

MAGDALENE INSTITUTIONS: RECORDING AN ORAL AND ARCHIVAL HISTORY



Oral History of Sarah

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|---|---|
| Reference Code: | MAGOHP/36/ANON |
| Pseudonym? | Yes |
| Status: | Survivor |
| Keywords: | Sisters of Our Lady of Charity Magdalene Laundry, Seán MacDermott Street; An Grianán Training Centre, High Park; mental illness; alcoholism; drug abuse; care homes; St Helena's care home, Finglas; absence of family supports; sexual abuse; homelessness; rebelliousness; breakdown of family relationships; domestic violence; rape; Regina Coeli Hostel; Legion of Mary; St Vincent's Industrial School, Goldenbridge; St Patrick's Mother and Baby Home, Navan Road; forced adoption; family separation; denial of access to records; Miss Carr's Home, Ranelagh. |
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Notes on Redaction and Transcription Process

Interviewee Initials: S
Interviewer Initials: SP

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 and dates have been removed to protect the privacy of the interviewee and third parties
- Dates have been accurately transcribed

List of Pseudonyms

| Pseudonym | Category |
|---------------------|---|
| Sarah | Interviewee |
| Anne | Interviewee's Sister |
| Suzanne | Interviewee's Sister |
| Margaret | House mother at An Grianán |
| Charlie/Charlotte | Magdalene woman who worked as a cook in An Grianán |
| Mother Kieran/Kevin | Third Party Religious |
| Sister Agnes | Third Party Religious |
| John | Interviewee's Son |
| Thelma Grant | Juvenile Liaison Officer |
| Brian | Interviewee's Son |
| Ryans | Unclear possibly interviewee's son's foster parents |
| Sharon | Interviewee's Daughter |
| Gerard | Interviewee's Son |
| Peter | Interviewee's friend |

Basic Data from Interview

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Name/Pseudonym | Sarah |
| When Born | 1960 |
| Born outside marriage? | No |
| Raised by | Family/care home |
| Education | Early educational level unclear (had to care for younger siblings). Had some classes at An Grianán. |
| Order | Sisters of Our Lady of Charity |
| Emigrated? | No |
| Physical ailments? | Did not say |

| | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Laundry | An Grianán Training Centre |
| From | 1976 |
| To | Unclear |
| Duration of stay | Approx. eight to twelve weeks |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Age on entry | Sixteen |
| Entered Via | Social worker |
| House Name/No | Did not say |
| Haircutting/punishment? | Yes |
| Circumstances of Departure | Unclear |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Laundry | Seán Mac Dermott Street |
| From | Unclear. Was there twice circa 1977-78 |
| To | Unclear |
| Duration of stay | Unclear. A number of months. |
| Age on entry | Seventeen |
| Entered Via | Possibly via a Juvenile Liaison Officer |
| House Name/No | Did not say |
| Haircutting/punishment? | Yes |
| Circumstances of Departure | Unclear |

[Interview Begins]

SP *Okay so thank you very much Sarah for agreeing to do the interview today. So, the first question I want to ask you is, can you tell me about...a little bit about your life, as you were growing up?*

S I'm...born in October 1960, I was the eldest of eleven children, that...I being, I'm the eldest girl. There were eight girls and three boys, two of them were retarded. Both my parents had problems from the day they married; my father being schizophrenic, having schizophrenia and my mother being...an alcoholic and a tablet abuser, and neither were never suspected until the latter part of us growing up as...into teenagers and then everything coming out. We had a troublesome time, we were in and out of care homes frequently, and for a Dublin family that would have been very rare in them days because there was always a family member to take them, but nobody wanted to take us. So we would have been put into different homes, at times maybe for a week and maybe for a month but as a child, whether it be a day or a week it's never ending because you're taken away from your security and the love of...what you only know. The rest...is very hard... *(Voice breaks)*

SP Yeah.

S *(Pause)* I went on to grow up. I had to leave school at fifteen. Between the years of eleven and fifteen, it was very bad at home. My father had been charged for sexually abusing one girl in the house and the onus was on the rest of us because they knew that there was something else going on and they couldn't figure it out, but I had already sewn the family in so tight that we just kept our secrets to ourselves. We shared nothing and gave nothing away. We then...time as it went on, things got really hard between me and my mother; we fought over everything. We fought over when she'd be drunk and then she'd tell the social workers that I was disruptive and I was coming in late at night. It was no such thing. It was because I was...would be trying to get the kids to bed, get them to school, cook dinners, cook teas, everything and get it all sorted. By the time...it went on then, they went away for a year to Portrane [psychiatric hospital], both of them were put into Portrane. He'd come back after the abuse and both of them went to Portrane and I was left to mind the house. For me a year, and with that it was hard, really hard. We had nobody literally coming to us, only home help and a social worker, but I'd been like...that house was my job to look after and it was so hard. The *constant* worry, the *constant* bringing them to school, bringing them here, getting them to

school, but it went...I done it, went to the nuns, went to the food...for the food bags because there was no money, they had the money. I had to go and beg food. That's when I learnt how to rob, very easy. Me and Anne [pseudonym] would pay for one lot and take the bottom lot and we learnt how to survive the best we could.

SP *And was there no social welfare payments or anything?*

S Don't know where the money was, I didn't get the money. I didn't get the money, they got the money. Wherever the money was it wasn't coming to me and I'd go to the nuns in [location removed] and get the food parcels and there'd be tins of meat, tins of stewing beef, potatoes and veg, and I'd make dinners out of that. And that's...and eggs and eggs, I fucking detest eggs! And then we'd have to come home and I'd have to...most of them were in school. Suzanne [pseudonym] was sick, she was the youngest she had some rare heart thing and I'd have to give her her medicine. Every four hours she would have to get her medicine. That's what I could never understand is why they said I was...mistreated Suzanne, it was me that always took Suzanne for all her hospital visits, for her appointments, to the doctors, to school, everything, everything. The youngest...

SP *You were left to look after...*

S ...all of them. My Mam never took them to the hospital for anything, she never...she was never awake long enough to do anything in the day and if she was awake, you were sure of a beating or you were sure of him coming in drunk, but there was never a week where you were sure of a bit of peace. So, there was always one thing or the other and everybody blamed it on us because she had too many kids and we were uncontrollable.

SP *And how long and she and your Dad both in Portrane for?*

S Ten months, ten or eleven months.

SP *Okay, and then they came out and they were just put back at home with...*

S They came home and within two months I was sent to An Grianán because I couldn't live under her rules. I also didn't want her back as a mother—she wasn't my mother. She'd walked out on

her family, she'd left like she always did all through her life. She dumped her family onto some...into some home, some dirty place for us to be abused and hit again and everybody...I've never met somebody that can honestly not say that they haven't touched me or hit me or done something to me. So then we went on...then I went to An Grianán and *my God* that was a fright. That was in '76 and it was the summer, the heatwave that summer, and we were taken to Bray and it always stuck in me mind...this...this was really funny...we were taken there on a day trip down to Bray and I'm getting off the train and getting on the train was my Ma and Da and all the kids, and I remember thinking, 'that's my family'. And my Da talked to me and she [her mother] just got on the train with the kids and ignored me and the younger ones were asking, 'when are you coming home?' And I said, 'I don't know,' (*voice breaking*) and then I was told to move along, 'come on we're going to the beach for the day, we'll have a great...a great trip,' (*crying*) and I just let go and walked away, but that was my family, not fucking High Park. So I think I made up my mind, that day at the beach looking at that nun and your one Margaret and Charlie! [pseudonyms] and I said, 'I'm not staying here, I'm not staying with them'. And it was something or nothing but it was the look of the women up in that laundry that frightened me. Every day I'd go up there, I'd look at them and there was always something frightening about it because I said to myself, 'why are youse here,' and I remember them saying, 'oh we came here a long time ago'. They didn't remember and if you can't remember what happened to you, then you don't know...then you don't know why you're there in the first place...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...and then I remember we'd go for our lessons every day and I'd to keep asking, 'when am I going home, I want to ring me neighbour, I want to ask my Da to get me'. She wouldn't allow...I wasn't allowed to have visits.

SP *Oh, so you never had a visit?*

S I wasn't allowed to have my family to visit me for a few weeks until I settled in and I kept ringing, getting money, going up to the shops; if they...we'd anything I would rob *anything* so I could get money, just enough to make a phone call and then the people...when you come out of High Park, across the road is a long road, the pub is to the left and down the very far right hand

¹ Charlotte/Charlie was a Magdalene woman who worked as a cook in An Grianán whom survivors refer to frequently. She has been assigned the same pseudonym in all Oral History transcripts.

corner there's gates to what was called the school. Down the far corner there used to be a shop and the people that had it [third party identifying information removed]. I think they had two [children] a boy, two boys and a girl or a boy and a girl, [third party identifying information removed] but we used to go up to that shop and she used to let me ring my Ma's, the neighbour's house, for me Da and she used to say to me, 'are you going to stay, will you be good when you go back,' and I said, 'I don't know'. But that was the only place we were allowed out. We weren't allowed out the back gates; we were only allowed over that way.

SP *Why's that?*

S I don't know, because that shop was obviously belonging to the convent. They served the convent, do you get me? We weren't allowed out onto Drum...the Drumcondra s...the Drumcondra Road, we were allowed onto Grace Park [Road], never allowed on the other side, and the houses we cleaned were all on the Grace Park side.

SP *So you had to do cleaning?*

S Yeah, I went down...I was sent to the laundry one Saturday morning and *I'll never forget it as long as I live*. I've never used bleach after that. I remember going in and *heaving* to the smell and the girls were saying, 'once we get it over with we can sit in the garden and we can play and we can do this,' and I remember thinking, '*what*, I'm not doing this!' My Mam wouldn't let me use the washing machine at home, I wasn't allowed...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...and I said, 'no I'm not doing this,' but, started, we had to sort out the laundry; had to put it out into piles, napkins, table cloths, whatever so on and so forth, whatever it all was, but I started looking at all the names because they told us that, that that laundry was all our laundry, and it was the convent's laundry, and there was the sheets laundry, but if it was all our laundry, why was there all names on it? So that's why I asked...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...and your one grabbed me by the hair and told me to go back to Mother Kieran [pseudonym] and get another pl...thing to do. So she sent me to the convent the next week, on the Wednesday and with that, I had *no intentions* of doing any work, that's for sure, to that. I ran up and down the corridors in me bare feet *screaming like a lunatic!* And there was *murder*. I know I g...I know I got punished because the girls had said nobody had ever got punished like that. So, whatever the punishment was, I can't remember, but it frightened the life out of the girls because...it didn't frighten me so obviously I didn't give a shit, and then I said to her, 'I want to see my Dad, I want to see my Dad, I want to see my Mam'. 'Your Mam doesn't want you back, you have to stay here now and learn,' and your one Margaret, that house mother, with her *sweet, soft voice*, always that...always gritted in on me teeth but telling me, (*imitating Margaret*) '*oh you're going to get a great job and you're going to do so well and you're going to be so clever,*' and bla, bla, bla. And I remember thinking, 'the only job I'm going to get out of here is a fucking wooden box or a cleaning job,' and that's where I got me skills from.

SP *And what...what you were telling me before is it that they told you, you'd get jobs in the civil service?*

S They told us that we'd be educated and that we would get good jobs in the civil service. You know the civil service down where the docklands is where the big building is...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...and all the lights do be on at night time, (*imitating nuns*) '*you'll be going in there to work as a secretary*'. They told us where we were going and all, told us where we were going. I would never have thought about down there as civil service, do you know what I mean? They told us where we were going to work and all and we'd get great jobs, great educations, but we had to help out as part of our learning, as our learning.

SP *So what kind of...what was your learning? What did you have to do there?*

S Well, I...on...the latter part of the years gone down, I always thought I had to go to school because I didn't go to school when I was at home because I had to stay at home and mind the kids. So I thought I was going to secondary school there, but I got the shock of my life. I either had to go to the laundry, do the nuns' convent or go to clean houses. We helped out the

community, that's what Sister Kieran...that's the word I was trying to think of. Sister Kieran told us when we went to clean people's houses, we went to help the community because they were old and we were doing a charitable thing. And I always thought that was funny because when you'd go down to do the charitable thing, the cleaning job, there was always a cup of tea, or a glass of milk and a biscuit or a cake...or a piece of cake waiting for you and that was it. You'd break your back cleaning someone's house.

SP *And you never got paid for it?*

S I never got any money; we were being sent down to help.

SP *And you never got paid for any of the laundry work that you...*

S Never went d...never got a penny, never. Sure pocket money, did we get pocket money to go up to that shop? That's what I'm trying to re...remember but I can't. I don't think we did get pocket money because I remember...I had to be somewhere, where I got pocket money.

SP *Did you get money from your parents or anything?*

S My Dad would've given me money. If he had anything in his pocket, he would have given it and then I'd keep it. Probably I kept the money and I cut me hair and I kept that money and I got the bus back to [location of interviewee's home removed], but I got taken back because I got the bus and that girl I knew from around [nearby location removed], she knew how to get home through [location removed] on a bus and then I'd only have to get off from that bus to go down to me Ma's. Where the other way, I didn't know how to get to me Ma's. I would have had to go into town and get the bus out.

SP *And who brought you back?*

S *(Pause)* I don't know but I was brought back anyway. The police car didn't bring me back but somebody....

SP *Someone...*

S ...somebody came and got me, but I was brought back and I was punished again because I think they went on another trip and I wasn't allowed to go on the trip, I didn't care anyway, I didn't care.

SP *Sorry you were sixteen at this time?*

S Yeah, I went in 1976.

SP *Yeah, and can you tell me a bit more about kind of, the living conditions, like what the building was like, where you slept?*

S We went...came in stair...came in the door. An Grianán had their own separate building from across the way and you came in and there was a little sitting room. It was lovely, you'd thin...think you were going into the lap of luxury, and then you went up the stairs and you came in and there was all little cubicles and they were all our rooms, all little cubicles. We had a bathroom, a sitting room...had we...we sat in the sitting room too yeah. Again, all sitting around in circles, no sofas, no three piece suites, all chairs, all sitting around in circles and the kitchen and the dining area. What we ate I don't remember, that's another thing, but then again I always had a...phobia about food anyway, so food probably wouldn't have bothered me in them days. I'd eat anything so, whatever. Food was food, but the rooms all had little, little cu...a bed, a locker and clothes, stuff to hang up our clothes in a little wardrobe thing, and the bed, a little single bed, black iron...or was that the Navan Road [St Patrick's Mother and Baby Home]? Iron bed, it was an iron bed I'm positive, and we all had curtains and we were only allowed to pull the curtains down at night time; the curtains had to stay up all through the day, yeah, and that was it.

SP *And what was your day, like, do you remember your daily routine there?*

S Having to get up for prayers, get breakfast, breakfast, prayers or prayers and breakfast, one or the other. Going to classes, getting our lunch and then up to the convent to clean or allowed out onto the grass but not allowed out to play or...nothing to play or to do, no...you know what I mean?

SP *Yeah.*

S Not allowed to play because we'd make noise. Not allowed to play games unless it was at the grass where An Grianán was and Margaret and your one, Mother Kieran come out and arrange games for us to play, stupid games, but we weren't allowed to run around and play chasing or things like that, like we did at home. *(Pause)*

SP *And what kind of stuff did they teach you?*

S Maths, English, we done Irish...hated Irish. We went to class, we had classes but again we had one nun teach us some of the subjects and I think your one, Margaret taught something as well, and I'm nearly sure it was to do with cooking and things like that, do you get me?

SP *Yeah.*

S All our basic skills. We were taught cooking now that I think of it.

SP *Because the reason why I'm asking is, if you were going to become, I don't know, typists or whatever wouldn't you have had to be...*

S The typewriters...

SP *...yeah.*

S Yeah where I learned, we didn't sit at typewriters, we sat at desks and done homework, done work.

SP *Did you do any sewing?*

S We were taught that with your one, Margaret and we were taught cooking. We were taught cooking, because we were brought up to the kitchen to do the cooking upstairs and I think it was her that taught us the cooking skills, positive it was her. If not, it was a nun but I doubt because the nuns did very lit...very little. Very little nuns were let into An Grianán. Mother Kieran ran An Grianán with an iron fist the same way Sister Agnes [pseudonym] did, do you understand me?

SP *Yep.*

S They ran that to their liking and that's it. Very few outsiders, they allowed nobody to share the running with them. Like, we got our dinner in...our dinners by Charlie, she made the food, but I always asked her what happened her hands and she said it was just...she got arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and I said from what? Says she, 'oh just washing me hand...in water all the time'. But she never had left there because she probably worked there all her life...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...because she knew nothing outside that place, and she just thought we were ungrateful girls, that we weren't grateful for the way Mother Kieran looked after us but I didn't need her to look after me, I had a par...I didn't want anyone to look after me, but I didn't want to be held in a place where I couldn't have a life either and be told that I had to do these jobs that I didn't want to do.

SP *Yeah.*

S I was led to believe that I was going to be looked after and be minded and loved, but I was no better off; I was out of the frying pan and into the fire. So I was between two...between two places, so the next step I took then was probably in me head was to get pregnant and get a baby and get away altogether, but it didn't pan out did it. I went home after that and I'm nearly sure then I ended up being homeless again, being thrown out because my Mam was forever throwing me out and I'd be on the streets...and sleeping in alleyways and doorways and trying to keep warm, and then I'm nearly sure I went into Sister Agnes's [Seán MacDermott Street] before I had...long before I had John [pseudonym]. So I would have been in there between '77 and '78 and I'm sure I went in there after having John, because I had nowhere to live after having John.

SP *And just to clarify that...I know where it is but Sister Agnes's is...*

S Seán MacDermott Street, Seán MacDermott Street, and Sister Agnes was the house Mother, that's what we had to call her, a house parent...a house mother and Margaret in High Park was a house parent. Margaret was a house parent and Mother Kieran was the house mother.

SP *And you spent eight weeks in An Grianán isn't it?*

S A couple of weeks; but it could be 12 weeks, it could be...

SP *Okay.*

S ...I'm not sure. I know that I spent a summer there, I know that I didn't go home until the summer was over, but as I said, whether it be a day or a week or whatever length of time it was, it was an awful part of my life that...was taken from me. Again, my childhood memories of that heatwave that summer, all of that was gone again. Every time something...I ended up in somewhere, it took me *months and months* to come back around and each time it just get...got worse and worse. That the trust got worse and worse; I trusted nobody then, nobody, only Thelma Grant, that JLO officer [Juvenile Liaison Officer] and it was her, *had* to be her that put...I...it's all sticking together now, because nobody else could have sent me to An...into them places; most of them places you had to be sent...Sister Agnes's...the Health Board didn't have a say, the Health Board didn't really put you in there. It was the Courts or the JLO system.

SP *Yeah.*

S Positive. Whether I got beaten in An Grianán, I can't remember, all I remember is that I hated it so badly.

SP *And were all the doors locked?*

S Yeah.

SP *And the windows, were there bars?*

S Yeah, yeah. They had bars on the bottom windows and upstairs...you see we were upstairs...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...and the door was locked *all the time.*

SP *And where was the laundry in relation to An Grianán?*

S Over in the convent at the back.

SP *Okay and that's a different building is it?*

S Yeah, that was a different building. There was the far...the lodge was down the back, the farmer's house, then there was like...it would have be run as a farm years ago...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...and then the convent, and then the back, you come around that part of the convent, down the steps was the laundry.

SP *Okay.*

S It was down in the basement, it was out of the way.

SP *Okay and then your building was...*

S Separate from them, it was in the main gate. In the main gate was An Grianán and to the right, up the drive way then was the convent, then at the back of An Grianán was the lodge, down onto Drumcondra [Road], the back...the back gates and over onto the far right hand corner then was all like...like a farm.

SP *Okay and what was the laundry building like?*

S *Reeking, stinking, bleach, smell of piss, urine...always had that smell, always, and all them big...a big drum, the big washing machine thing and then the...the rollers, which were huge and we were tin...like, even though I'm tall now but I was still tall for me age, they were huge,*

and they...you had to take the sheets out and two people had to fold them and you had to stand in the middle and you had to run your hand down it to get the crevice right and fold them again and pour them over, and they had to be *spot on*, or if not they'd have to be done again.

SP *And were you taught this like...*

S No we...

SP *...or did you have to learn that for yourself?*

S ...no, another girl showed me. The girls agreed to it.

SP *Yeah.*

S You see I didn't, I suppose that was probably me, I just was different. I fought for everything, I fought with everyone.

SP *Yeah.*

S Even in there I fought, I just was very troublesome. Maybe it's because I'd seen something I didn't want to see, and that smell, but I remember questioning the day, the...all the tags, all the different names on the laundry.

SP *Yeah.*

S If that was our linen, why is it all tagged? If we're only doing our bed clothes why has it all got tags and bags to go up to...all the bags, sacks, all went into sacks when it was finished. That's...that's another thing that always bothered me all through the years. I've never seen vans going in there to pick that laundry up, never seen anything going in, but yet I've seen it in Seán MacDermott Street and they'd be coming in and out all day in the other gate where the arches are, there used to be gates there, black gates and they used to drive in there and get the...I used to think it was the food going in until one of the girls one day in Sister Agnes's said to me, 'now that's the fucking laundry, they're coming into collect the laundry, them all...all them eejits in there do the laundry all day long,' and I think that was the most...frightening thing that

I ever thought about. I remember looking at them then and thinking, 'they're like me, that's me or could be me, I have to get out of here'. So I'm nearly sure that I was in there before I had John and that...that's probably it.

SP *And sorry, to just go back to An Grianán, how old were the women around the laundry? Were they quite old?*

S They weren't...looking back on it now, they were old but they weren't old, do you understand me?

SP *Yeah, I do, yeah.*

S They were only in their thirties but they like sixty year old women, do you understand me?

SP *Yeah.*

S They were so bent over and their hair white, their teeth were rotten, their teeth were rotten...always had a thing about teeth...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...their teeth were rotten and they were always looking at your hair, always wanting to be t...had a fascination about your hair. They always wanted to be plaiting your hair or curling it or putting it up for you, you know what I mean? See I n...you see, they never bothered me, do you understand me?

SP *Yeah.*

S They never bothered me because I suppose, 'cause my younger brother was retarded, that different people didn't bother me, I wasn't afraid of them, where the other girls were.

SP *Oh I see, so these...did these women seem different to the rest of you?*

S Yeah, they were completely different.

SP *And how were they different?*

S They didn't communicate with us, they didn't talk to us or nothing. They weren't allowed to talk to us and we weren't allowed to talk to them.

SP *Yeah.*

S It's only if we'd be going by and we'd ask them something they'd answer us, but they wouldn't talk to us, talk to us. Same with Seán MacDermott Street. Them women didn't talk to us either. They were...they were in a court yard in two houses and them women weren't allowed to talk to us, no more than we talked to them.

SP *Yeah.*

S Isn't that sad?

SP *It is.*

S Isn't it?

SP *So you never like found out any stories about how they got there or anything?*

S No, no we weren't allowed to talk to them. I never really wanted...I think I knew, I think I knew. That's how it was so hard for me to not want to be there, do you understand me?

SP *Yeah.*

S I knew in my heart that day, I was going to be one of them. I wasn't going to be a civil servant and get a big job and have a good education, that wasn't happening. If I hadn't had it by now, I wasn't getting it.

SP *Yeah.*

S I nearly knew, I think I knew from day one, from the day I went in there, from the first night I slept in there, I didn't want to be there. Once I heard that bolt going on that door, I was *hysterical* and I couldn't go out and it was seven o'clock in the evening and it was a beautiful evening and I wanted to go out and run around [on] the grass, and when I was told we can't go out, we can sit on the stairs and talk, I just remember sitting on the stairs and saying to the girls, 'what do you do all day?' 'Well we do this, and we do that and we go on trips'. But it wasn't do this, do that. It was for the good of the community, for Sister Kieran's community, Mother Kieran. It was Mother Kieran it was her name, was it Kieran or Kevin [pseudonym], it's Kieran. You see a long time ago I kept diaries but they got destroyed...

SP *Yeah.*

S ... and I wrote everything down in diaries...but they all got destroyed. An awful pity, they would have made a great book (*sighs*) but sure that's life.

SP *And I forgot to say, or...I know, but who put you into An Grianán?*

S Social worker, social worker. They were in and out of the house like yo-yos and they kept taking us out, putting us back, taking us out, putting us back and then we'd be put back to my Mam and Dad's. But the hardest part was, when I turned a certain age, I couldn't be put into a children's home anymore. When the...when the...when the kids were younger and they all got taken away to go to St Helena's, at sixteen I was classed too old to go into a children's home. I was an adult then, but yet they still controlled me right up into my twenties by putting me into whatever they could...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...but couldn't put me with my brothers and sisters. It was all the time trying to break me away from my family unit, break me or break the unit, one or the other.

SP *And has this had a long-lasting effect on your relationship with your family now?*

S I don't talk to my family. I talk to one brother, the other brother is retarded and me youngest brother was killed.

SP *Yeah.*

S I don't talk to...I say hello, I talk to one sister but that's only being civil and the rest of them I don't talk to. I think what happened was...I realised a long time ago, I realised just after my Dad died that everything I ever did was for that house. I never had time to draw my own breath for my house or my kids or for me. I never had time for me. Anytime all through my life, it was always, I had to get food on the table, I had to get this, I had to get that. From an early age I had to go to work as well. I went to work at fifteen and everything was money, my mother's life was money, and if I didn't get the money, my Dad didn't get it because he spent most of his time having episodes, as we would call them, but most of the time in Portrane.

SP *Yeah.*

S If he wasn't in Portrane, he was drunk and if he wasn't drunk he was beating...it was always one thing, one battering or one...one thing after the other, and the only thing that kept it all sane was that...I had to keep going, that's it, isn't it?

SP *Yeah.*

S I had to keep going.

SP *And tell me about the health authorities and their role in all of this? I mean you were a child. Did they not think you know...a child...*

S They said that I was disruptive, that I had mental problems, that I...that I...slept around, things like that, but you know something, there...that was all lies. The first time I ever slept...got caught was with the person that I made my first three children for, I didn't sleep around. They never asked me, they just went on the say of my parents. Okay, I had loads of boyfriends—so what? That was what teenagers did. Was I not allowed to have friends? Was I not allowed to have a life? I had loads of boyfriends, three boyfriends, three boyfriends, that was nothing. I...all I ever did with any of them was kiss them on the cheek and went home, but according to my parents I slept and I done this, I done that, but nobody ever asked me.

SP *Okay, so the social workers would speak to your parents but not you?*

S Not me. And presumed I done it and as they didn't ask me, I let them presume.

SP *Yeah.*

S What's the point in telling thick people something, do you know what I'm saying?

SP *Yeah.*

S I...I only have, I have five children. Three of them are from one father and the other two are from another p...father. The first partner I was with beat me senseless for nearly ten years. There was days I didn't know which end of the day I was at and if I wasn't black and blue or in a hospital or kicked to death somewhere, I had to survive. So I learned how to survive again and make a new life, which I did. I took my children...my two children and I made a new life for myself and I started afresh again and *nobody*, no matter how hard they'd hit me, taking the things away from me, have put me down. I've come back up, and that's not thanks to anybody, that's thanks to me and for all the hurt and pain I've suffered, I've always got up and said, well there has to be something better out there and that's what's kept me going I think. Because I always think there has to be something better and if it's not, then I don't know.

SP *That is what...a really good attitude to have.*

S It's the only attitude I have because crying about it doesn't help. It's no good crying over spilt milk because you can't pick it back up, it's gone. It's no good crying about the lost...that I've lost, and it's no good crying about the years I've lost. All I have left now is the last few and enjoy them. Unlike most people, I've had a good life. I've made the best of all the bad things that's happened and turned them into positives because even though Brian [pseudonym], even though my oldest, his father beat me so badly, that's why I laughed when you said about rape. He raped me when John was only six weeks old. *(Crying)* He beat me so badly that when the police took me to the police station they couldn't see my face, but all they were worried about that night was, where was he 'til they charged him; they were looking for him for a robbed car. They didn't bring a doctor to see me that night, they seen nothing. My clothes were all torn, the dress was tore off me, was wrapped around me and all they did was sat me on the chair for

seven hours until I...just...they wanted to charge him but they wouldn't let me see a doctor or nothing and all I wanted to do was get out because the baby was in the Regina Coeli [hostel] with a girl.

SP *Yeah.*

S She minded him for me that night, and when I got back to the Regina...actually it wasn't even...I was only three weeks after having John because he was gone at six or seven weeks, and when I went back to the Regina that morning, I got in the door, your one opened the door and she looked at me and she started screaming and I just said, 'oh get out of me way,' and I just went in and got a bath and all the girls were looking at me and I said, 'just mind the baby, feed him until I get ready,' and I got dressed and I got on with it, but it was too late, the social workers knew then and they were going to have John one way or the other. They decided at that meeting that they...they were having him and I just said, 'what can I do?' All I ever wanted was a home to bring my baby up but they said I wanted it today and not tomorrow, but living in the Regina wasn't a place to live in.

SP *Yeah.*

S It wasn't fit for pigs, never mind people and it was horrible!

SP *Who was it run by?*

S The Regina Coeli is run like the Morning Star Hostel, lay people.

SP *Okay, it's not run by a religious order?*

S I think it was run by...but they don't have...it's lay people that let you in if you get me?

SP *I see yes.*

S You have to wear your scalpel [scapular] when you go in, yeah, it was run by religious because you got that scalpel thing from the Legion of Mary...

SP *Oh yeah, yeah.*

S ...all that crowd. Everything, every...every part of my life has been run by the Health Board, social workers, the Guards, and nuns. There's never been anybody in that pack that's ever done anything good for me, nobody.

SP *Yeah.*

S And nobody has ever given me anything without me having to fight for it and like, when you sit down and think about it, I'm fifty-three, I don't have any friends. *(Voice breaking)* You lose your skills to communicate because you lose your trust. You lose your trust when you're...when you're abused. When you're abused you lose all forefront in your mind of what life is about. You can never trust anybody ever again, ever. No matter who they are, you never tell them and you never open up or tell them the truth because it's too frightening.

SP *Yeah.*

S But now I don't care anymore because everybody should know the truth. Truth is the only thing that's kept me going and I know eventually, in a few years' time when I'm a little bit more stronger, or maybe I've pieced it...most of it together, but I'll put it altogether and somebody will be accountable for taking away all my childhood. I was a child, not an adult, not twenty-something years of age. I was a child...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...minding children and I wasn't troublesome. I didn't go out and hit people or...was abusive or anything. I never took drugs in my whole life. I drank but I didn't drink until I was in my twenties and what I drank was...just to bury the pain and then I stopped. That was something else I stopped doing because, why should I hurt me for no reason, I didn't do anything wrong. You see, I don't know.

SP *And you told...and so you know this man that beat you...*

S Hmm.

SP *...that you talked about there? Did you start going out with him when like, sort of, of remember you were saying to me...*

S I met him when I came out of High Park.

SP *Yeah, because you thought that was a way of...*

S Of getting out of all of it and getting my baby, but little did I know that everything came with a price. Oh my God, did that come with a price, that part of my life came with a high price, the damage, the pain, everything. He nearly tried to kill me in England; threw me out of a window and broke my back, left me in hospital for months. My son was damaged, Brian was destroyed by him.

SP *This is your second son after John?*

S Yeah. I sometimes wonder how much Brian remembers, but then again when I look back, he must remember everything because I have a great memory, I have a brilliant memory. When I first went into Goldenbridge I was only three and I remember...I remember the little gingham dresses and all.

SP *So you were in Goldenbridge as well?*

S Yeah.

SP *How long did you spend there?*

S Weeks, just weeks while she was having babies.

SP *Okay, so...so yeah you were saying during your childhood you were in and out of kind of care homes...*

S Care homes, yeah. So that's how...that's how it was so easy just to keep me moving, keep me going and going. So eventually they were hoping probably to keep me somewhere but couldn't...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...because I always found a way to get back out.

SP *How come you were only...what I find strange is that they didn't take you from your Mum on a court order. How come they were just putting you in places like Goldenbridge for a few weeks and then...*

S Because my Mam and Dad would get their act together and then they'd give them back. They didn't take them then in them days, there was too many of us.

SP *I see.*

S There was eight, nine, ten, eventually eleven...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...what would you come to do with eleven children? Better to give them back to the devil isn't it than the...where were they going to put us all?

SP *And was Goldenbridge at this stage and places like that, were they closing up? Because we're talking about...*

S Well no, because if you look at it...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...I'm the eldest of eleven and through the seventies, we would have been in all them places.

SP *Right, yeah, yeah.*

S Do you get me?

SP *I do yeah.*

S Yeah, we were in all them places. The next place to come on the market was St Helena's in Finglas but Helena's didn't get the reputation as the rest of them got because Helena's was ran by people, not by the nuns. Helena's was in Finglas...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...but I wasn't allowed in there because I was too old.

SP *Okay, and you said you spent time then in Seán MacDermott Street...*

S Twice I was in Sister Agnes's...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...so that's the part now that bothers me, because I can't remember whether I went in there the following year, after coming out of An Grianán I went into Agnes's and stayed there for a while and then went on to have the baby and then come out of the Navan Road and get thrown out of me Ma's again, and then I ended up homeless and did I end up in Sister Agnes's then, or was it the two times before I had the baby? I know I was twice in there.

SP *And were they for again, kind of weeks, periods of weeks?*

S Months in Agnes's, it was yeah.

SP *Months yeah, okay.*

S Yeah it was a couple of months in Agnes's.

SP *And you were based in the hostel bit?*

S In the hostel, not in the laundry, in the hostel; in Sister Agnes's hostel.

SP *And do you remember at all if someone brought you there or...?*

S That I can't remember.

SP Okay.

S That I can't remember, whether it was a social worker, that would have been Thelma Grant. I can't remember.

SP *And were there rules again about...*

S Not allowed out, you had to be in before a certain time and you could only go out at a certain time. You weren't allowed and you had to clean the...Sister Agnes's, you had to clean the house every day. It had to be spick and span. You had to clean, always clean for them, had to always do something for them. There was nobody in to do anything for us, do you know what I mean, we had to clean, do our own washing, everything, everything.

SP *And was it all locked up?*

S Yeah, we were locked in at night time. The convent door separated the yard and then the...the house door, do you get me, but once you were in, you weren't going back out.

SP *Okay and did you have to work somewhere else?*

S I went to a shop then. She got me job in a shop minding a baby and working in the shop in the evening for an hour, just to be getting a bit of training for myself, but that fell back on it as well because the shop went on fire and the person that owned it, the woman and the baby died in it, so that fell back.

SP Okay.

S My bad luck again I think.

SP *And did you... and so then you were pregnant and you went to St Pat's. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?*

S Jesus Christ, if I was to put all the things together...that has to be the worst place I can ever remember being so afraid of in all my entire life. It was the worst out of the whole lot of them because it was something that I couldn't hit back at. Everybody else you could hit back at or do something on, or not do what you were told...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...but I was in *constant* fear of them taking my baby, having to walk up them stairs every night to bed and listening to the girls screaming when the babies were gone, and then the other girls telling me, 'no, that's them only having their babies, they're alright,' but that screaming, that wasn't them having babies.

SP *Yeah.*

S That was their babies gone, their babies being taken. Once their babies were born, they were never given into their arms, never seeing them.

SP *So were they taken straight away, the babies?*

S Taken straight...straight away and put into a nursery.

SP *And what happened to the mother?*

S She'd be put somewhere else on the lower ground floor because all the mothers-to-be were kept upstairs.

SP *So you'd be heavily pregnant having to go upstairs?*

S Yeah and we'd be kept is[olated], we wouldn't be allowed...and again, we'd sit in a big sitting room, big room and none of the girls talked. The sadness in that room and the *fear (voice breaking)* and then I just kept ringing [inaudible] my sister, her boyfriend's mother had a phone and I knew the number off by heart and I kept getting out, and I kept ringing and ringing and ringing and ringing and ringing and asking them [inaudible] if they would come and get me and get me out of here. To get me Da or Ma, me Da to get me out; and he kept saying, 'you can't get out,' and I said, 'they're going to take my baby if not'. And then I was to go for me visit [check up at the hospital] and your one said, 'no you can have your visit here,' and I said, 'no, I'm going to go,' and I went to the Coombe [maternity hospital] and I told the social worker that, 'I think they're going to take my baby,' and she said, 'we'll put on your chart that you're going to come here to have your baby, I'll ring them now,' and she rang them, and the nun said, 'ah yeah no problem'. But that night I went into labour, she brought me down, she put my legs up on the stirrups, my hands in two straps and she shaved me completely. She wouldn't even tell me what she was doing. She kept *feeling* me and *poking* me and telling me, 'oh you're nearly there,' and I said, 'I don't want my baby born here'. I didn't want the baby born in there, not to have that on its certificate.

SP *Yeah.*

S *No way.* I said, 'wherever is to be is to be but not that,' and I said, 'I'm not leaving...having my baby here, I want to go to the Coombe'. I don't know how I ended up in the Coombe but I ended up in the Coombe to have the baby, but again the social worker got involved and told my Mam and Dad they had to take me home, but they didn't want me home, they didn't want me. She wanted me out now, you know, I mean completely out. That was the last time I ever lived in that house.

SP *And you were how old?*

S Eighteen.

SP *Yeah.*

S I hadn't lived in that house properly since I was sixteen, only a few weeks at a time, and I was gone then. I never went back after that. Once I lost that baby I never went back. I never had a Christmas or a birthday or anything in that house ever again.

SP *That was when you had to go to Regina Coeli's?*

S Regina Coeli with the baby.

SP *And then they took your...your baby?*

S They took my baby that day, a few weeks later on an unfit person's care order and the Children's Court awarded them the court order. They said I was unfit, but as I said, how could I have been unfit? If I had have been shown what to do with the baby I might have been okay but sure that's life, isn't it?

SP *But why, what was their reason for you being unfit?*

S I didn't know how to...because of where I was living and I had no money and no back...no support.

SP *Okay.*

S I think they were all the reasons. I've never seen the reasons, I've never seen that order, I've never seen none of them documents, I can't get them. I'm not allowed to have them because John is over twenty-one, over an adult. So I can't see what I signed. I asked them for...to let me see the form I signed as that's my form, I signed that form not anybody else, and I'm not allowed to see it. I'm allowed to see none of it, none of it. I wrote and asked twice, three times so the next time I'll write for it, it'll be worded different, so I don't know.

SP *Yeah, and what has their response been every time you...?*

S They sent me sections of paper telling me under article this, article that...I'm not a solicitor, I'm not a legal aid secretary, how am I supposed to break all of that down?

SP *Yeah.*

S They just bog you down and bog you down and bog you down and tell you there's no files but there is a file...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...because I have part of it, I have transcripts, I've pieces of it there.

SP *They've given you haven't they pieces, just pieces of it?*

S They d...they didn't know they gave it, it came out with something else...

SP *Okay.*

S It slipped out by mistake.

SP *Yeah and sorry I forgot to ask but who put you into St Pat's or how did you end up there?*

S It must have been through Thelma Grant.

SP *Yeah.*

S Had to be through her because the police came and said I had to go because I was sleeping rough and it was said it was unhealthy for the baby and that they were going to bring me to a nice place, and I said, 'no I'm not going,' and the next day I met her, went to Ship Street and she said, 'I'm after finding a great place you'll love it, it's lovely, it's out in the...it's like you think you're in the country'. *Oh God*, I'll never forget going in...

SP *That's how they described St Pat's?*

S Yeah, it's like a little day trip.

SP *And how long...how long did you spend in St Pat's?*

S Just a few weeks.

SP *Just before you were having your baby?*

S Just before I had the baby...wasn't it?

SP *And what did you have to do there?*

S Nothing.

SP *Like did you just sort of sit around?*

S Sit around all day; the days were endless and the *sadness* and the grief and the pain of everybody in it. It was just, it's dead with me. All these years...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...and I remember...I went to visit somebody a few year ago and I had to go past it, but it's knocked down. It's all houses built on it now...

SP *Okay.*

S ...but you know, they never knocked the tree down?

SP *Oh really?*

S I remember that tree, always looking out at that tree and how...how everybody in them posh houses didn't know what was going on to all them poor girls in here, all of us, do you know that?

SP *Yeah.*

S Because it was a...a really up market suburb. It wasn't at the back of like Seán MacDermott Street...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...and when you've got An Grianán and High Park as well, how well to do area it was in. All them bitches probably got well fucking skivvied for it, got all their cleaners out of it. All them girls...even if you were pregnant they would have to go out in them days and do cleaning, that I know for a fact. That a lot of them girls when they went to that Navan Road, they still went out to clean houses, to help for their upkeep.

SP *You didn't have to though because you were nearly...*

S Nearly due, and the Coombe were watching for me like a hawk, do you get me?

SP *Yeah, yeah.*

S Because I had already been to the Coombe loads of times for all my visits...

SP *Okay.*

S ...all...and they couldn't control...they couldn't have my baby. I remember the nun sitting there knitting lovely cardigans and telling me, 'the baby will look lovely in that now when it's going on its visit'. 'It's going on *no* visit,' that's what I told her, 'going fucking nowhere,' only with me, and she told me that the baby would have a better life without me and I said, 'whatever life it'll have it won't have one where I won't have the choosing'. Then again I never had the choosing in the end, so maybe I should've given them the baby. Who knows, who knows? We make decisions and choices whether they're right or wrong, but I genuinely thought I would have got to keep my baby and rear him.

SP *Yeah.*

S I never thought...but the Health Board would have took him, but the Health Board spent all their life trying to take me, so they were going to take something off me, so they took my baby and destroyed him. So their plan worked in the end. What they didn't get from me they took from me child...

SP *And you...*

S ...and that's the only way I can say to fix it in my head is that they spent a whole life trying to get me, to keep me and they couldn't so they got to keep my baby.

SP *And you were telling me that he was given to foster and then they'd...they gave him back?*

S They gave him back because they said they couldn't handle him [rustling noise] that he was out of control, but he wasn't, he was just a normal teenage boy, out playing football and broke a neighbour's window. These things happen. I don't know how many windows Brian broke when he was fourteen, fifteen, playing football. I think he broke three in one week. I nearly bloody had a heart attack, but they were things, normal things, but I think the Ryans [pseudonym] thought that he was going to be like their Dad and part of them probably were right. He probably did...be the most like a parent, but I think he could've been helped, he could've been as balanced as the rest of them. He just wanted somebody to love him.

SP *Yeah. And were you allowed contact with him?*

S No, I had to write to the social worker and then when I wouldn't...if I didn't make the contact I wouldn't get the visit and then they'd come back and say to me, 'well it's up to you to make the contact for your visit,' and if I didn't make contact I didn't get the visit and if I wanted the visit then I'd only be allowed to have it in James's Street Hospital or in a clinic, and then when I got my own place to live I started to have the baby, started to have him as a tod...child, but they wouldn't let me have him, only for two hours on a Saturday and some Saturdays I wouldn't be allowed to have him because they'd be going somewhere else.

SP *So he knew that you existed.*

S He knew I was his Mam yeah, I would never let it go, I was never letting it go. I was his Mam and that was it.

SP *Do you think that had an effect on him, the fact that he was taken away from his Mum?*

S Of course it had, it had an effect on all of us, and I'd say he never got over it that he didn't have us. He hated the fact that Brian and Sharon [pseudonym] had me and he didn't have me, you know what I mean?

SP *Yeah.*

S Never could understand it because nobody ever sat down and explained it to him, nor did I because I nev...since he turned seventeen I've seen him four times...

SP *Okay.*

S ...and two of them have been in a prison and the other two times...the Health Board did try to give him back to me when he was sixteen. I thought that was very funny, thought it was hilarious. I was only after having a baby and they tried to hand me back my son and I said, 'no I don't want him'.

SP *At sixteen?*

S I don't want him because I'd already made a new path for myself and I already had a new life and I knew I couldn't take John then. I knew he resented me, I knew he hated me and I knew he would've hurted me because he was so angry and they said, 'oh we'll help you, we'll help you'. But they were forever trying to...but then I got really depressed on Gerard [pseudonym]. I think after that, when I sit down and think about it, after that then I got depressed and I took an overdose of tablets, but they wanted to take my kids to *mind* them for me, and look after them for me and put them somewhere. They weren't quick enough and I had already been there, done that, wore the t-shirt, and I just pulled myself together and got my sister to stay with me and my brother and then Gerard's Dad said, 'no you needn't mind the kids, I'll look after them,' he said, 'I'm after taking holidays out of work, I'll stay here and look after her and the kids'. So, they didn't get anywhere then ever again, they were never getting my kids...

SP *Good.*

S ...never getting them again. They were always wanting to *mind* other...mind your kids. That was their word, *mind*, we'll *mind* them for you, mind, mind.

SP *And the man who...who abused you that you were telling...did you stay with him then was it?*

S No I finished with him.

SP *Finished with him.*

S When Sharon was born, Sharon was born on the [date in November removed] and I left him on New Year's day that year [year removed]. I left him. He left me for dead that night and at four o'clock in the morning I woke the two kids up, put Brian on his bike and I told him we were going on an adventure and I put Sharon in the pram and my friend who's in UCD [University College Dublin] I rang Peter [pseudonym] and I told him that I was leaving him and I needed money. So I had safe money to run with, I had £200 and I had a house to run to. I'd already found help and I ran and I never came back, never came back, and I never looked back either. I just look back on all the years of the abuse, the beatings, *ah Jesus* everything. Nothing was ever worth that, nothing, nothing, but life is hard, that's what they throw at you, that's what you make of it.

SP *And how come you stayed though that long with him?*

S I think I knew no better. I had no family, I had nowhere to live and everywhere was a doss down house. I had Brian. I went back to my Ma's, got pregnant, I got a job, got my life, it was only getting back on track. Got a great job actually and then I got pregnant and had Brian and then I ended up in a Mother and Babies Home over in Donnybrook.

SP *Oh.*

S Yeah.

SP *Which Mother and Baby Home is that?*

S I don't know, Miss something, Miss Carr's.²

² Interviewee is possibly referring to Miss Carr's Home on Northbrook Road in Ranelagh.

SP *I do know of it.*

S Miss Carr, isn't it? Miss Carr? You went to Rathmines then to live in the house, so I ended up there for nearly a year and then I got my first Corporation place [social housing].

SP *Gosh so twice in your...in your life you end up in a Mother and Baby Home.*

S All for the sake to help me mind my baby...and all for the sake of the...

SP *Did they try to take...*

S Oh yeah, she t...

SP *...who was it, was it Brian?*

S ...Brian, yeah they tried to take Brian as well.

SP *And how they didn't take...did you...?*

S Because I was too cute then.

SP *Yeah.*

S I was too well up. So we got to live in these little rooms like apartment things.

SP *Okay, in Rathmines?*

S In Rathmines it was, yeah wasn't it? Because you walked up George's Street, to the top of George's Street. The pub used to be in the middle, took a left, went around the back and into the left again. So it was, it was the start of Rathmines around there...

SP *Okay.*

S ...and we lived there until I got a flat up in [location removed], up in James' Street and then from there I got a house in Tallaght and then I *never*...after Brian, I never put my foot inside me Ma's house ever, ever again, *ever*. And I always had somewhere to live then. I always knew how to provide a home, do you understand me...

SP *Yeah.*

S ...make a home. I'd go from one place to the other.

SP *And the father of your child, of your first three, was he around much?*

S No, he never seen them after that.

SP *Okay so you basically...*

S Cut off...

SP *...looked after them on your own?*

S ...yeah, we never had any contact. He doesn't even know what Sharon looks like. He never wanted to know them. If he couldn't have me, couldn't have the kids. He doesn't even know what Sharon looks like or nothing.

[Irrelevant conversation removed]

[Interview paused and resumed]

SP *Okay, so any last words?*

S No, if it was to be...if I had to think would I have changed my life? No. If I could fix the pain that was there I'd love to fix it. If I could get back anything from it, is the knowledge that it made me a better person, but not the people that helped me because none of them ever helped me, they destroyed me. So anything that's in me is down to my kids that I love and adore and they love

and adore me, and I probably would have never made it without them and that's it really. (*Voice breaking*)

SP *Well thank you so much, thank you.*

[Interview Ends]