Magdalene Institutions: Recording an Archival and Oral History
A project funded by the

Reference Code: MAGOHP/51/ANON

Oral History of: Philomena

Pseudonym? Yes

Status: Survivor

Keywords: Mount Saint Vincent Orphanage, Limerick; Good Shepherd Magdalene Laundry, Limerick; Sisters of Charity Magdalene Laundry, Peacock Lane; Good Shepherd Magdalene Laundry, Sundays Well; Good Shepherd Magdalene Laundry New Ross; Good Shepherd Magdalene Laundry, Waterford; Marianvale Mother and Baby Home, Newry; separation of family members; sexual assault; lack of education; literacy issues; auxiliaries; Irish Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children Inspector; Child of Mary; hunger strike; rebelliousness; rule of silence; adoption; lack of informed consent; forced adoption; mental illness; alcoholism.

Date of Interview: 22nd August 2013

Also present at interview: Lou (interviewee’s daughter). See MAGOHP/54/ANON for separate interview with Lou.

Transcript: 54 pages

Number/Format of Audio Files: One .wma file

Interviewer: Dr Sinéad Pembroke

Records/Papers included: No

Access Conditions: Anonymised interviews are freely available to the public. Immediate release of transcript and anonymised audio; interviewee’s identity will be revealed in 30 years.

Conditions Governing Reproduction: Interviews can be reproduced, however the citation below must be used at all times.

Notes on Redaction and Transcription Process

Interviewee Initials: P
Interviewer Initials: SP
Interviewee’s Daughter’s Initials: L

Key
… = Short pause (or where words are repeated or the speaker changes direction mid-sentence)
(pause) = Long pause
blabla = spoken with great emphasis
(blabla) = Additional audible expressions, body language
[blabla] = background information that might be helpful

Notes on Redaction Process
- Named individuals have been assigned pseudonyms
- Certain locations have been removed to protect the interviewee’s privacy
- Exact date of birth removed to protect interviewee’s privacy

List of Pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Status/Relationship to Interviewee</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philomena/Margaret</td>
<td>Interviewee/Survivor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Interviewee’s brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majella</td>
<td>Interviewee’s sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orla</td>
<td>Interviewee’s sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aidan</td>
<td>Interviewee's brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fr Burke</td>
<td>Priest who raped interviewee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lou</td>
<td>Interviewee’s daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sr Thomas</td>
<td>Third Party Religious (Industrial School)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisling</td>
<td>Woman who was in New Ross with Interviewee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>Interviewee's house name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>Possibly interviewee's son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Possibly interviewee's son</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
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Basic Data from Interview

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Pseudonym</th>
<th>Philomena</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When Born</td>
<td>1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born outside marriage?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raised by</td>
<td>Family then reformatory school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Reformatory school, but insufficient. Interviewee cannot read or write.</td>
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<td>Physical ailments?</td>
<td>No. Mental illness.</td>
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<td>Of Note</td>
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<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Good Shepherd Sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td>Limerick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duration of stay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age on entry</td>
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<td>Entered Via</td>
<td>Reformatory School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Name/No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haircutting/punishment?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumstances of Departure</td>
<td>Transferred to another laundry</td>
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<th>Good Shepherd Sisters</th>
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<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td>Waterford</td>
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<tr>
<td>From</td>
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<tr>
<td>To</td>
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<td>Duration of stay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age on entry</td>
<td>Approximately eighteen</td>
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<td>Transferred from another laundry</td>
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<td>House Name/No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haircutting/punishment?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circumstances of Departure</td>
<td>Transferred to another laundry</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>To</td>
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<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
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<td>To</td>
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<td>Age on entry</td>
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<td>Entered Via</td>
<td>Transferred from another laundry</td>
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<tr>
<td>House Name/No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haircutting/punishment?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circumstances of Departure</td>
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<td><strong>Order</strong></td>
<td>Good Shepherd Sisters</td>
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<td><strong>Laundry</strong></td>
<td>New Ross</td>
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<td><strong>To</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Circumstances of Departure</strong></td>
<td>Sent to work in a hospital</td>
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[Interview Begins]

SP  Okay, so thank you very much Philomena [pseudonym]. Today's [the] 22nd of August...so I guess the first question I want to ask is can you tell me about your life growing...when you were growing up?

P  Well, I hadn't a good life. I hadn't a good life anyway, you know...I had a hard life.

SP  And, can you tell me...so when you were born...where were you born?

P  I was born in Limerick, in...in the City Hall Hospital, I think. Far as I reckon...yeah...that's where I was born.

SP  And what year?

P  The [exact date of birth removed] 1943.

SP  Okay. And do you remember anything about your family?

P  Not r...later years, we met up, like, you know. Later years we met up. So, it was...four brothers. No, three was it, the twins...the twins passed, but...there was three of us in the Industrial School...

SP  Okay.

P  Three brothers and myself.

SP  Yeah. So was your family kind of broken up, and...

P  Yeah, we were broken up. Yeah.

SP  Okay. And you were all put into institutions?

P  There's Peter...Peter, Majella, and Orla [pseudonyms]. There was three of them not put in.

SP  Okay.

P  Three of them there were...
SP  *And how come they weren't put in?*

P  I think they were...they were bit older than I was at the...grandmother took over Orla.

SP  Okay.

P  S...so, then after the mother dying...she went over to England, they'd thirteen, and then Peter, the other brother followed. And then me other brother Aidan [pseudonym] followed, so...

SP  *Ah, okay. And then the rest of you when...*

P  It was the fath...the father...he was out in...foreign, he was a sailor so...

SP  Yeah.

P  ...there was no one there to look after us.

SP  *And how old were you when you were put into...*

P  I was seven.

SP  You were seven.

P  Seven.

SP  Okay.

P  I was a little young one and I went up to see my mother. Fiona [pseudonym] that's another girl and she brought me up to see my mother in the sanatorium.

SP  Okay.

P  And at that time you wouldn't be left in. She was on a corridor.

SP  Yeah.

P  And I just ran through, I can picture it, and a s...sister pulled me back and my mother sitting on the chair.
SP  So she had TB?

P  TB.

SP  Ah okay.

P  TB.

SP  And is that why you were all put into institutions…

P  Yeah.

SP  …because your mum was in a sanatorium?

P  Yeah, in a sanatorium. And to tell you the truth, the father didn't even care. He wanted to...he was captain of the navy ship and he just had this high life…

SP  Yeah.

P  …you know, so he didn't really bother.

SP  Okay.

P  That the other three made a life as I say, but they found out then where I was. I was married at the time.

SP  Okay.

P  So, I got in c…contact then.

SP  Oh, so yeah, so this is after…

P  Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SP  …after you...when you were older.

P  Yeah, older, yeah, yeah.
Ah okay, so up until that point like, you'd never seen your brothers and sisters?

No, no, no. I do nowadays [sic] but the sister in England came down for the reformatory school...she came over from England to see me. And, if I was sixteen she could have taken me out of the reformatory school, but I wasn't. So I was...I was just only gone thirteen. She was, you know, it wasn't her fault...their fault. You know, it wasn't any of their fault it was the father's fault...her...what the treatment was done and...the interfering was done with me, you know.

Yeah.

A priest an' all.

And can you tell me what happened with the priest?

This was in Limerick now...and I remember, I...I was...I was c...j...long, I wasn't long gone over to th...the laundry and I was walking up this corridor and Mr Burke [pseudonym] would call me. Now is was a kind of a tunnel...g...actually I was going down for potatoes and he called me and I went over anyway and there was kind of a...a table, a wooden table...

Put me on the wooden table, (sighs). Now la...he's dead now but I...I'd...I'd...I'd wrote a letter to the Minister of R...Health and he denied knowledge of it, I had to go to the guards [Irish police] and I won't go to the guards. Because, I...I'll just leave it, you know.

And at the time, did you tell...what did you do...did you just...

No, I told no one, I kept that up until the social worker and the nurse th...they come to see me.

Okay.

Oh no, it wasn't obvious, I...I had a stroke and...and the whole lot over in the hospital. There was a lovely nurse there and I just blew out everything...

Okay.
And I told her, so that's how th...

So that was much later on whilst you kept that a secret all those years...

Oh yeah, yeah. Everything was a secret until a couple of years I started...you know...

Yeah.

...was it Patrick [pseudonym] that was the first, and to Lou [pseudonym] I said...telling Lou I had something to tell her but I think y...y...you partly guessed did you, what it was?

Yeah.

She partly guessed what it was and...

Yeah.

...ah, so...

And this priest what was he doing there? Was he like the priest that said Mass?

He was the...the, what do you call them now? P...p...

The parish priest.

The chaplain.

Ah, okay.

It was the chaplain, that's who it was.

Oh, Jesus.

But I won't go out and, but, c...l...I couldn't, I wouldn't even go near the guards, I just...
And he came in front of me many a time, yeah.

Oh, yeah, you kept having to see him.

Yeah, yeah. He...he...what was I...I was in here one day, no it was out in the kitchen, and...he was there and he was doing this (makes a gesture) and laughing n...but I...I kept it in me...me head for a few weeks and I just had to leave...go. I told you about it did I?

Yeah.

I told ya. And I, you know, but now, th...then come now this few months, about three or four months [inaudible] in the bedroom, seen him in the bedroom...

Ah, so...

...it was a long, long kind of a h...h...habit and he had this thing.

Yeah.

But he's burning in hell anyway.

Yeah.

With the rest of the nuns.

But you're still...are you suffering those nightmares that you still see him, or...

Now, not as bad.

Okay.

Not as bad as...they changed my m...medication, you know.

Okay.

All this medication, it isn't everything, but it helps, you know...
Yeah.

...it helps.

And, did it happen the once, or did...

Just the once.

Okay.

Just the once, just the once.

Yeah.

It, but...it happened another girl before me. Because she told me.

Okay.

She...she's...I never mentioned anything to her. She says, ‘I have something to tell you,’ she says, ‘Philomena,’ she says...I says, ‘what's wrong with you now,’ so, ‘up telling...up saying what happened,’ and I said, ‘why don't you go and say it,’ and she wouldn't. It was...I was telling her to go and say it and I wouldn't say it meself. I gave this...you know.

Yeah. And why didn't you tell the nuns?

I was afraid.

Yeah.

I was afraid.

Yeah.

They'd put me...they put me up to the dormitory...dormitories [inaudible] they did it. They did it with the auxiliary there.

Okay.
P Yeah.

SP So...so they were...so you were afraid that they would punish you for...for it.

P They wouldn't believe me.

SP Yeah, or that they wouldn't believe you, yeah.

P They wouldn't, they probably wouldn't believe me. ‘Cause no one did believe us, they all thought we were telling lies until the people in...that this, this didn't happen. But it came out in the end.

SP Yeah, yeah. And, so this was actually when you were in the laundry part of Limerick.

P Yeah.

SP So, just to r...go back to the reform...when you were in...so you were in the reformatory school in Limerick beforehand.

P Yeah.

SP And what was that like?

P That was the same.

SP Yeah.

P The same. We were only kids that time and we got...

SP Yeah.

P Well twelve...the same punishments as the laundries for...we got over it and we were getting...There was a nun there, Sr Thomas [pseudonym] was her name, she used p...she used pull up our dresses and get the...a whip, and whip us.

SP Hmm. And did they give you an education?
P: No. I... I... can't read nor write sure.

SP: Yeah.

P: I can't, never gave me any... I... the Mount [Mount Saint Vincent Orphanage] either now is... they should have given it to me, because it was there I went in first.

SP: Yeah.

P: But then we got... they had a school going alright, a class, but I used to be up there with me back turned... there was a... a copy writing numbers, me numbers or I'd try do me ABC and I had me back turned to the class, so, you know.

SP: Okay. And... yeah, and did they... what was like your routine there?

P: Well the routine was, get up at seven o'clock, go to Mass, get whatever they give you... porridge or... I dunno and come down and do the cleaning on our knees. Then you had the class... that's what they used to call it, class. You go to your class, and I was sitting on the chair with my back turned at a small table. Like, I can picture everything. It's like today it's... it's happening.

SP: Yeah. And why did they... why did you sit there with your back turned to the class?

P: They, they did that to me. Making little like 'cause I didn't probably, I'd say I was nearly the only... the only one in the class probably didn't remember to write my name or anything, you know.

SP: Yeah, and they didn't want to teach you that?

P: I asked, well I said that, it must be that.

SP: Yeah.

P: It must be that. The others use to alright, now, read a book, or sums... doing sums, but, I was being put up on the thing.

SP: And so, after the class, or 'the class'... what happened afterwards?

P: We used go out to the playgrounds for about an hour and walk around with the nuns.
SP  Okay.

P  Walk around with them.

SP  *And you'd have lunch as well, or like a dinner?*

P  Oh you'd have... yeah you'd have... you'd have your dinner, I don't know what it was, I forget what it was we had for dinner but it wasn't very nice. Dripping on our bread.

SP  *And, and then, did you do any other work there or...?*

P  What about knitting, well I used to knit. Well, s... scarf, a long scarf I used to do in the knitting, a long scarf. But... the... the polishing and the work wasn't as hard there as it was in the laundry...

SP  Yeah.

P  ... you know. Because we used to be polishing on our knees and going up stairs and cleaning it and...

SP  Yeah.

P  ... you know,

SP  *Yeah. And when you were in the reformatory school did you ever see any of the Magdalene Laundry... were you allowed to mix with the Magdalene Laundry women.*

P  *Oh not at all,* you couldn't, oh no. The only time you might see... when you'd go to Mass every morning and they'd be opposite us. But I wouldn't see them, I'd be at the back. They used put me at the back. They used be opposite us.

SP  Okay.

P  Oh no, not at all we couldn't even talk, at meal times no, no.

SP  *And did you make any friends when you were there in the reformatory?*

P  You couldn't.
SP  No.

P  You couldn't because the badness, this...what way will I put it...they were bad lining us they were thinking we were talking dirty language or something. That's the way I can ex...the only way I can explain...

SP  Yeah.

P  And then they used put...if you'd do anything, well if we were laughing or anything they'd have a table in the middle of the dining room and they put you...they put you up the top the table, not on top of it but on it.

SP  Yeah.

P  And eating your meals off it and kissing the floor to apologise, oh yeah.

SP  Was that in the reformatory?

P  Both of them.

SP  In both of them. It was the same pol...

P  Both...both of them.

SP  ...ah I've heard that before, yeah, yeah.

P  Both of them, both of them. Kiss the floor.

SP  And how did the nuns treat you in the reformatory school?

P  Ah it was worthless, they were just as bad as the laundry ones.

SP  Yeah.

P  If not worse.

SP  Okay
P They used cut our hair too.

SP And what kind of punishments would you get from them or...

P Oh the punishments, we used...we used to get was just to go out in the corridor or our hair cut, you know...

SP Yeah.

P You know. Yeah. That's the punishment we used to get. And they might, they might give you a punch, you know. If they felt like it, they'd give you the punch.

SP Okay.

P But I was kind of able for meself in that way cos I'd give them cheek. That's...that's why probably I got so much punishment. You know.

SP Okay. So you kind of rebelled did you?

P Yeah, yeah but I...I split one nun anyway and I...I got...got an e...I got an extra year for that in the reformatory school. (Laughs)

SP Oh. And did they use to beat you with a whip or...

P The whip yeah. They used have them belts around them, oh yeah, oh yeah.

SP Yeah.

P Oh God, there's so many things I can't think of, you know.

SP I understand. Yeah.

P Yeah.

SP And did they say horrible things to you? Like did they...
Oh, the world... the world... what's the words they used to say? Oh, 'you're not going out to the world you're down in the dumps, the... the slut or the dumps' or something. I forget what, that's, yeah, oh they used...

Yeah. And did they ever, sort of say anything inc... bad about your parents or something...

No, well they didn't say it to me now about my parents.

Okay.

No, they all used say to me, 'no wonder you're in here'.

Okay.

'No wonder you're in here'. And I stood up one day in the cla... in the laundry and I said listen, 'I'm not in here for anything.' I said. And I said, 'most of the girls are n... are not in here for anything' I said.

Yeah.

And there's an auxiliary, he's from Limerick (laughs) I know it is funny in one way, but they used give the lectures. They'd stand up on a high chair, table and speak out... like a bible...

Yeah.

And he came out telling her story, to don't turn out like her, that she was Mary Magdalene. I always remember that, she was Mary Magdalene.

Wow.

Uh huh.

And when you were in the reformatory school did you get visits from anyone?

Well I tell you I didn't now, no.

Okay.
I tell you, when my grandmother was alive, she died shortly after I going in, she used come up alright now, she'd visit me.

Okay.

Yeah, yeah, when she was alive but, apart from that then, no one.

Okay.

No one.

And what happened to your mum actually?

She TB you see, she…she got TB.

Uh huh.

So, she was in the sanatorium seven years before she died.

Oh, she died yeah, yeah, okay.

She died in the sanatorium, you know.

Okay, ah. And that was when you were...

That's her there now. (Shows photograph)

Ah.

And that's my...that's Lou's other grandmother.

Yeah.

That's her there now.

Ah. So she died while you were in the reformatory school was it?
P  No she died when I was in the orphanage.

SP  So in the orphanage, okay.

P  The orphanage.

SP  And did you go to her funeral or anything?

P  No. Sure I didn't know. It must have been for about two years that I was in the orphanage when they told me my mother was dead.

SP  And...so...okay so, actually I meant to ask, you know, because you were in a reformatory school, did you go to...were you in a court or anything? Did they send you through the courts?

P  I think...no...it was the Mercy Nuns in the orphanage sent me to the reformatory school, not, but as far as I know. I think...I dunno, was I sent in by the courts into the orphanage, I can't...I must have been. I can't really now...

SP  Okay.

P  ...tell you that. I'd say I was sent in by the courts.

SP  I'm sorry, wh...what was the name of the orphanage?

SP  Mount Saint Vincent's in Limerick.

SP  Oh, Mount Saint Vincent's.

P  Yeah, yeah. Mount Saint Vincent’s.

SP  Okay, so yeah. But you can't remember if...if you were in a court or...

P  I remember...I remember alright now...they used call him the 'cruelty man' [Irish Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children Inspector].

SP  Yes.
P He brought me up to the nuns.

SP Oh.

P I remember that, a 'cruelty man', that what's we used call him at that time, so, I thought I was great going in because I had no mother, well...

SP Yeah.

P ...you know, no father, you know.

SP Ah so, it was the 'cruelty man' who you brought you to Mount Saint Vincent's.

P Yeah, as far as I know it was the 'cruelty man' that brought me 'cause I remember that.

SP Okay.

P I remember that I was young, it was in the summer, I remember that.

SP Yeah, yeah.

P I remember a lot of things but, oh...

SP So you felt kind of happy about going to the orphanage at first, were you?

P I th...I thought I was great. So when I went in, sure I was about...what, I remember it was about two, three hours in there sure when I got whipped with a, with a bel...a bl...a bel...black bel...leather...leather...leather s...leather belt.

SP Yeah.

P No.

SP And okay. So then you're in the reformatory part of Limerick 'til you were how old, you were...'til...?

P I was sixteen.
Sixteen.

They put me over. You see they knew what they were doing.

Yeah.

They knew what they were doing.

Yeah.

Putting me over there.

Yeah. And, so at sixteen then, and...so you...what year was that? That was...

[Speaking to daughter] You have the...we've all the years alright, but I...Lou has them all.

Yeah. Sorry, now, 'cause you were born in nineteen...

Forty-three.

Forty-three, okay

Fifty-seven was it?

I dun...yeah it was the fifties anyway the fifties.

Fifties okay, yeah, yeah so that was then sent...put into the first Magdalene Laundry...into the laundry in Limerick?

Yeah, yeah. From the reformatory in Limerick, that was the first...yeah, yeah.

Okay.

Yeah. Then Peacock Lane. That place, my God, they used lock us in at night into a room, down in the room. And – excuse me for saying it – slop...slop out in the P...Peacock Lane, now. The...they...they were supposed to be Charity nuns them. Oh my God, yeah. Bolt us in. A one would go round at night and bolt us in, and opened it in the morning, was out, and slop out like Mountjoy [prison].
Gee. So...and in Limerick...I mean when you were...when you were transferred to the Laundry in Limerick, did...what did they say to you like? Did they...how...did you know where you were going, or...?

Oh no. They, they said to me, 'we're sending you over to St Mary's'.

Okay.

That's in...the laundry.

Yeah.

And I said, 'why'? Sure I got a slap across the face 'cos I said, 'why'. But I was...I was kind of able to take up [stick up for] myself in one way.

Uh huh.

But in another way I had no power, you know...

Yeah.

...to do anything for meself.

Yeah. So you...you then were in this building in St Mary's...

In St Mary's, the laundry.

And sort of a new dormitory.

Oh yeah.

And what happened, did they give you a uniform?

Oh Jesus we were talking about uniform...oh such a uniform, oh, I can picture it. A blue thing...

Yeah.
P Down to here, and a white collar. And you go on…we used to call it the 'ran', 1 when we'd want to get going we used call it the 'ran', we'd go out but we wouldn't do no work. I often starved myself to get out.

SP Yeah.

P And they had this white collar, and they'd take the collar off you and they'd pin it on your…on your back.

SP Okay, why would...why did they do that?

P Because, (laughs) we wouldn't...we wouldn't go back to work, we wanted to get out, we wanted to get out.

SP Oh, okay, yeah, yeah.

P And by doing that...we, we would do no work for them for them for a week or two.

SP Ah.

P Sure I often starved myself for a week.

SP Okay. And how long were you...s...sorry did they...so they changed your name did they then?

P Ah now, Margaret [pseudonym] now, Philomena Margaret was my right name, [I had] my right name Margaret in Limerick. Now Margaret was definitely in Limerick.

SP Okay.

P But Peacock Lane they never changed the name. No. They were the only two places they didn't change my name.

SP Okay.

P Yeah, you know, 'cause I was left Margaret...

SP Okay.

1 See also MAGOHP04/Mary/ANON; MAGOHP75/Mary Collins.
...in St Mary's in Limerick and Peacock Lane 'cause they never changed our names. They gave you...you had your full name, Philomena Taylor [pseudonym of interviewee's maiden name] or g...you know, or some...

SP  Yeah.

P  They never changed your name there, but they were cruel.

SP  How come...yeah, it's strange, they change your name in some places but not in others.

P  But they obviously Charity...it's, it's the Good Shepherds, a...a...a...all the Good Shepherds change the names, every one of them.

SP  But...but...cause the Peacock Lane was the Sisters of Charity.

P  Charity, as I say, that's...yeah.

SP  And, did...and did anything else happen on the day in Limerick when you were sent over, did they cut your hair or, or anything, or...?

P  Oh no, it was, it was lovely the first day.

SP  Yeah.

P  Oh, but the second day, this, the machine, put me hand in there. I couldn't, I couldn't do it. They got one of the auxiliaries to cut my hair into the...yeah, they did, I couldn't do it. And then there was a woman, oh she was...now you...I was what...I...gee I was young now and she was ol...she was about sixty or seventy I'd say. And she was down from me and she was doing this machine and her, h...h...half her hand came off. And didn't I run down, just...just run down then they put me flying up again. They locked me up in the dormitory or out in the dormitory for two days with an au...auxiliary 'cause I went down. And I dunno what happened that women from this day. I don't know did she go to Barrington's Hospital in Limerick. I always think. Her whole hand off.

SP  Yeah, Jesus. Yeah.

P  Yeah.
SP  Did you see that woman again?

P  No, no, she never, she didn't come back. No one ever seen her. She never came back to the laun...whenever the poor woman went to I dunno. But I can always see...and I ran down and I got punished just...yeah.

SP  You got punished just for running.

P  Just for running down to see what happened.

SP  Gee.

P  Yeah.

SP  And what work did they have you do?

P  Oh, they had everything. They had...we were pulling out clothes from washing machines, wringers, colanders, I can't think of all of the...oh it was very hard work.

SP  So, yeah, you didn't have like one responsibility, you did a bit of everything did you?

P  I did everything, they put everything, ev...no. I was on the coats alright for about three months. Sure I was creasing up the coats and they took me off that. They took me off that and they put me down to the laundry. That's where they put in the clothes to get washed and pull them out and in...into the wringers.

SP  Okay.

P  Oh.

SP  And they had you do all of this in silence?

P  Oh, you couldn't. No you couldn't speak, no, no.

SP  Yeah.
And around Christmas, or a feast, they used give us a f...St Philomena I was, my feast would come, that day St Philomena, they'd give me Cornflakes and they give you, 'God Be Blessed,' that's...that's what you'd say, 'God be Blessed,' you can talk. Oh, yeah, yeah, they...s...I dunno. Oh Jesus.

And this, sorry, this was in Limerick was it...or...any...yeah...

The whole lot of them, they were all the same, the whole lot of them though. Well I will say for New Ross now. Now I wasn't too bad in New Ross, they weren't too bad to me now, they were good enough to me now in New Ross. I will give that now, to them like. They weren't as bad as the rest but they...you know, they were still chopping and chopping do you know?

Yeah.

But...

Yeah. And you said to me earlier that in Limerick you ran, you tried to run, you tried to run.

I had to run. Oh I thought I was doing the smart thi... But they must...they must've been watching me. Some of them must've been watching me because there was two girls waiting for me in [inaudible]. Oh they know, so they...they know like this.

So you climbed the wall...

Oh you want to...Oh sure a mountain of a wall, and ah God I was scraped and everything. And I was put away then for a week.

Oh you were put away for a week?

Up in the dormitory. Yeah.

Okay. And did they do anything else to you?

Water. They gave me water. They gave me water and they gave me jam and a bread for a week, Oh yeah.

Did they cut your hair or anything?
Yeah, sure, my hair used to be always... *everywhere I went my hair was cut*. Not once, or not twice, *everywhere I went*. It was cut *everywhere I went*. You know, it was *just pure badness*. They were no... the religion, I can't stand it. Now, excuse me for saying it, I can't, I hate it. Now I know it wasn't all... all the nuns’ or priests’ faults but I... I just got beat, I'd say on my own... you know, but it's the nuns and the priests...

*And did you see many nuns in the laundry?*

Yeah there was... I'll tell you now. There was one up on a high desk watching around to see were you talking or doing your work.

*Really like? She was like, higher than...*

She, she, she was up in the... then, there was about two or three walking up and down and going the other side and doing that to you. *(Makes gesture)* To look at you to see was, you were doing your things right. Now

*And were you paid? (Laughs)*

What!

*(Laughs)*

Paid!

Yeah.

No. No. No. Paid. Oh we were paid alright. We were paid punished.

*Yeah. Sorry, I... I... I knew the answer. I just had to ask that question. (Laughs)*

Oh, God. No.

*And did you even get like any pocket money or anything?*

*Not at all, no, no. No. Never.*
SP  Did they give you things like soap, you know like, to wash yourself, like soap and toothpaste for your...

P  No they never gave us...they never gave us soap. I'll tell you what they gave us. (Laughs) They used make their own soap...

SP  Okay.

P  ...n a big, big, barrel and that had to set. It was a kind of a black soap. And they'd put it on the...

SP  Yeah.

P  ...the yolk. So we hadn't even baths, tubs. Black soap they used to make their self in a big barrel. What I mean now by black soap, they used get bits and pieces of, it must've been their own soap in the convent or what and put it into the barrel...

SP  Oh right.

P  ...and let it go thicken. And they'd put it on the sink then above.

SP  Oh, okay and that's what you had to wash with?

P  That's...yeah, hmm.

L  The other [inaudible]

P  Oh God, Jesus.

SP  (Laughs)

P  Fuckin' awful, but that'll tell you.

SP  I'll let you light your cigarette there. And what about toothpaste, did you get...?

P  None of that.

SP  Okay.
I never, I...I never seen toothpaste there. I never seen toothpaste.

Yeah. And what about sanitary towels?

Rags and we used to have to wash them and then put them into the machine. Even in the reformatory school, we had to...now I wasn't even getting a period at that time, we used to have you know in the bowl of water and then our hands. Oh good God.

Oh. And who were you doing laundry for? Do you know who like who they were for?

Oh no. Not in the reformatory school now. They’d do no laun...

No I mean in St Mary's who were you doing it for?

Oh, ah, hotels...for the whole of Limerick. For the whole of Limerick.

Uh huh. Okay.

For the whole...they made money and they're saying they didn't. They made it. They did make it, yeah.

Yeah, they did. A sweet then they'd give you then at Christmas.

And what about food...what was your food like?

The food was rotten. All...I dunno, was it steamed or was it put in...oh it was t...

Did you ever see what the nuns were eating?

No, no, no. Not at all. Not at all.

They never ate with you, they just...?
P Not...no. They wouldn't sit in the same chair that we sit. They had the rose petal chair and we...when they'd come into the room, we'd all have to stand up, say, 'good morning sister' or 'good morning mother,' whatever names they were and then they'd want to sit down and we'd have to go up for the chair and, 'now sister sit down'. Yeah! Oh yeah.

SP And did a nun ever...or an auxiliary...did you ever get beaten by anyone while you were in the laundry?

P Oh the auxiliaries took over there.

SP Yeah.

P They got the permission from the...the auxiliaries took over there.

SP Yeah.

P Like, they took over from there. With their cross down. A blue...a blue habit and a cross. And then (laughs) Child of Mary. A child of what? You had a blue, a green, and another colour ribbon to become a Child of...is it a Child of Mary?

SP Purple.

P A child...purple or something. A Child of Mary! And we'd take it.

SP Is that what the auxiliary was, a Child of Mary, or...?

P No. They were trying to make us...they were different ones now.

SP Oh, okay.

P Th...they were a kind of...they had their uniform and they had their cross, a more like a nun. But if you were good...well if you did your work right, you...I think you get, is it a green one or a b...you get a ribbon and a [inaudible] but I wouldn't...I never took it.

SP So it was kind of like...so, so your ultimate reward was to be a Child of Mary?

P Yeah.
SP  Yes.

P  Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SP  Okay. But you never got...

P  No, not, no.

SP  (Laughs) And...

P  Oh, no.

SP  And did they...did you get any kind of...did they humiliate you or...?

P  Oh, they did, the many times they did. Ah many times. They had their own, their own few. Well it was very little few then, but they had them, they had them.

SP  What kind of things would they say?

P  Well, (sighs) it's hard to think back, it's hard to think back.

SP  Okay.

P  They said once to me that I'd never go out to the world 'cause I'd be in the slums, the slums of the world. That...that's, you know?

SP  Yeah, yeah.

P  That's the...they always said that to me. That's the thing that I can always remember. 'You'll be...you're not in here for anything good'. And what did I do? Nothing. Nothing. I know, maybe I was a bit wild, you know. But I mean, wild, I never really did anything out of the way.

SP  Did they...did they ever beat you?

P  They did. Yeah they did, they did.

SP  Yeah, in the laundry?
P Yeah, yeah. They did. They did. They'd bring in the auxiliary and their selves. They'd take a chance. You give her a whip. I'll give her a whip. You give her a whip. I'll give her a whip. About four whips they'd give us. Yeah.

SP Wow.

P Yeah. Yeah.

SP This is for...what were you whipped for?

P Well I'll tell you now, I mightn't do... I mightn't do me work right.

SP Yeah.

P Or I wouldn't do it at all.

SP Okay.

P That... I tell the truth, that's why, I wouldn't do the work right. Or I mightn't do it at all for weeks.

SP Hmm. Yeah.

P I used crease-up the work designedly.

SP Okay.

P That's what I used do, the... the... the shirts and all. And that's why they put me down. 'Cause I was... had to pull out the clothes so I couldn't do nothing... nothing just pull out the clothes. But when I used to put them into the wringer then, I'd just shove them into the wringer and the (laughs) the wringer would hop, hop, hop. They took me off of that then and they kept me on the pulling out the clothes and putting them in.

SP And so... so you kind of... your way of rebelling was to... you, you said you would... would you not eat sometimes? You'd just go on hunger strike?
P: I s...yeah, yeah. Yeah...ex...yeah. That's the way you...you could. But still they didn't give a c...they'd keep the auxiliary there in case you might, that you could escape somewhere wherever, but I didn't care, what way could you, how could you escape....

SP: Yeah.

P: ...'cause we were locked in completely.

SP: Yeah.

P: You know.

SP: And did you ever ask, while you were there, in any of the... in any of the laundries did you ask when you were leaving?

P: Ah, when I...no...when I was there first I said, 'why am I over here?' And like they said I wasn't fit enough to go out that I'd be in the slums.

SP: Oh yeah.

P: That's what they said to me. I'd be in the slums. Sure I didn't even know what they w...meant by that, you know?

SP: Yeah. And did they ever give you, like, a release date? Did they ever say when you'd be released?

P: No, no, no. But I did get the release afterward. I did.

SP: Yeah. Okay. So how long were you in Limerick for then?

P: Limerick...p...Limerick was the longest, I think two years Lou [checking with daughter who can consult records], I think that now. Two years. Then I was six, seven, eight or nine or ten, twelve months. A few months then in the rest of them.

SP: Okay.

P: You know.
Okay. Okay, so. When you finished two years in Limerick, then what happened? They said to you...like how did they move you to...you went to Peacock Lane was it first?

No, I went from Limerick...

Oh.

I'm not sure was it from Limerick either to Waterford or Cork...to the Good Shepherds. It's one of them...I can't...but I know I went to one of them.

Yeah.

They sent me there and like, I couldn't say nothing like, you know?

Hmm.

You'd be afraid to say anything.

What did they say to you like?

They said that they were moving me to another place and the bus driver that...that...we'd be there, he'd take over. And he'd have me sitting in front of him and when we landed in our destination then there'd be an auxiliary there to collect us. I couldn't...you couldn't have a chance to run away because probably they could have somebody else...security, down at the other side, you know?

Yeah. And you wouldn't know where you...where to run or where to.

Yeah, exactly, no, well see. No. No.

Did they tell you why they were moving you?

No. Just moved me.

No. Okay.

Just moved me. They just moved me. I'd say they were kind of...they got fed up of me I suppose, giving out and not eating and...I'd say that's the reason.
SP: Yeah. Did other girls do the same as you, like, the hunger strikes?

P: Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah.

SP: Okay.

P: There was three...I remember, there was three of us out together...

SP: Hmm.

P: ...in the cloister. And there was three auxiliaries, we were all on hunger strike to go. Oh God we were on it for over a week. I'll always remember it.

SP: Yeah.

P: So, the other...I remember...the other two girls...they called the other two girls into the office. So, weren't they gone! They were gone, and I was still on the cloister. I didn't know they were gone until I went.

SP: They were gone where?

P: They must've sent them to somewhere else.

SP: Oh really?

P: They must've sent them to...'cause they were gone.

SP: Okay, and you were left there.

P: I was left on the corridor. I thought, I thought, you see, you have to apologise. You had to say, 'sorry sister' or something, but I...I was so stubborn I wouldn't do it.

SP: Yeah.

P: And that's prob...the other two probably apologised. But if they were apologising I never seen them afterwards.
SP  Yeah. And like, when you were on hunger strike was it...were you...was your demand to leave? Did you want to leave? Is that why you were on...

P  I wanted to leave. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I wanted to leave. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SP  And did they ever...when you went off hunger strike they did tell you...did they make any false promises, did they tell you that you will leave or...

P  Oh, oh they told me...they told me at one stage that, that they were going to get me a lovely j...a lovely job in a hospital. Carlton's Hospital in Limerick. I thought that was great.

SP  Yeah.

P  I stayed good for a while. This was ages coming on, 'ah,' says I, 'off again with...' we called it 'the ran', that's what we called it.

SP  The...the...the ran. Okay.

P  'The ran', that's what we called it, they had so many queer names. When they used come, the nun used to come in we used have to clap them and all, you know, Oh God! (Sighs)

SP  And you know when you went on the ran did you...like how did you know to do that? Was that someone else...did someone else give you that idea or...

P  No. That was the routine with the most of us. It was the routine with us. You go on the ran today and I'll go on the ran tomorrow and we might get out, that's...you know.

SP  Ah, okay.

P  That was the routine. Such names we had.

SP  (Laughs)

P  The ran.

SP  And do you...like...did you...did you ever get to know any of the other girls or the women?
P No, no because we c...we couldn't speak to them. The only time now...around the table in...having our meals, and that was very, very seldom the chaplain might come in and say, 'ye can have God by blessed,' that means you can talk. Such...ah let me alone. So now that'd be very, very seldom we'd t...you know.

SP Okay.

P But apart from that we're miles away. No, couldn't ta...talk. They were bad-minded, filthy-minded. They'd think they were talking...probably thought we were lesbians or something.

SP Right, yeah.

P That's what I, you know, I...

SP Yeah.

P ...this...I may be wrong but, you couldn't. And then, it could be once in every two or three months we'd go into this big hall and they'd put on music, waltzing. And, there used to be to be waltzing around. And they'd be looking and they'd pull us away from each other. Y...y...'d be here probably and the...the...the other girl'd be over there, all waltzing around. I...I...I...oh God, I....

SP Was that what you did when...you know, when you weren't working did...what did you do?

P Of a Sunday. That's only a Sunday.

SP That was just on the Sunday.

P Sunday. There was work every other day.

SP Yeah.

P That was only of a Sunday. That...all of a Sunday that's all. We used to. And it wasn't every Sunday we'd get the music.

SP Okay.

P Music. And when we'd get it then, miles away. I was here and the other girl was...used to be there and they'd be up and down the floor watching all of us and, Oh I don't know, they had...oh God.
SP: And what did you do in your spare time there like, when you weren't working, besides the dancing?

P: We used go into the...working room, they'd call it. Now I would say some of the girls there they were for profession, knitters and sewers making priests' vestments...

SP: Oh yeah.

P: ....and that's what they used to do. But Philomena doesn't know how to do any of them.

SP: So that was what people did in their spare time was more work.

P: Yeah...the...yeah, yeah. Oh, there was garments there. They ironed sweaters and priests' vestments and ladies' Limerick Lace.

SP: Hmm.

P: Limerick Lace.

SP: And all those things would be sold off...

P: Oh, all sold off, all sold off. Yeah, every one of them was sold off.

SP: Wow. And...and did you have you have to do the cleaning around the...the place, around St Mary's?

P: Oh, you, s...you'd have to do all the cleaning, all the girls, they'd do the cleaning. And the machines, oh Jesus, the oil. And down on our knees and our hands would be raw. You know, people...and I still today...them nuns, well the nuns that were either...they're dead and then they're rotted, but the other ones now, I don't know what the feck...they have another name on theirselves [sic] I think, I dunno what they have on theirselves, but I...I don't think they believe the girls...they believe what happened. Do you see, they have no proof, and that's why they're trying to, la...you know, put these girls to more, more trouble. They had no proof but we were there, the old people, do you know what I'm trying to say?

SP: Yeah, I do, yeah.
And now, you have people now, God help them there's some of them in Waterford, they're looking after four or five of them. They're not even looking after them.

Yeah.

They're not even...there's people coming in and they're bossing them and they're bullying them.

Yeah.

'Cause I was told that from a girl that was down there herself and she's seen it.

Okay.

She's seen it herself that they were very frightened looking. And th...they're supposed to be getting paid now. They're not getting paid.

These are the women that are still in the...the...

In the home.

...the home, yeah, who were in the laundry.

Houses...yeah, they got houses, their own land for them. So, they're not looking after...'cause the girl seen them, she was telling me. She was...I say...Aisling, [pseudonym] Aisling, she was telling me, 'cause there's a girl here, Aisling, she was...she was in New Ross with me.

Ah okay, yeah.

She was in New Ross with me and she was in Waterford orphanages...orphanage.

Okay. And, and, she's...she's...and she's...she's visited people in Waterford there.

She went down there...her son was home there from, he's out foreign or something.

Thailand.
Thailand. And she just went down to see would she see any of the girls, you know, which she did, she knew a few of them alright. But they were real frightened and they were saying, ‘oh, oh, we're getting paid now, we're getting paid’. Sure what...what were they getting, they're pension is it? Why, I dunno.

And do you know, actually, did they say what's gonna be done with the money, with their payouts...with the money that they get for the compensation?

I don't...

Like will they get to spend it themselves? Yeah.

That's what I'm saying, she...she...she doesn't know.

Yeah.

The girl told me that she doesn't know. There's a girl phones her every week, the girl I know, and she told her that the nun told her that she's on...that her phone is too dear and not to be phoning. And it was out of her own money it was coming.

Yeah.

The pension, whatever, I dunno, are they using...is it they're getting the pension in the hands, or are the nuns...’cause they said they were looking after a hundred and that's why they didn't want to...you know.

But going back to you. So, okay, so, you went from Limerick, two years in Limerick.

Yeah.

To Waterford.

Waterford. I'll...I'll...I'll say Waterford anyway. I'll say Waterford. I'm al...I'm al...I'm almost sure it's W...Waterford I went to.

Yeah. And you were there a few...

About six or seven months.
Six or seven months.

You know, I was five and six and seven and eight months in the rest of the places.

Okay. And so, so Water...so Waterford and then on to...

Cork.

Cork.

St Mary’s, the Good Shepherds.

The Good Shepherds at Sundays Well. Yeah.

Yeah.

And then Peacock Lane.

Peacock...oh, Peacock Lane.

And then, was there another one after that or...?

New Ross.

New Ross, that's it.

Oh, New Ross, New Ross.

And New Ross was the last one.

Yeah, New Ross was the last one yeah.

Okay. And you were twenty, about twenty-one, twenty-two?

About twenty-one, twenty-two because I was a long...I was a long...here in [name of hospital removed] Hospital here when I met Lou's father.
SP  Yeah.

P  You know.

SP  Okay. And so...so...you...when...when you said...when you said...when you said Peacock Lane there I saw your face there, so...

P  Oh my God.

SP  So it was a very horrible place was it?

P  It was now. It was. You know, we...in the [other] laundries you hadn't to dump out [slop out]. You had some sort of toilet. Excuse me but, oh, it was just unbelievable.

SP  Yeah. And did you have to do the same sort of work as...?

P  Yeah, the same work yeah. The same work, the same work, yeah, same work.

SP  And again all in silence?

P  All in silence. But, it wasn't too bad in Peacock Lane where the silence was. You could talk kind of, you know. You couldn't talk in the other places. You could talk in Peacock Lane alright now, but not in the other places you couldn't. You only...it was just what we had to do. Oh...

SP  And so you got to keep your name in the Peacock Lane and in the...?

P  Pea...Peacock Lane and in St Mary's in Limerick. Margaret, yeah.

SP  But in the other places they changed your name?

P  Oh, was it Bridget, Bridget...Philomena. Oh don't ask me what the names. I can...I can...I can...and then when the priests would come. And now the priest says such a saint, you'd get cornflakes, cornflakes. Oh Jesus Mary and Joseph I don't know what world were they living in, you know?

SP  Yeah. And did you like, forget what your name was after a while? Do you know like, or did you want to be known by a certain name?
No, it was taken from me so I wanted my own name.

Yeah, Yeah. Did you ask them, did you say to them?

I dun...I...when I was over in the reformatory school they told me this...

Hmm.

...that I might have my own name Margaret and I mightn't.

Okay.

They might give me a different name. But they didn't, I kept Margaret.

Yeah.

You know. Oh God, such names.

Yeah. And what was Waterford like?

Waterford was just the same as the whole...New Ross wasn't too bad now, it wasn't too bad, you know.

Yeah.

It wasn't too bad, but the rest of them were just hell on earth.

And again, all of them you were doing the same work in the laundry, the same work...

The same...same work. The same thing.

...and the same...same routine?

Yeah. Get up, go to Mass and...

Yeah. And did they have this Child of Mary thing everywhere or...?
Oh in every one of them they had it...they had...I know I shouldn't be laughing, but a blue ribbon. A narrow blue ribbon is...you were nearly a Child of Mary I think. And the wide blue ribbon that you were a Child of Mary. And the mauve one, I don't know what the mauve one was. There was another one, I forget. I forget it, but (laughs). She came down to me, she says, ‘look,’ she says, ‘you'll never be a Child of Mary because your rotten with sin’. That's what she said, I was rotten with sin. You know, y...ye...oh, don't talk about it. It's just unbelievable what happened.

Yeah.

What happened. Well, as I say, it took me near over thirty years to come out with the most of the thing...

Yeah.

...but since I start speaking about it, you know, I'm...you know. I thought I'd never...I thought I'd carry the cargo all me life.

Yeah.

You know, but, I don't know, it must've been my mother who helped me, or somebody helped me.

Yeah. And did you ever think you were gonna come out of the laundries?

I did and I didn't. You know, I kind of...a...mixture, you know, a mixture. But I always said, 'I won't be there forever'. I used to always say that, 'I won't be here forever'.

Yeah.

You know.

And you know, so wh...so you after you were moved to Waterford...like in all...every time you were moved, did they ever tell you why you were moved? They just said you were going?

You were going...because, I told...I would do the work. I'd get into this madness and I...

Yeah, okay, so you kind of rebelled in all of the places?

...in...yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I wouldn't do it and I'd...that's the why...
And you’d do hunger strike or...?
Oh yeah, yeah, oh aye.

So that’s why they think they were moving you?
Oh that’s... yes, that’s why they were moving me. Oh, oh definitely, there was no other reason.

Yeah.
There was no other reason.

And do you remember, did you ever see a doctor during that time or...?
No.

No. Okay.
Never s...

An inspector?
I never seen a doctor no. Never seen a doctor. There was a place alright, the infirmary, and the real old people now, probably they used to put them up there... I think they used put them up there to die. That’s what I thought of it now, but I don’t know.

Yeah.
I thought that they put them up there to die. Excuse me a minute if you don’t mind.

Yeah, no problem, I’ll pause it.

[Interview paused]

[Conversation continues from when recording was paused]
P  Just thrown into…just thrown into the bath.2

SP  So…so yeah, you were in New Ross. So you were twenty-one and then twenty-one, twenty-two.

P  Yeah.

SP  And do you want to tell me what happened? So you were released then were you?

P  You see I...I was, yeah I was, New Ross got me out. They put you out to work, you know.

SP  Yeah.

P  So, it was the baby really. [Referring to baby in bath] (Pause) You wouldn’t think twice of doing it, you wouldn’t think twice now, of doing it. Just look at that there, a dead baby.

SP  And…yeah, 'cause you were so, you had gotten pregnant but you didn’t know?

P  I didn’t know…I didn’t know, you see. New Ross...I just went in and I said to them…I thought it was normal because I wasn’t getting no period.

SP  Okay.

P  So they got a doctor in to see me.

SP  And you were working in [name of hospital removed] at this point?

P  No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

SP  Okay.

P  This was when I went back to New Ross, I went back to New Ross to see them…

SP  Yeah. Oh just to visit?

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2 See page 48
P: To visit, and just told them...I said about I was getting no periods, not thinking there was anything wrong with me so...

SP: Yeah.

P: They brought me in, they got a doctor to examine me, so I was pregnant. So they got me up to Newry [Marianvale Mother and Baby Home, Newry].

SP: Okay.

P: So I was...I was only, what, a few weeks pregnant so I was...

SP: Yeah

P: ...nearly nine months in Newry, but not in the laundry now, in...

SP: Yeah. The Mother and Baby Home

P: ...the mother...yeah, yeah. But they had nothing got to do with that now, the Good Shepherds like, you know, that was up to me like, it was me.

SP: And what happened when you were in the Mother and Baby Home?

P: I just had to wait until the baby...

SP: Did they make you do any work there or...?

P: Oh yeah, they were very cruel too, they were cruel enough like, you know. They were slapping to me face and get in there and everything. And then they says to me, 'when you go into...when you go into labour you're going to have a very, very hard labour'. And I had.

SP: Right.

P: I had.

SP: Yeah. And what was the kind of atmosphere like? Was it...like what were the other girls like and...was it very depressing or...?
P There was some now, you know, where...see there was these big...well they come from big fam...well-off parents. They were alright, they had a private room but we had...

SP Oh right, so people with families had a private room?

P I think it was like, you know, big rich people, put it that way. They had a private room. They had one there and when each of their babies was born they'd go out. You know, and...and then the nuns then would look after...the babies get adopted.

SP But the rest of you were all put into a dormitory?

P Oh a dormitory, yeah, yeah.

SP A dormitory, yeah, yeah. Okay. And did you ever get out? Like, were you allowed out or...

P Oh yeah, you could go out yeah, you know. You could go out, you could go out. But account of me [being] from the South...

SP Uh huh.

P If the English government knew, they were in trouble.

SP Oh I see.

P I was the only one from the South.

SP Ah okay.

P Because I was...I couldn't support myself, I couldn't get no clothes or anything. It was then they got all the clothes for me.

SP Oh okay.

P For the baby like, you know.

SP Yeah.
P But, I sh…I had him for three months.

SP Yeah. And so…and do you want to just repeat the story about the bab…the dead baby, about what they showed you?

P Yeah, if you want. It's just I don't know what happened, 'cause I mightn't be alive to tell the story, you know.

SP So…so…so a girl had had a baby was it?

P Yeah, and the baby died. And I was brought in to the bathroom to see the baby. Oh God, thrown in the bath.

SP Yeah. And what did they say to you?

P They said to me, ‘now you'll think twice,’ or…what was it, ‘you'll think twice now coming in here’. Or something like that… effect, I can't really now think what it was.

SP Hmm, yeah. And so then, nine months later you had…you went into labour.

P No, I had already the child.

SP Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah

P Oh I had already the child, I had already the child, and they just brought me in.

SP Just to show you.

P To show me, yeah.

SP Okay. And the labour was very hard was it? You had a difficult labour.

P I had a difficult labour yeah, yeah.

SP Okay. And what happened when you gave birth? Did they take the baby away from you straight away?
They took the baby and washed it, but there was a nurse there and she'd feed the baby. But then, it was the time to go in the hospital. I had to go back to the…Newry, you know for the adoption.

Okay, so you went to a hospital to give birth it wasn't in the…?

Yeah, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Do you know what hospital it was?

Daisy Hill, oh it's all in my head, isn't it Lou? Daisy Hill.

Sorry?

Daisy Hill Hospital.

Daisy Hill, Okay. And then you went back to Newry to do the adoption.

Newry, yeah.

Did you, like, did they have you sign anything or...like...?

No, I'll tell you, the funny, funny part is, I was down here, God, I was about a year or a few months down here I met the father. I was a year and a half altogether and we got married and then I became pregnant and…John [pseudonym] above and this man...I was in labour in [name of hospital removed] Hospital and this man came down, down to the labour ward and he said, 'I want you to sign this'. Sure I didn't know what I was signing and I put a cross...

Yeah.

...but the matron in the hospital knew like, but that was to sign fully, as a...as I found out later on then what it was about.

Oh, okay, okay and that was to do with the adoption.

The adoption. Just...just said, 'put a cross there to that,' because I wasn't able [to read].

Yeah, and you didn't know what it was about.
Know, he just said, ‘sign this,’ and I was in labour, I wasn't too bad in labour but they brought me down like.

And this was actually when you were giving birth after you were married and giving birth to your other child?

Yeah, yeah, they...yeah.

Wow. And so do you know where your baby was adopted to? Up to the like...was it to a family in Newry was it?

No, he was put into a home two years before he got adopted. Because I got all this from [inaudible]. Remember, Brian [pseudonym] was me social worker, he was very good. Oh he looked into an awful lot of things but...like, we were supposed to meet up and it didn't happen. He was on drugs and...

Yeah. And how do you...I mean, did you want to give your baby away, you know, how do you feel about that?

I...I d...the way I feel about it is, I didn't get a...get a choice to keep my child. I know myself I wouldn't sur...I wouldn't have been able to survive but if I got that chance.

Yeah.

You know, I still probably would have given the child up for adoption because I had no...you know, but I didn't get that chance. You know, they just took the child at three months.

Yeah. And so, after you gave birth, did they...you said they tried to put you into the laundry?

Oh they tried to put me into the laundry but I wouldn't go.

Yeah.

I broke...I remember breaking windows, I wouldn't go. So they put me back to New Ross.

Okay.
And New Ross then got me over here.

To [name of hospital removed], okay.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Okay, and after all of that happening, how…how were you mentally like, you know?

I was…I wasn't too good, I wasn't too good. I…I was in and out. I was in that…over in [name of local mental hospital removed] for a couple of months.

Yeah.

But, I got through it.

And then you met your husband?

Yeah, he's very good yeah. But he doesn't know anything about this now. Only the girls does know.

Does he know about your…the Magdalene Laundries?

He knows about that. Oh yeah, he knows everything about that, everything about that.

Did you tell him straight away?

Oh no I didn't, did I? Oh, I think I did, I told him I was I an orphanage and I told him I was in a laun…but he didn't really know what was the meaning of the laun…the laundries, do you know, that time now they wouldn't know.

Okay.

But I told him I was in the orphanage, oh I did yeah, yeah,

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Did you feel any shame about your time in the laundry, was there any…

Oh there was, there was.
SP  ...like would you tell people outside?

P  No, no, no, no, no. No, no. I never told anyone did I Lou?

L  No.

P  Only me family. I told them alright and I...I found it hard enough like.

SP  Yeah.

P  I know th...they'd be still with me but, you know, it was just the shame.

SP  Yeah, yeah. And actually I forgot to ask, but when you were in the Magdalene Laundries did you ever see anyone from outside? Did...like say, delivery men or...?

P  No, but....well I didn't now, I didn't....I...I...I didn't see any, no.

SP  Yeah.

P  I didn't see any delivery men, no. But...

SP  Okay. You weren't allowed near them?

P  No, no, no. But...the Sorting Room...you'd see the van and there was a big, big gate and once the van came in that gate would be closed.

SP  Okay.

P  And we sorting out the laundry, you know, the...what's for what.

SP  Yeah, yeah.

P  You know. Yeah, oh yeah.

SP  And tell me, how did you survive through all of that, like. What kept you going?
Oh, that…that is a miracle. I dunno what kept me going, but I gave…I gave…I gave it the end. I think it was my mother that…you know, I’d say it was.

Yeah. And…so…so, of all your...like what’s your biggest achievement I life? What are you most proud of?

My kids and my husband.

Yeah.

That’s all that matters to me now. And me grandkids.

Yeah.

I know I do be roaring and screaming at them half the time but do you know?

And you have a very large family don’t you?

Yeah, yeah.

And actually, being a mother, because you didn’t have a mother or…and your father wasn’t around...how did you feel about becoming a…a…a parent?

(Pause) Probably I was…probably excited because I had somebody to look after me...

Yeah.

…and that was me husband because I had nobody else only him, you know?

Yeah. Hmm. How did you meet actually?

We met down in the [location removed] Ballroom at a dance. I fell for his shoes. He had pointy shoes that were shining (laughs). That’s right, we...I always say that to him, ‘your pointy shoes’. We’re forty-seven years now.

Wow. That’s great and he’s a great help and a great support.

Ah he is, he is, ah he is, he is. I don’t give him the credit I should give him. He is out on his own.
SP    Yeah.

P    You know.

SP    And tell me...can you tell me, how have...after everything that's happened to you...with all the...the laundries and everything, how have you suffered...like what...what, kind of...what effects has it had? Do you get nightmares for example?

P    I used now. I used to. Back...back flashes [flashbacks] I used to get, back flashes.

SP    Yes. And what about mentally, did it have any effect on you?

P    Oh it had, yeah. It had. It had an awful lot of impact on me.

SP    Can you explain how?

P    Well I was...I kept it to myself so long.

SP    Yeah.

P    I spoke to no one, do you know?

SP    Hmm.

P    I spoke to no one and every day I'd get up, I'd say, 'what...what will I do?' you know, that's...what will I do?' Will it ever come out in the wash, you know.

SP    Yeah. And did you have to be on any medication or anything?

P    Oh I'm on...what am I on? [consults with daughter] I'm on medication aren't I?

L    You are now but back years ago you were on Valium and stuff.

P    Oh, I was on Valium and I'm on medication for the stroke.

L    [Name of hospital removed] was the psychiatric...
I was in psychiatric for a couple of months, but I'm...I'm...now I'm too...

Yeah.

She used to go on her auld binges.

I always...I used to go on the drink. I remember I very bad on the drink.

Was that a way of you kind of...

Dealing with it.

Dealing with it.

Very bad on the drink. Very bad yeah.

And, did it have any health effects on you, or anything, did you suffer any other way or...?

I used to suf...it's all...it's all in there was suffering.

Yeah.

All inside me. It was none outside, all inside.

Yeah. And will it ever leave?

I don't think so, it will never leave. But you go forward, you go forward you know, you keep going forward. What's the use going back you can't go back. I'll keep going forward until God takes me. You know. I have my days but...

And how would you feel towards the nuns?

I hate them, I hate them, hate them.

And what about...and how did you feel the day of the apology that you got from Enda Kenny [Irish Prime Minister].
Oh, you can ask Lou, were you here Lou, you...

No, you phoned me.

Phoned...I was, I was really, I cried. I didn't think that day would come...

Hmm.

...that we did get an apology. Now, it was worth the Lotto [lottery] me, worth the Lotto me, so.

And you were saying to me, that was worth more than the compensation.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That's what I was waiting for.

It's more the acknowledgement and the fact that they were believed.

‘Cause...‘cause, w...we weren't believed for a long time.

Yeah.

Yeah. And it was all, didn't the government know and it was all thrown under the carpet.

Yes.

Of course they knew. Now, this government, or every government but Labour or Costello or whoever it was, I dunno. You know.

And in fact yeah, because you would have gone through the first redress [Residential Institutions Redress Board], to do with the reformatory school and then they...they...they kept the Magdalene Laundries out didn't they.

Yeah. Well I put that in when they offered it. And they told me that it [the laundries] was a private...that it had nothing got to do with it.

Yeah.
P: That's what they told me, I put that in about I was in the Magdalene Laundries and the govern...it was the government...

SP: Yeah.

P: ...that says it was private. And see the way it came out then?

SP: Yeah, yeah. Well, have you… I think I've finished asking questions. Do you have anything else you'd like to add before we finish?

P: Not really no, I think I'm... I think I'm finished. All I hope is that they're burning in hell for what they did to me.

SP: Okay.

P: That's my last work.

SP: Well thank you very much Philomena for everything.

P: And thanks.

SP: It really means a lot that you spoke to us today. Thank you.

[Interview Ends]