigators with appropriate experience and qualifications. I assumed that any interview of Peter Hercock would be recorded, and notes taken and that I would be fully updated.
- 3.8. My assumptions later proved to be very wrong.

- 3.9. Investigation of my complaint was carried out by two members of the Abuse Protocol Committee. One of the people was **GRO-C** a Marist priest. Both he and the other investigator treated me with respect and compassion. But as the process unfolded, I became increasingly concerned that several serious issues were not being addressed.
- 3.10. Hercock was interviewed in March 2003 and he admitted his guilt. I then again met with the investigators to discuss the outcome of the interview however this meeting with me was tense and I was dismayed by their responses to my questions.
- 3.11. I was told Hercock told them he had expected the complaint to have come from a different person. As I was clearly not Hercock's only victim I asked what the Church was going to do to help other victims come forward.
- 3.12. **GRO-C**'s response was: "nothing. It's not our responsibility."
- 3.13. I met with **GRO-C** in June 2003 to complain about the way in which the interview had been conducted. It should have been recorded, but it was not. There should have been a full transcript, but there was not.
- 3.14. I was made to wait about six weeks before I was given only a small written summary. The two people who interviewed Hercock were not proper investigators and had no professional skills or knowledge of how to deal with a manipulative sex offender.
- 3.15. I received a formal apology from the Church regarding Hercock's abuse and a payment of \$25,000. And then I was expected to shut up and go away. Apologies are good, but accountability would be even better.

Refer EXHIBIT WITN0002005 – Letter from **GRO-C 10 June 2003**

- 3.16. During this time, I received information that Hercock had abused two other girls, sisters, at Sacred Heart in Lower Hutt, also in the 1970's, and I contacted one of them.
- 3.17. The abuse victim told me that a family member had made a formal complaint regarding the abuse by Hercock in the 1970's, to **GRO-C** at Catholic Social Services in Wellington.
- 3.18. I was told **GRO-C** told the family to stay quiet about the complaint.

3.19. The family then attempted to see the Cardinal but all efforts at getting an appointment were blocked. The family demanded that Hercock be removed from Sacred Heart Lower Hutt and the archdiocese duly removed him but sent him to Sacred Heart College in Napier.

3.20. I believe this practice of moving priests on has come to be known as "The Geographical Cure". A way the Church can hide the abuse and keep it a secret.

3.21. The Church therefore was fully aware that Hercock was a sex offender before they sent him to Napier, and effectively left him free to commit more sex offences on vulnerable young girls.

Not relevant to the NJ process

Not relevant to the NJ process

Not relevant to the NJ process

4. THE IMPACT OF THE ABUSE

- 4.1. As a schoolgirl I entered the Sacred Heart counselling room in a state of emptiness, and I am still hollow. I mourn the loss of the life I could have had if the violations had not occurred. I discovered years later, Hercock had absolutely no counselling training before coming to Sacred Heart college.
- 4.2. I am still angry at the school for letting this unqualified predator have unsupervised access to vulnerable young girls.
- 4.3. I used alcohol for many years to try and escape the traumatic memories. I no longer use alcohol at all, but I depend on medication and counselling to manage the effects of depression, anxiety and PTSD.
- 4.4. As children, we were taught to call the priests "Father" and indeed, the relationship between priest and child is like a (healthy) parent-child relationship. Or it's supposed to be.
- 4.5. The power imbalance between counsellor and child or young person, has that same dynamic. Hercock was both priest and counsellor, therefore magnifying the impact of the harm he caused.
- 4.6. I strenuously avoid situations that could set off my PTSD. This has caused me to live in social isolation.
- 4.7. Because of the severity of my PTSD, I have been unemployed and on ACC weekly compensation for many years.
- 4.8. I am embarrassed at being unable to work, so I find it easier to not meet new people in social situations, because they will inevitably ask "what do you do?". It's an unanswerable question. Dealing with ACC has created another layer of trauma that experts refer to as "secondary wounding".

The Catholic Church complaints process

- 4.9. I have noted above how poorly the Church conducted their investigation and I would never recommend any survivor of clergy abuse to use this process. It is unsafe.
- 4.10. To add to this the investigators did two things which expressly contravened my requests. I had written a letter to Hercock describing the harm he had caused me, and I asked **GRO-C** to read it out to Hercock, and then leave a copy of that letter with Hercock. **GRO-C** did not leave the letter with him.
- 4.11. Secondly, I specifically stated I did not want any sort of written apology from Hercock, yet **GRO-C** obtained one from him and presented it to me with a kind of triumphant flourish. I was disgusted and did not open it until much later.
- 4.12. The Church cannot be allowed to investigate its own. An independent system needs to be set up in the manner of how the IPCA works in relation to complaints against the police. It must consist of a body of professionally trained experts.
- 4.13. I remain aghast at the attitude of **GRO-C** in thinking it was quite acceptable to both investigate Hercock in 2003 and then counsel him in 2016 regarding what plea he should enter for the charges and later provide him with a character reference at sentencing.
- 4.14. I think he has behaved in an appalling manner in relation to this entire matter.
- 4.15. When I sent **GRO-C** an email in 2017 to express my dismay at his actions, his reply was both patronising and aggressive.
- 4.16. **GRO-C**
- 4.17. **GRO-C**
- 4.18. At the time I laid the complaint with the Church, I had expected Sacred Heart college at the very least to contact me and other ex-Sacred Heart girls with a token apology, or some acknowledgement. But nothing.
- 4.19. Even after sentencing and all the publicity surrounding it, I thought surely, they will now. But no. Complete silence. That silence is an insult.

5. LOOKING FORWARD

- 5.1. The Catholic Church in New Zealand hides behind the no-fault ACC scheme, instead of owning up to the damage its institutional practices have caused and paying for that damage in full.
- 5.2. I am unavoidably culturally Catholic, but my actual faith is about my relationship with God not with the archaic and self-serving institution of the physical Church. My anger is directed at the individual perpetrators who destroy the lives of the vulnerable. And at the members at the top of the Church hierarchy who have been more concerned with protecting their own interests and reputations, than caring about those of us who lie hurt and broken down here at the bottom.
- 5.3. My great hopes for the work of this Royal Commission are 1) that institutions are either helped or forced to hand their abuse complaints processes over to an independent body of professionals, and 2) that abuse victims can make complaints in a safe environment in which being believed comes ahead of being dismissed, silenced, or ignored.

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:

6.8.2020