

Witness Name: **GRO-A-MR JJ**

Statement No.: WITN0329001

Exhibits: WITN0329002 – WIT03290012

Dated: 23.03.2021

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF **GRO-A-MR JJ**

I, **GRO-A-Mr JJ**, will say as follows: –

- 1 My name is **GRO-A-Mr JJ** and I was born on **GRO-A** 1958. I am a survivor of Cherry Farm and Lake Alice.
- 2 I was one of the claimants in the Grant Cameron proceedings, and my statement for that is attached to this statement [**WITN0329002**]. I have also included some of my Lake Alice notes and Oranga Tamariki notes, which I think are relevant. They are listed in the table at the end of this statement.

Early life

- 3 My birth father was an Irishman. I am named after him (**GRO-B**). My mother was Māori. I am the second oldest of five children. I never knew my birth father. He had left before I was born. My mother was a wonderful loving woman,

but unfortunately for her and we children, her partner (our stepfather) was a very violent man. He would beat my mother up regularly. I recall running to the convent across the road to get help. At around the age of five, my stepfather and mother separated, and my mother had a minor breakdown and spent a short time in Porirua Hospital.

- 4 We children were then made wards of the state. Mum didn't want us to go to her mother as her mother had been extremely cruel to her. However, the social worker did not listen, and we were put in her care. Growing up with her was hell, really hell. She resented having us "dumped" on her. She was extremely cruel.
- 5 For example, she would make us beat each other up. She would put us in the hot copper when it was heated. She would make us pinch each other, push each other, and hold each other underwater. She had a walking stick that she would waive around and beat us up with. I spent a lot of my time trying to protect myself and my siblings from her. Our grandfather didn't treat us like this, but he didn't stick up for us either. He was a German man and was scared of his own wife. Our grandmother also treated us like slaves. We had to lift stones and move wheelbarrows and do a lot of heavy labouring work. I remember once she bit a piece out of a corn cob growing in the garden and then said one of us had done it and that was an excuse to hit us.
- 6 My mother would come secretly to the end of the street and wave to us children and beckon us to come down to see her. She tried to get us back, but she couldn't as we were wards of the state. We always had bruises on our bodies, but I was treated the worst because I was considered dumb. The woman from social welfare who was responsible for us as wards of the state was a scary woman and never helped us. She would always take our grandmother's side.

Schooling

- 7 One of my main problems as a child was that I had some sort of learning disability. I just could not learn how to read and write and spell. This was made worse by the stress I was under at home and the fact that the primary teacher, Mr Dillaway, would hit a cane on my desk and shout at me because I couldn't

do the work. I was aware I was getting more and more behind the other children but didn't know how to stop it.

- 8 I got teased and made fun of at school for being a “dumbbell” and “backward” and “slow”. Even my siblings teased and taunted me for being dumb. I would lash out and hit other children because of the teasing, and that was the beginning of me getting a reputation for being aggressive. The teachers were also very aggressive to me because I couldn't learn. It was really awful being teased and yelled at all the time.
- 9 When I would come home from school and tell my grandmother about my problems with learning, she would not be sympathetic to me. She would say things like “that's typical of you”. I couldn't share any problems with her. No one cared or comforted me when I was under so much stress.

Sexual abuse

- 10 The first time I was sexually abused was by a man who I think was a **GRO-C** priest. He had a **GRO-C** I ran over to the **GRO-C** to ask for help once when my stepfather was beating up my mother. He went over to my home and spoke to them and then suggested we come back with him and he would look after me for a while. We went, and he sexually assaulted me.
- 11 When I was six or seven, I was sexually abused by my adult cousin, **GRO-B** **GRO-B** who was also staying with my grandmother. This was full sexual intercourse and very painful. When I showed my grandmother my bottom, which was showing the injuries from the rapes, she simply said that I had done it to myself by hitting my butt on the bed end. **GRO-B** sexually assaulted me many times over a three-to-four-month period. I learnt there was nothing I could do about it. I find it very hard to talk about the sexual abuse I have suffered. He didn't sexually abuse my siblings, but he was very cruel to all of us. He would hang us on the clothesline with pegs and laugh.
- 12 I was made a ward of the state on 9 June 1970 and then sent to Campbell Park in Dunedin on **GRO-A** 1970. I only stayed there a month. I hated it there. I was so unhappy and unsettled. **[WITN0329004]**

How I came to be in lake Alice

- 13 On 6 March 1970, Dr Pugmire wrote a psychiatric report that was insulting to my race, my family, and me. This report started the events that led to me being taken off my mother by court order and made a ward of the state and sent to a boy's home. **[WITN0329003]**

This 12-year-old Maori boy is one of a family of sub-cultural, subnormal children born to an irresponsible Maori mother by an unstable violent father. His IQ is in the 75 to 85 range, but his behaviour at home and at school suggests not only low intelligence, but gross instability or early psychosis ... Although his mother has had the good fortune to marry a very fine Maori gentleman who is well able to train normal children, **GRO-A-Mr JJ** has proved quite unresponsive.

- 14 Dr Pugmire got important things wrong. The "fine Māori gentleman" was a violent wife beater. He had not considered that there might be other reasons why I was the way I was – such as all the sexual abuse from my cousin and cruel treatment from my grandmother and my inability to learn. After a few reports, I was committed against my mother's will to the care of the state. **[WITN0329004]**

Cherry Farm 1970

- 15 From Campbell Park, I was admitted to Cherry Farm on **GRO-A** 1970. **[WITN0392005]** I had just turned 12.¹ I was there for two years until I was moved to Lake Alice. I talk about Cherry Farm in my statement for Grant Cameron's class action proceedings at paragraphs 13 to 17. **[WITN0329002]**
- 16 In summary, Cherry Farm was a horrendous place. It was way worse than Lake Alice, for me. I was placed in Villa D with the mentally insane adults. I and the other children were sexually violated by male nurses regularly. We were hosed down with high-pressure hoses, laughed at, and taunted for no apparent reason. They called us every insulting name under the sun. At bath time, they would push our heads under the water. I got ECT there. After a while, I was told that I was being sent to Lake Alice because it was closer to my family home. I

¹ An OT note on my admission refers to "outbursts" (originally "psychotic", then downgraded to "hysterical") and "a preoccupation with knives". A letter from the Department of Health to the Director of Social Welfare on 15 July 1970 while I was at Cherry Farm records "A single definite diagnosis has not yet been made but it felt that he is probably schizophrenic with the developmental and cultural factors adding complexity to the picture."

don't believe this. I think I was sent there because they couldn't find a foster home for me.²

Lake Alice

- 17 I confirm my statement to Grant Cameron about what happened at Lake Alice is correct and I just summarise it briefly here [WITN0329002]. I had two admissions. The first was from [GRO-A] 1972 to [GRO-A] 1972. [WITN0329006] The second was from [GRO-A] 1973 to sometime after [GRO-A] [GRO-A] 1973. [WITN0329008] In all, I was there for around 10 months.
- 18 I do not believe I had a mental illness and should not have been admitted to either Lake Alice or Cherry Farm. The people at Lake Alice knew this, but it did not stop them giving me ECT and drugs for punishment. I note the letter from a social worker signed B Hollis dated 5 June 1973 reads in part: [WITN0329007]
- ... (an earlier) report suggests that [GRO-A-Mr JJ] was diagnosed as schizophrenic, but in fact this is not correct. This was a tentative diagnosis and has not been confirmed by Lake Alice ... [GRO-A-Mr JJ] was re-admitted largely because of a lack of suitable alternatives. As far as the hospital (Lake Alice) is concerned, there is nothing psychiatrically wrong with him, at least that needs further hospital treatment. He is currently being held but not treated ...

Assessment on arrival (paragraphs 20 to 23 of GC Statement)

- 19 Basically, I recall that the first time I went there I had a very brief meeting with Dr Leeks. He came out of the office after my social worker had spoken to him. He just said I was in for treatment and to do as he said. He seemed nice at first, but I soon learned it was just a front. He didn't talk with me or ask any questions. He never told me I was going to get ECT.

My sleeping arrangements (paragraph 3 statement of GC Statement)

- 20 When I first arrived, I was put in a ward with crazy men. It was an adult ward. I was terrified of them. They looked like they had come out of a horror movie, and I felt I was living with monsters. There was nothing I could do as the door was locked behind us. There were other boys there, and I recall a boy who was just six years old. I recall there being more Māori boys than Pākehā. I was in

² I am not sure how long I was there, but it felt like a long time. Sometime during the year, I was moved to Lake Alice.

both Villa 15 and Villa 16. I was never put in the dormitory upstairs. I slept in the little rooms called "punishment rooms" just past the ablution block.

- 21 There were small square boxes, almost like dog kennels. I and other boys would be locked in there for one to three days. You had a potty for doing your personal business, and we were given water and sometimes something to eat. When I went back with the *Holmes* show, they were still there, and I pointed them out to the reporter.

Electric-convulsive therapy – ECT (paragraphs 43 to 52 of GC Statement)

- 22 I got a lot of ECT at Lake Alice, both modified and unmodified. I got far more unmodified ECT. I estimate that I had it 20 times. ECT happened all the time; there were always children getting it. If it was modified, we had to drink largactil or swallow white pills or get a jab in the bottom beforehand. It took away a lot of the pain, but you could still feel the throbbing.
- 23 If it was unmodified, you first heard buzzing and then feel the shock as it went through your head, which would be throbbing, and you would be screaming and shaking. It was incredibly painful like punching in the head, and when it finished, you didn't know anything. It was horrible and sore. It was really, really, really terrifying, and often I would pass out. I still get headaches today from it. ECT was liberally used as a punishment for us.
- 24 When the boys were in the lounge watching TV, they knew when ECT was happening because stripes would run across the TV screen.
- 25 I think the doctors and nurses got a kick out of giving it to us. It was like they wanted to really, really hurt us. One day there was an incident between me and a nurse. I broke a pot accidentally. He threw a hammer at my head. After that, he gave me ECT. I got it 12 times in the same day. I was in so much pain after. I was a complete wreck.
- 26 When you were waiting to find out if you were chosen, you would hear the children's screams. They were horrible and eerie. A nurse would then come in and point to you and say "you". He would then drag you upstairs. ECT was all about punishment.

27 A whole lot of nurses would hold you down. During ECT, I would go unconscious and wake up in another room on a bed with a sheet under the bed. Sometimes I woke in a bath. You lose control of your body after ECT because it gives such a shock to the brain. Afterwards, I would have blackouts and hallucinations. I would have such a pounding in the head that it would feel there was a tonne of bricks on it. I have ear problems now as a result of getting ECT. Afterward having it, we were just sitting on chairs rocking backwards and forwards.

Drugs

28 I got largactil every day. It was a brown liquid that tasted very bitter. It made me drowsy, and I felt like a zombie. I put on heaps of weight with it. I hated it and had no idea why I was being given it.

29 I got paraldehyde injections but less than ECT – maybe less than 10 paraldehyde injections. You were thrown onto the bed by nurses, kicking and screaming, and a doctor would put an injection in your bottom. It was so painful you couldn't move and it would last for days. You couldn't even walk after getting it.

Seclusion

30 I was always thrown into the lock-up after a paraldehyde injection. Sometimes it felt like days. Sometimes I got food. Sometimes only water. I was in lock-up a lot of other times too. I never knew exactly why I was locked up – they never told me.

31 Often boys would be physical with each other or misbehave. This was not because they didn't like each other but just because they had so much pent-up energy and stress from being there. If anyone saw you hitting or slapping or pushing another boy, then you got ECT or put in a cell.

32 As I said, I always slept in lock-up rooms too.

Sexual assaults

- 33 I was regularly sexually abused at Lake Alice by different male nurses. There were two male nurses that I specifically remember abusing me sexually. Mostly it was full sexual intercourse – full rape. One was a Māori nurse (big and ugly) and one a European. I was often abused while I was in lock up. There were other nurses who abused me, but I can't recall their names.
- 34 I also remember hearing other boys screaming in pain when they were being raped at night. Sometimes it was before the nurse would get to me and rape me also. I was so ashamed and embarrassed about what was happening to me sexually, and this embarrassment and shame has stayed with me my whole life. These are horrific memories to live with.

Staff (paragraphs 39 to 41 of GC Statement)

- 35 A lot of the male staff were horrible, but Nurse Leonard was lovely and kind and like a mother to us. Mrs Duncan the cook was also lovely and would mother us children. Some of the female staff were lovely – they would give us lollies, kisses, and awhi.
- 36 Some male staff found every opportunity to laugh at us and make fun of us. For example, I saw a news item on TV. There were these towers in the pictures that were actually water towers. As children, we were told by the male nurses that there were men with guns in the towers and that if we ran away, we would be shot. I believed that.

Schooling

- 37 I had no schooling while I was there. In fact, I didn't even know there was a school. I was put to work making pot-plant plaster casts and other things.

Family visits

- 38 My mother visited me only once that I recall. She told me later that she had come many times to visit me, but she was always told I was not well enough to see her. I never knew about these visits

Māori/Pacific residents

- 39 I definitely think Māori children were treated worse. We got more ECT.

Disabled/vulnerable residents

- 40 I didn't know if there were children with disabilities there. Some children were definitely shaky, but I don't know if that was from the drugs or if they had cerebral palsy.

Complaints and compensation

- 41 I complained about the sexual abuse to Nurse **GRO-B** several times. I showed her my bottom, which was very sore. I recall her making an appointment for me to tell Dr Leeks what had happened. I recall Nurse **GRO-B** telling Dr Leeks that she had seen the tear. Dr Leeks would then say "No, that's rubbish. That's self-inflicted. None of my staff would do that." I recall other times when I complained she would look at me as though she believed me but was saying "what can I do?"
- 42 I also complained to my social welfare officer about the ECT and sexual abuse. He was not bothered and didn't care about me. He would tell me to leave it with him, but nothing ever happened.
- 43 After mum pulled through her breakdown, she told me she tried to get me out but had no power.

ACC for sexual abuse

- 44 I went to ACC about the sexual abuse and was given counselling. I only had about four sessions. I couldn't bear it because the counsellor kept going over and over the same incidents and asking questions such as "how many times". I would complain to her that she already asked me those questions in the sessions before. I thought there was no point in me going as it was just making me very upset. I would like to go back again however and have some proper counselling. I have never claimed for earnings-related compensation.

Taking part in 20/20 documentary

- 45 I recall seeing a 20/20 documentary about Lake Alice. After that, I rang the *Holmes* show and told them that I was one of the ones who had been there. They said they would do a documentary on it. They took me back there, and I

showed them around the whole building and explained where everything was. It was horrible going back and having all the memories again. I also remember seeing a pair of blue and white striped pyjamas on the floor, and that upset me a lot. When I visited, there was an education block but that had not been there when I was at Lake Alice.

Taking claim through Grant Cameron

46 I heard that Grant Cameron was taking a claim, and I joined in. Someone took a statement from me. [WITN0329002] I received \$80,438.60 before Grant Cameron's fees were deducted. I do not believe this was enough for all I have been through and the damage done to my life. But we did not have a choice – we had to take it or leave it.

Life after Lake Alice³

Employment

47 When I first got out of Lake Alice, I was still on the drugs that Dr Leeks had prescribed. I spent two months in a family home before going to Hastings to stay with another family and find work. I worked for short periods, for example, fruit picking and at Watties. I couldn't keep going to work at Watties as the noises reminded me of the sound of ECT in my head. I was sent to borstal for three months from September 1974 to December 1974.

48 Most of my life, I was not able to find a job. No one would take me on after they asked about my education and found out I couldn't read or write. Also, I have just not been well enough to work for most of my life. I believe I lost the chance to earn a living because of Lake Alice and Cherry Farm.

Getting married

49 I met my wife at a party, and we later married. Her mother organised the wedding. We had five children together. I found it very hard to be in the marriage

³ An OT letter dated 5 June 1973 that recommended my admission to Maryland's in Christchurch records: [GRO-A-Mr JJ] is surely a 'born loser'. He has been culturally deprived, is of limited intelligence and formal training, and has lacked security, stability and sometimes acceptance in all the placements tried to date. The results are that at nearly 15 years of age, [GRO-A-Mr JJ] seems no further ahead than when he started, and he is not yet able to cope with the demands of the community.

because of what had happened to me. I never wanted to physically discipline my children. I just wanted to hold them and love them. I wanted to give them everything that I had not had.

50 Sometime later in the marriage, I told my wife that I had been sexually abused and been in Lake Alice getting ECT. From then on, she started getting suspicious of me especially when I was cuddling and embracing the children. I explained to her that I've been through so much shit, why would I ever want to put it onto my children. I was angry, but her family were suspicious of me. In the end she left me in 1997 and took the children and moved back to her family. Then they all moved to Tauranga to be with my wife's oldest sister.

51 That was very hard for me to lose the children. Also, my ex-wife was putting all sorts of negative things in their heads about me. I am still in touch regularly with my youngest daughter, but I think the other children have been poisoned about me. I told them some things about my experience as a state ward but not everything as the full story is just too scary. My ex-wife is now dead.

Car accident 1996

52 On 26 October 1996, I was struck by a car in the legs. It was around the time my marriage was breaking up. I didn't hear it coming because I was so distressed and distracted and already in a state of depression. The dispute with my wife had closed me down so that I did not see the car driving towards me. My legs were smashed up. I was in Auckland Hospital for three months, and I had to learn to walk again. I walk with a stick. For the last 10 years, I have had a carer who lives with me.

Effects of Lake Alice

53 My main problems now are PTSD, depression, anxiety, and socialising with other people. I don't share what has happened to me when I was a ward of the state and at Cherry Farm and Lake Alice because I fear that I will not be believed. I wasn't believed when my cousin was abusing me, and no one listened to my complaints. I still hate my grandmother for how cruel she was to me. I carry a lot of hurt and pain about my grandmother and Lake Alice. She

could have helped so much by not letting me be put into Lake Alice in the first place.

- 54 I am very upset that I never got to learn to read and write properly and never got any schooling at Lake Alice. It never made sense to me why I was taken away just to be assaulted and sexually abused and to get ECT all just because I could not learn. I've never been an alcoholic or a drug addict. I do like beer, but I don't over-drink. I was on antidepressants for a short time, but the doctor said he didn't think it was a good idea because I might get addicted. I felt I had to stop taking it because I didn't want the doctor to think I was a drug addict. They did help.

What I want from Royal Commission

- 55 I have had a one-on-one session with Commissioner Paul Gibson, and I loved it. He was such a lovely man. He was blind, but he heard everything I said. I was so impressed with him. They were all lovely people.
- 56 I want the government to be accountable for what happened to me while in their care at Cherry Farm and Lake Alice. Helen Clark's apology was just words on paper because no one was held accountable. Dr Leeks and the staff were never made to answer for the hellish lives they gave us.
- 57 Also, the last settlement with Grant Cameron, my voice was not heard. It is very important to me that people hear what we went through and believe my story. I want people to listen carefully to me.
- 58 I would like a public apology – not a private one. I think we should be able to go to the Beehive and have a publicly filmed apology from the prime minister so the whole country knows what we have been through. Everyone needs to know we are telling the truth. We did go through what we say we did, and it is not a laughing matter or a joke.
- 59 I also want compensation and do not consider that what I got from the Grant Cameron compensation deal is adequate. My entire life has been ruined by what happened to me at Cherry Farm and Lake Alice.

- 60 I would like to learn to read and write. I think the government should be helping all of us with learning disabilities to read and write and support those with health disabilities.
- 61 I have never been treated for the hurt and suffering and pain that I feel all the time. I want some counselling for the sexual abuse, but do not want to go to a psychiatrist, because after what I've been through, I would never trust one.
- 62 I'd like my life to be made better than it is if that is at all possible.

Giving evidence

- 63 I am happy to be on the stand and give my evidence but not for every Tom, Dick, and Harry to see me. I would want to be behind a screen. I would be scared that people would be laughing and looking at me saying "look at the nutcase on the stand". I couldn't handle that. My carer would go with me.

Statement of Truth

- 64 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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