

Transcript of interview with Peter Mulryan

Interviewer: Mary Cunningham

Date: 3 March, 2020

Location: Peter Mulryan's home

Length of Interview: 1 hour 27 minutes

The following items were copied and submitted by Peter for the archive:

PHOTOGRAPHS

1: Peter with his foster mother

2, 3: Mary Mulryan, Peter's aunt

4: Peter with his uncle John Mulryan

5: Peter, Kathleen and baby with Peter's mother, Delia Mulryan

6: Press photograph of local drama group

7: Memorial Card - Delia Mulryan

8: Peter with All Ireland medal for handball

9: Handball players

10: Peter (aged about 40)

11: FCA

12: P&T (Peter, front left)

13: Family. (back) David, Karen, Irene, Noel. (front) Ronan, Kathleen, Peter, Triona, Una

14: Family with Grandad Kenny

DOCUMENTS

1: Section from the list of names of children recorded as having died in the Home.

2: Birth cert for Marian Bridget Mulryan

3: Death cert for Marian Bridget Mulryan

4: Recorded causes of death of 796 children in the Tuam Mother and Baby Home

5: Details on deaths in the Tuam Mother and Baby Home

6: New York Times (Jan13, 2018)

MC: It's the 3rd of March [2020]. This is Mary Cunningham and I'm with Peter Mulryan who is a survivor of the institution which was known as the Tuam Mother and Baby Home. This interview is part of the Tuam Oral History Project which is being conducted by the history department in NUI Galway. We are in Peter's home in Derrymullan and Kathleen, Peter's wife, is also present.

Peter, I know you've told your story publicly over the last number of years and you have also participated in a documentary around the Home. Maybe if you can start your story with your earliest memories.

PM: I was born in 1944. My mother wasn't married so I was brought to Tuam. I was born in the Regional Hospital Galway, which I didn't find out about until 1970 through Catherine Corless's work and investigations. I hadn't a clue where my relations or my parents were. I tried several times back when I was about eighteen or nineteen years of age. I made contact with Galway County Council. They had nothing, no information to give me. I wanted to find out who my mother was, who my father was. Several visits and phone calls and they denied me any chance to see any of the records. They invited me in and that was all, they had nothing for me, no files, no nothing. It was horrendous, it's a natural thing for anybody to want to find out where they came from. I was getting no help from anywhere—church or state.

I came out of St Mary's in Tuam at four and a half years of age. I remember that day clearly, but I have no memories, prior to that, of being in St Mary's Home, because inside the big high walls nothing changed as I grew up to four or four and a half years of age. I have no memory whatsoever until the gates were opened one day.

It was 1949, January 1949, no sorry, February 1949 that I went out to the real world. I was boarded out to a family that was approximately twenty miles from Galway. I was put into an ambulance, into the back of the ambulance. I couldn't look out the windows because the windows were high. There was a man and a woman there, probably a nurse and the driver in the van to take me on that journey. I hadn't a clue where I was going, I couldn't look out because the windows were so high. It was scary, I had no one to talk to, I didn't know where I was going. We stopped at this house. It was a drizzly old day in the month of February—damp. I remember as I was going in at the back of the house, a two-storied house, to see the trees moving. I was scared of that because I hadn't seen anything like that before even though I was four and a half. Never saw trees moving in the wind like that. I went into the house anyway and there was a big fire down. There was a man and a woman there. The woman was in her seventies and her son was there, her was in his fifties.

See Photo #1

So that's who I was with— a farming community. They showed me the bedroom upstairs. I saw this iron bed and lovely white clothes on it, a blanket and all that. It was like a cot for the world, but it was a steel one.

I saw a dog then under the table and he wagging his tail. I was very scared then; I never saw a dog before. He didn't bark, he was moving around, he was quiet, I had never saw an animal. When you think of the children today at four and a half and the amount they know.

MC: So, that's a vivid memory you have of arriving in that house.

PM: That's my first memory of a human being moving around from one place to another. Prior to that, I suppose, it was just kids screaming. There was up to three hundred kids in St Mary's at that time. It was double the amount that should be in there, there should have been only a hundred and fifty. There was only room for one hundred and fifty, I don't know how they had beds, they were on top of each other I'd say. As I said, I have no memories of it, but I know that was it.

MC: We'll skip along a bit to see what you know about the circumstances of how your mother ended up being in the Tuam Home.

PM: I didn't meet my mother until 1975, all those years. When I went to look for my birth cert, it was there I found information on it, a little bit of information—where I was born, the Regional Hospital in Galway. Kathleen and myself went into the Presbytery there and met up with the priest. I introduced myself and said what I wanted. I said I was looking for the records of my mother, where she was. He turned to Kathleen and said, 'Is it you that wants this?' That year, we were planning to get married so we had to have the long birth cert for that.

MC: And this was in—?

PM: In the Regional Hospital in Galway

MC: You went into the Regional looking for information.

PM: He went away reluctantly, and he was back in a few minutes with a ledger. He picked out the page, no problem finding it and I looking for that for so long. I was about nineteen years of age when I went looking for that first. I was denied it, there it was, no problem.

MC: Was that your first time getting the birth cert? When you were due to get married.

PM: Yeah that's right. That was the time. That's why I looked for it.

MC: What age were you then?

PM: I was thirty-two, and I looking for that for so long and I was denied it—unbelievable. As I said, I always wondered where I was.

After getting a beating in that house, I'd go outside screaming and I'd look around. I'd look up at the stars at nighttime and I'd say, 'What direction am I from?' I'd go around the circle and I'd say, 'You're south, east, north and west.' I had this in my mind that I was from the west of Ireland. That happened a good few times. It was where the sun set, that's where I discovered that's where I was born. Believe it or not looking from the house where I was. I had no attraction to any place else. I would be always watching out for the name Mulryan in papers or when I'd meet someone asking would they be anything to Mulryan's—

MC: Would this have been when you were a teenager? When you started to really think about where you came from.

PM: Exactly yeah. Strangely enough I was attracted to that area when I discovered my mother.

So, he [the priest] directed us on to the area, to the parish priest where my mother was from. So, I said, 'We'll go there.' We went there, after that, and he told us that yes, there were Mulryans in a certain area of west Galway. He sent us to the wrong people, the wrong Mulryans. We went in there and they said the next house there, that's where you're from. We went in and sure enough when they opened the door I could recognise them. There was a man and a woman there and it transpired that it was my uncle and my aunt was in that house. That was the first time ever to have contact with a relation. **See Photos #2, #3 #4**

MC: Had you grandparents passed away at that stage?

PM: No, they told me where my mother was. She was. In the Magdalene Laundry in Galway.

MC: But your mother's parents were gone. That's what I mean, your grandparents.

PM: Oh, they were gone. So, they directed me to where she was. I thought she had a job there then, in the laundry. But far from it.

We got into Galway city and met a Reverend Mother and she said, ‘Yeah, she’s here, but you can’t get in today to see her.’ A few days later we got in again. ‘Oh yes,’ she said, ‘when you go in to meet her here, don’t say you’re looking for your mother, say it’s your aunt and you’re her nephew then.’ I still can’t understand why they said such a thing, that I couldn’t recognise her as my mother. Just say ‘Looking for my aunt.’

I got to see her anyway, into a small little room and I was only allowed to be there about fifteen minutes. We had a cup of tea and biscuits. The door was left open of course and probably someone could hear what was going on. It was awful hard to bond at the start, very hard, because she wasn’t talking much, only with her head down like that, even though I knew she was delighted to have met me.

MC: Sorry for interrupting you. Did you tell her that you were her son?

PM: Oh, I did.

MC: And did she react as in she remembered clearly having you?

PM: She didn’t say much about it until later on, because it was probably a shock to her. She was moving on in years. She was sixty-seven or sixty-eight at that time, even though she looked like an eighty-year-old woman. That’s what she looked like, poorly dressed and all that.

MC: You were saying that you thought, when you were told that she was in the Magdalene Laundry, that she was just working in a laundry and you didn’t have any understanding that maybe she wasn’t free to leave, as we know now was the case? So, you just thought it was regular employment.

PM: Exactly. I thought she had a little job.

Anyway, I was only allowed fifteen minutes and I had to leave then. So that transpired into—I was going every month, three weeks to a month. I was told then I was coming in too often, the Reverend Mother told me. ‘Next thing she’ll come in, and next thing she’ll follow you sometime, and if anything happens to her, you will be responsible.’ I’d be responsible if she came out to Ballinasloe. She made that quite clear to me. Wasn’t that an awful threat? Shocking! We accepted everything the nuns said, we thought that was the rules. A good few months later, I wanted to take her out and I wasn’t allowed. ‘You’re not allowed to take her out, because she’ll want to leave here and she’ll break out, and if something happens, that’s it, you are responsible for it.’ I never asked that question again.

So, in summertime, when the weather got fine, I was allowed out town for fifteen minutes or a half an hour. So, then we started bringing her out to the beach, in summertime. There was a year gone, at this stage, before we started moving out. Our child was eight or nine months old, and we used to have the baby with us, and she was delighted to see the baby. The first time ever I saw her smile when she had the baby in her hands. I have a photograph of it there. **See photo #5**

MC: But she never spoke to you about the home or anything like that?

PM: No, never said a thing, she was afraid to talk.

MC: So, she didn't really converse much with you, is that—?

PM: No, not that time. She was afraid to talk out. When we went out to shops, she spoke more freely. She'd be always asking about the baby if we hadn't the baby with us.

MC: When you met the uncle, her brother—they had never kept contact with her while she was in the Magdalene Home?

PM: Oh, they did. They'd meet her of a Saturday or a thing like that.

MC: Oh, used they?

PM: They knew where she was. They were following—trying to get me as well. They were hoping—they saw a photograph of me in the local paper one time. I was in a play and I was dressed as a priest. **See Photo #6** They tried to follow that up, and at one stage, he [Peter's uncle] passed by the house that I was in, the house where I was boarded out. He came on a bicycle, he must have cycled over forty miles, how ever he found out. He saw information in the paper with the photograph, the address and all that. He must have followed it up. I remember clearly the day I saw him. This man cycling along. I was doing a bit of gardening at the front of the house. He looked in and he kept going, slowly. He told me afterwards he thought I was happy where I was, and that's why he didn't go any further with it. He came to get me back to their home, to their house, because there was none of them married, they had no family, they were moving on in years.

MC: They would have liked to have a nephew. How many brothers and sisters did your mother have?

PM: There was five, some died. I met three of them. The family before that then, there was fourteen in the previous family before that. Half them went to America. A good few of them died. It was the time of the famine, a lot of them died.

MC: So, she was like a lot of women at the time when she fell pregnant with you, she just had to leave home, was it?

PM: What happened that time, the parish priest came to the house, when she was twenty-eight or twenty-nine. He knocked at the door and the father, my grandfather, came to the door. The priest said, 'Your daughter is causing a scandal in the parish. She must leave and I know a place where she can go to. We can arrange it.' Sure enough, that's what he did. She was brought to Loughrea. [St Brendan's County Home] She was about six months pregnant at the time. They had no cars that time, so the only way of transport was bicycles. So, my uncle Tom and Aunt Mary brought her on the bar of the bike.

MC: Her brother brought her?

PM: To Loughrea, in the dark of night and they were home again before the light the next morning from Loughrea. Because of the scandal. Imagine going that distance on the bar of a bike and she six or seven months pregnant, sitting on the bar of that bike.

MC: If she had got to six months in the pregnancy, and the family hadn't made any decision for her to leave, do you think would they have left her in the house except for the priest's interference?

PM: They would of course.

MC: They were okay with her having the baby?

PM: They were of course. They would have minded her, but you see, the church had control of it.

The nine months came, and she was brought into the Regional Hospital. I was in the hospital six days. I was weak, but my mother, after three days, was sent to Tuam, down to St Mary's in Tuam. Then three days later, I was brought to Tuam, and stayed there for a year with her. But if she had, or any of them had a hundred pounds at the time, my mother was free to walk out the door. But they hadn't. A hundred pounds that time was a fair amount in the 1940's.

MC: A huge amount.

PM: A huge amount of money and that's what they got for every child.

MC: Do you know why it was Loughrea that was selected for her?

PM: It was the Health Board and a church run thing again. That's why.

MC: You know how a lot of women were taken to Tuam, because it was the Mother and Baby place—

PM: Yes, but they weren't born in Tuam, they were born in a hospital setting.

MC: At that point?

PM: Yes. She worked like a slave there then, and after a year she was let out, because she didn't have the hundred pounds. She was there for penance, that's what they'd say. Penance! They collected Children's Allowance and the whole lot.

MC: Did she go straight from the Tuam Mother and Baby Home to the Magdalene Laundry or was she back out at home first?

PM: She went back to the laundry.

MC: She went straight to the laundry from Tuam, so she never really got back to her home place again?

PM: Not really, no. It was tough. She would have been thirty years or more in the Magdalene Laundry.

She had another baby then, ten years later, a sister that I didn't know I had. Catherine [Corless] in her research discovered that the name was on that list of the 796 babies. The name Mulryan showed up on it, and after further examination the mothers name and all that was on it. We put two and two together, so we checked it out. **See Doc #1 listed above**

MC: And you know nothing of the circumstances of what happened there?

PM: We have very little information on it. I'm still looking for information. There is a death cert. She was born a healthy baby, with a birth cert. She was registered but wasn't certified by any medical person whatsoever, only by Bina Rabitte, who was a domestic there in St Mary's. She is down for everything, no matter what went on, whenever there was a child born, her name was used. **See Docs # 2, 3 listed above**

MC: You found from Catherine anyway that—

PM: Catherine's information, I followed that up and we got a death cert and it says that she died from convulsions at nine months and she was born a healthy baby. How could this happen? I'm tired looking now, trying to get more on her file. Where is she? Where did she go to? It's quite possible she was brought to Shannon, and off on a plane to America and sold off there. That's what they used to do regularly. The nuns would bring the baby up to Shannon and give the baby to a hostess there on the plane. That was the hostess's job to mind the baby until it got across to America, and probably met someone from the church there, a priest or a nun, who took over and transferred it to somebody else.

MC: You think that may be a possibility, unless you get proof that she [sister] is actually buried in Tuam?

PM: I'm looking for proof for the last five years now, and I'm getting nowhere.

MC: Can we go back to your foster home where you described—there was a mother, an elderly lady and her middle-aged son, wasn't it?

PM: Yes, her son who wasn't married either. I was there at four and a half. The first thing anyway, I was brought to the bog. It was summertime, when summer came, I was brought to the bog. I walked straight into a boghole. They were cutting turf, himself and another fellow. I didn't know what the water was. I went down to there [*indicates his neck*], I screamed, and they came and pulled me out of there. I probably got a hiding for doing it, I don't know. I hadn't a clue what a boghole was, I walked straight into it. I was left there for the day then, dried off.

To think about a year later, on one of his cruelty trips again, I was out in the shed, and he had a canvas bag, and he put me into the canvas bag and left down between the shafts of the cart. He put me up on his back, and said he was bringing me to the bog and the boghole. He walked off down the road anyway. I never cried; I was as quiet as a lamb. He went down to the same boghole where he had pulled me out the year before. What kind of a mind had he?

MC: So, you were five and a half, around, at that stage?

PM: I was about five and a half at that time. Whatever happened anyway, he went maybe a hundred yards down this narrow road where we were living, and stopped, and let me out. Whether there was somebody coming, I don't know, I'll never know.

MC: Had something happened that caused him to do this or was it just—?

PM: I don't know whether I let a cup fall, or something as basic, I don't know, I just haven't a clue.

MC: You have no memory of that.

PM: The treatment I got from him was just unbearable, unreal. When he'd be hammering me, his mother would say to him, 'Will you leave him alone.' I was dammed glad to have her there somedays. I was beaten. My pants would be taken off. He'd take off his strap and he'd lash me on my bottom. A four and half or five-year-old, he'd lash me with that. Then in summertime, he'd use nettles on me, put nettles down inside my pants, that kind of stuff.

MC: Was he always aggressive towards you? Were there ever moments when—?

PM: There was never a smile, he would never praise anything that I'd do. I'd have to always be one hundred percent perfect, no matter what I did. He was lethal, absolutely lethal. No respect whatsoever.

She was old, trying to mind me. She wasn't able to do it, you know. I'd go to school and my head would be covered in lice. At the desk, I'd be playing with the lice in my copybook with a pencil, pushing them away. There'd be that many, they'd be falling down off my hair. She wasn't able to do it. She was kind compared to him.

MC: Do you remember anybody calling then? The Child Welfare Officer?

PM: They used to come. I'd know nothing about it. They wouldn't ask me much questions or anything as to how I was getting on. I'd be afraid to say anything anyway, I'd be terrified to say anything.

I had the one pair of shoes for five years, I'd say, I remember well. I only used the shoes going to Mass. That's how they lasted me so long. But they were so tight on me, I'd be going around walking on the side of my feet, because the shoes were so tight on me. I'd be walking three to four miles each way, you know. It was okay for the first couple of years, it would be fine, but I would be growing out of them. I wouldn't mind but they were getting money for clothing for me.

MC: You believe it wasn't spent?

PM: I had a pair of boots coming out of Tuam, hobnailed boots, that's what they used. I don't know how long I had them for. Then I was in bare feet from Easter until November, every year, on the farm. Then on Sunday, I'd be allowed put on the shoes for walking to Mass. As soon as I'd come home, they were thrown off. They were perfect when I was finished with them only, they were so tight on me.

MC: Did you go to school regularly?

PM: Oh yeah, I went regularly, but—. My record would be a hundred percent attendance, but I'd always have a note going with me to school, if the sun shone, I could get off at half twelve. It was the envy of the rest of the school to see me get off, no homework or anything. Off to go farming. The farmers were allowed to do that with us. Education didn't register with them or with the department either. It mustn't have. They were allowed to use us any time they wanted; school didn't matter. I never passed an exam in school.

MC: So, the teachers accepted that situation?

PM: Oh, they did, they were probably told that. Hand up this note every time, that was it, gone. Anytime the sun shone, I could go. The roll would be called by eleven o'clock, so that was it, I was registered as being in school. My attendance was very good. I was held back two different years in classes. I couldn't go from one to two because I hadn't enough education. That's the way I went through that system.

MC: Were there other children, in the area, fostered?

PM: There was a couple of more, we weren't cute enough to talk to one and other about our stories. There was one family and he [the foster child] wasn't treated very well either, and then there was another family, and they were very nice to this young fellow, very nice. He was a couple of years younger than me, he was well dressed, everything like that.

I remember that I wasn't toilet trained until I'd say I was about eight. I'd be wetting my pants in school and nobody would sit beside me. I remember wearing corduroy trousers, if I took it off, it would stand up on its own. That's how filthy it was. No one would sit beside me.

MC: So, a very, very bad experience for you.

PM: Oh, yeah, all the way. I was thirty-two years before I left that house. I still stayed there.

MC: And was the foster father, we'll call him, was he still alive then?

PM: Oh, he was, yeah. The only time I saw him cry was the morning I was leaving to get married. He came down the stairs and he was crying. It was the first time I saw him to cry. Because he knew he was going to be on his own. His mother had died ten or twelve years prior to that.

MC: When you were leaving—

PM: Because he knew it, he was on his own. I stayed there—I was afraid to leave. A lot of people ask why didn't I leave, why did I stay under that. 'What could I do? I said, I had no education. People would ask me to go somewhere. I couldn't go, just couldn't. I was nervous. If I had education I wouldn't mind leaving. I did a correspondence course when I was about twenty years of age. Post used to be coming regularly from a university in England and he'd say, 'What's that?' He'd open any letters that came as well, he did open letters, private letters. It was unreal.

MC: Did he remain abusive to you, even when you were an adult?

PM: I never actually really stood up to him. I was afraid. I was afraid I'd be thrown out, you see, but there wasn't a notion of him throwing me out because he wanted the free labour. I was paying my way while I was there as well. Every week, I was paying my way.

MC: In what way, how do you mean? Through your work?

PM: When I was working.

MC: Was he giving you any money, when you were an adult?

PM: He never gave me a cent. You often heard of “The Wren, going out with the wren”, didn’t you?

[Tradition of children going to neighbours’ houses on St Stephen’s Day where they would sing a song or play music in return for money]

MC: Yes.

PM: When I was five, I’d say, four and a half or five, I used to go out St Stephen’s morning, I wouldn’t be back until six. I used to love the day, meeting people, getting tea, getting cake and a bit of respect, when I’d go out walking “with the wren”. When I’d come home in the evening, throw out all the money; I never saw a cent out of it. I was doing that until I was fourteen years of age, I never got a penny out of it. Never, I wouldn’t even think of it. It was all about money.

MC: And the boys or girls of your age—did you get to mix with people in the community.

PM: Not for a long time. I was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen before I did.

MC: Was that because of your shyness or because they mightn’t have wanted to mix with you?

PM: It was shyness, because I always knew myself as a nobody in society, nobody wanted me because I had no parents. I remember one of my classmates saying to me one day, walking home from school, I’ll never forget it, that I was bought in the market in Mountbellew. He was a year or two younger than me, yet he could say that to me. I was about ten at the time. He could say that to me, that I was bought in the market, it was very degrading.

I was never allowed to serve Mass in my whole life. I discovered afterwards that none of our group, people in my situation, were ever allowed ever to serve Mass because their mother wasn’t married. That was it, wasn’t that shocking.

We had a “stations” in the house. You know what a “stations” is? [A tradition whereby Mass was said in the home for family, and neighbours]

MC: Yes

PM: I was never allowed serve at Mass there. They had to get in a classmate to come and do it. How degrading! So, I was nobody in society, couldn’t get on a football team or a hurling team or anything. I never really got involved in sport until I was about forty, with the handball, and I went on to win three All-Irelands after all that. **See Photos #8,#9,#10**

MC: So, you obviously had a lot of skill and talent.

PM: When I was nine, I won a Feis in the school, two years in a row I represented the school. Then the finals would be in the parish school which would be Ahascaragh. All the five schools would be in the final, but I was never brought in any of the two years. My name used to be in the paper for it.

MC: What were you doing in the Feis?

PM: Singing. I won it two years in a row.

MC: You were saying there earlier how your uncle saw you in a photograph. You were in a play.

PM: That's right, in the local Caltra—

MC: A local dramatic society. So, you joined that. **See photo # 6**

PM: I joined that. That meant so much to me, that I could do that. I was about eighteen or nineteen at the time. People used to talk to me, 'Oh, you were great the other night in the play.' It was the first time I ever heard praise. I never heard praise, no matter if I stood on my head every day, I wouldn't get praise for what I did. I wouldn't mind but neighbours used to love to have me doing work for them, because they knew it would be done right. I'd get praise there for doing it. That's all I needed. The same when I got working in the job, I would be the first to help out somebody, if we got stuck anywhere, I would be the first to help them. I found I would be recognised, I was shown a bit of respect then.

MC: So, that was a big boost for you.

PM: Oh, it was huge. That's how I went through life all the time, nothing was too much, no matter what. But he'd [foster father] be giving out about helping someone. 'You old fooleen you,' all that sort of stuff, he'd be saying if he thought I was helping a neighbour, because he wouldn't help a neighbour.

MC: Were you the only person that was fostered in that house?

PM: There was another guy there, older than me.

MC: Did you have a relationship with him?

PM: Kind of. I thought he'd be kinder to me than he was. He'd carry stories home, if I was out socialising. He'd bring home every little thing. He went to England. When he'd come home from England, he'd go to the local carnivals [dances]. They'd know everything I did at home because he'd tell them where I was.

MC: So, when he'd come back from England, he'd come back to the foster home again?

PM: He would have, yes.

MC: And you didn't keep contact with him, throughout your life?

PM: I couldn't, no. I thought he'd be on my side but no, always carrying stories. He'd open letters and all that as well. If I was going out with somebody, he'd tell as well. He wasn't nice, not a nice person, instead of being helpful.

MC: You were talking there about your correspondence course. When you left - did you stay in school until you were fourteen? Was that the required time?

PM: What happened then, you see, the department would pay - once you were fourteen you were entitled to a wage in that farm - a pound a week or whatever it was. To avoid that they could send them [foster children]

to the 'Tech' or Vocational School for two years or three. They jumped at that when that came out. It was only in '61 or '62 that that came into being. I went to the local school.

MC: The local 'Tech'?

PM: Again - fine day, home, work. The same thing again. I didn't pass any exam there either.

MC: Were you able to read and write, leaving school?

PM: Well, just about.

MC: The reason I'm asking is that I know you progressed in your career, so clearly you educated yourself at some point.

PM: Oh, I did. That's what I was doing. I'd often think about leaving and maybe if I went to Athlone, I could go to night school. But I was afraid to leave. Afraid of the unknown. I could have got a decent education.

MC: You left then at the time you were getting married? When was it you met Kathleen?

KM: 1973. We were going out a few months when Peter started telling me - now I was aware of children coming from homes and all that kind of thing because we had somebody staying with us. But I didn't see anything like what Peter was telling me, so, it really shocked me, the stories he was telling me. We got married in '75. It was a few months before that that we found Peter's mother. As Peter said we progressed to visiting her and were told to stay away for a bit longer and all that kind of thing. We were so naïve at that time; we thought the nuns were right in what they were saying.

Then, babies started arriving. Peter only told me recently, that when he was getting married, he had it in his head that he'd never have any children, because he thought they would be treated the exact way as he was, because he didn't know any different. Our first arrived and then he realised, oh no, this is not the way it is at all. Because Peter really had no family to look to, and because of that he didn't know any different at all, he thought that's the way babies were treated, beatings and everything, it was the normal thing. Anyway, we went on to have seven children.

I didn't know the significance of - or how enormous it was for Peter to walk out of that house. I had no idea. We were preparing for the wedding and all the usual excitement, but I had no idea that, behind it all, it was such a huge step for Peter. I think in the first few years Peter found it very difficult. He had this new found freedom, so, was it seven days of the week, I think, you were gone to this meeting or - somebody would turn up at the door here; would you join this and would you join that. Peter would say, yes and yes and yes. Even on a Sunday afternoon, there was a meeting. **See Photo #11**

That went on for the first few years, and then, sort of, things settled down. At that stage he started giving up some of those meetings, and babies had arrived at this stage. Considering that he had no experience of family, I'd say he came out of it very well, do you know what I mean?

Because, even that man who owned that house - even when we got married, there was a problem. He used to come in here and he'd just cause upset. You couldn't get rid of him; he'd just come back; that was the way it was. He used to meet this girl that Peter had been going out with for a while and he'd start telling, oh, she was asking for you. But he'd be looking at me, that kind of a mentality, he'd be looking at me but telling the story because he was waiting for a reaction from me. Then he'd up it a little bit more when it went on for a while and there was no reaction. Then, eventually, it just stopped. But there was that kind of thing going on, on and off.

Definitely, Peter was totally attached to the man and I think it was because he knew no different - even when we were married, it was the only family he knew, and because it was, he was attached to him. I'd say he was not released from all of that until the day he died. It's ironic, because when he was dying in hospital, and his relations were there, and the other man that was reared there and his wife, he put out his hand and he called for Peter. I had mixed feelings about that. I was surprised that he did, but on the other side to it was I was annoyed, because when Peter needed him, he didn't put out his hand. There was times, no matter what we did, he'd turn up anyway. He'd arrive in here or, if we didn't go out to visit him, or if Peter didn't, there was just abuse, verbal abuse.

MC: So, he seemed to rely on you to an extent, in his later years anyway?

PM: Yeah, as he was getting older.

MC: Had you got a job, before you got married, outside the farm?

PM: At nineteen, I started. It was called Post and Telegraphs at the time—the telephone company. I got a start there, putting up poles and that kind of stuff. I got on very well there. I went to night school then for a while, doing maths and all that kind of stuff, Brushed myself up to be able to do courses and expand—I went from putting up poles to survey tech—a surveyor in the job. That's what I ended up with. I used to work in the office and look after timesheets and wages and all that for staff. It was a thing I never thought I'd get a chance to do, but I got it. But I was well respected in the job. I never heard a bad word about me. As I was saying earlier on, I loved to help people and it carried me a long, long way. It got me through that— **See**

Photo #12

I didn't say this earlier; I never spoke about my background to my kids - that's them there now, the group picture [*points to a family photograph*] - until they had their exams done and went to third level. It was only then I went public with it, because I didn't want to upset them, and they were very upset when they realised. I wouldn't mind but they knew the man and they were often out there, jumping up on his tractor, working on the farm with him. They loved it out there because they had great freedom after leaving town here, out there on the farm on a fine summer's evening. They would be driving the tractor—

See Photos # 13, # 14

MC: Did they just know him as a neighbour or a foster grandfather or what?

PM: He could have been an uncle. They accepted that.

MC: A relation. They probably wouldn't even have wondered about it.

PM: I'd say they had an idea before I even told them.

KM: They had, but they had this feeling of it's something we cannot talk about. The vibes were there from Peter that it was something we don't talk about and Peter didn't tell them much of the story at all.

So, they had no idea, but then Peter didn't know himself where he came from for a long time, until – originally, we wrote to the adoption and tracing agency in Galway and we met up with a social worker. That would have been 2011, I think. We made the appointment. I made the appointment so that I would be available to go with Peter when I would be on holidays. We went in to see the social worker. Now, I'd say she had about four months notice that we were coming, I think it was four. So, we presumed when we would go in that she would have whatever information she had, she would have it there in front of us. That wasn't the case. She met us; she took out, like a registration book. She said, 'Oh, yeah, there's your name, your name is there.' We didn't see it at all, we weren't shown it at all. She said, 'I will write to you.' So, we often wondered what was happening, it took nine months before the letter arrived. The letter consisted of two paragraphs. Basically, it said how he was born in the Regional Hospital, was transferred to Tuam Mother and Baby Home, St Mary's in Tuam. It was more about where he went to, he was fostered out and it said who it was, and then said his bicycle got broken and it was fixed by his foster mother. The last line said he was adopted in 1961. We were, 'He was adopted?' Then when we started making up the age; he was an adult; he couldn't have been adopted.

So, the little records we got of Peter, on it was when the inspection would go ahead, a social worker would call to the house. It said that he was a slight child, reasonably well dressed, and there was different things like that, but one line on it about adoption - *we notified the foster mother of the new adoption laws*. It was the same year that the social worker said he was adopted. She didn't even read it right. On the last line was - *if you have any further queries, please ring and make a new appointment*. I tried, and I tried, and I tried and nothing. I left messages to ask her to ring us back. I left messages - oh yeah, she was never there when we rang. Eventually, we had to give up because she would never return our call.

MC: What year was that?

KM: That would have been 2011, we went searching, so, that would have been about 2012. In 2014 then, Catherine Corless was on the news - we had actually visited the little site in Tuam, the site of the Mother and Baby Home, not knowing that there was any connection. Because we had seen something in our local paper about it. We were in Galway one day and we said, wonder where that is, and we went down to Tuam and we found it. We visited it not realising that Peter's sister could be there or that Peter was even there.

MC: Oh, you still didn't know at that point that you had been there.

KM: It was after that, that we found out from the social worker.

We met Catherine Corless at a talk in the university in Galway. There was a little section in our local paper again saying that this was going to be on and the two of us went into it. There were a few people there speaking including Catherine Corless, Susan Lohan from the Adoption Rights Alliance and I can't remember who else. We listened to the talks about it and we met Catherine afterwards. Catherine handed her number to Peter and said, 'Ring me.' Peter rang her a few days later, and the next thing she came up with the Mulryan name, which is not a very common name, she came on it on the list. There are two Mulryans, and she looked up both, and one them fitted as Peter's sister. When she checked it was the same name, the same mother. His mother was sent from Tuam after Peter being born, a year after, and while she was residential, she got pregnant. We don't know the circumstances or anything. She was forty-four years of age when Marian was born, which was quite old.

MC: When the sister was born.

KM: I could not believe that his mother was only sixty-four or sixty-five when we met her.

PM: She looked like an eighty-year old.

KM: She was very feeble. We had to link her. I had it in my head that she was almost in her eighties. I don't know how she could have been that feeble, but she was. Her eyesight was poor as well, she had cataracts in her eyes, which was quite young to have cataracts as well. It was only after she died that we realised how young she had been when we met her.

MC: The nuns in the Magdalene Laundry could have told you about the second child. They must have known.

PM: Of course, they did. That's how she ended up there.

KM: They must have. When Peter checked with the social worker in 1963, about his mother. They said that they had no information.

PM: It's in three different parts of the file, three different sections—

KM: It's the boarding out file, and on the very first page is Peter's mother's name and address.

PM: If I had known that when I was twenty. I was denied all that.

KM: They just went all out to keep everyone separated.

PM: They were very successful at that all right.

MC: It's an appalling story really of this deliberate separation of children and mothers.

KM: When we mentioned about taking her out, even for a weekend, no way it wasn't possible. She would have been institutionalised, that's what we were told, but maybe for a weekend—a trial.

PM: We wouldn't get that chance.

KM: You were not allowed. After all of that, when she died, we were at the funeral, they contacted us, and when we went in, and we went to the funeral. Afterwards, we were brought into the convent for a meal. There was a nun sitting with us that we had never met before. She seemed like she was there for a while, she seemed quite settled in her ways. She was sitting beside me and she said, 'Why didn't ye come in more often to see her?' I said, we weren't allowed, we were told not to come in by the reverend mother. She never made a comment, but you could see in her face that she was sort of annoyed.

MC: When ye visited there, did ye ever see anybody else who was working in the place?

KM: No.

MC: So, you didn't have a sense of the place being a place of confinement?

PM: Not a clue.

KM: We went to the door. A nun would answer the door and we'd ask for her. They would go off and the next thing, she'd come, and we'd be brought off into a little side room right inside the door. That's as far as we ever got.

PM: A small room, tiny.

KM: We never met anyone or anything.

PM: She was in hospital and they never told us she was dying.

KM: She was in hospital at one stage— we went in, and they told us she was in hospital, but they never told us why she was even there, and she didn't know why she was there.

PM: We never got her file either.

KM: We never knew how her health was, how good it was, how bad it was, anything. We just visited; we took her out when we could. Now, at the very beginning, we weren't allowed to. Not for quite a while—

PM: A good year anyway.

KM: As the years went on, they got more freedom, but by that time, she was gone too feeble. We'd take her out. That's why we used to bring her to the beach; there was nowhere to bring her. We'd bring her, on a fine day, to the beach. But we could only come on a fine day to bring her. In the wintertime, you'd just go into the side room and wait there fifteen or twenty minutes. I think she didn't know what to be saying. She used to tell us little stories, but at the time we almost brushed them off. We used to say, 'Ah, you know, it's only the way she's thinking.'

There was one particular story about the time she went to Lourdes. She was so excited. They were going with the diocese in Galway. We gave her a hundred pounds because in our heads, while we hadn't been to

Lourdes, we knew Knock, we knew the stalls and that. We thought they would be brought around, and that they'd have a great time, and she'd be able to spend her money. So, we gave her a hundred pounds going.

When we went into see her after they coming back, she said that she wasn't able to spend the hundred pounds because they weren't brought anywhere. They were brought to the grotto and they were brought back. They were in the hospital. Now, the hospital in Lourdes was like a prison in the olden days; now it is beautiful and very modern. She said, 'I had the hundred pounds and I put it under my pillow.' She said, 'I wanted to give it back to you.' She said, and I don't know what the name of the nun was, 'I saw "Sister whatever it was" taking the money out, and I told her that wasn't hers, and that it was yours and I wanted to give it back to ye. She said she never took it. But I saw her taking it, and she kept denying she ever took it.' She said, 'I know she did.' She said, 'The hundred pounds is gone.'

We were saying don't mind it, but again we thought she was imagining it, but we didn't say that to her. But in our own heads, we thought no, the nuns wouldn't do that. You see, we didn't know. But there was little vibes that we didn't pick on, and t's only thinking back now - she'd name a nun and say, 'Oh, that one is awful, she's not nice at all, she's horrible to us.' More of them she'd say, 'She's nice now.' That kind of thing.

PM: As they were passing by—

KM: We wouldn't pick up even on the names. We don't have any idea of who they were, we don't even remember any names of the nuns there in the convent. There were little vibes like that, but we were sure that everything was wonderful.

MC: You thought she was well looked after.

KM: We did.

MC: I suppose it is similar to the situation of your uncle thinking you were happy and being reluctant to interfere with your life.

KM: I honestly don't think he [the uncle] would have got him [Peter] back anyway, because He was already sent out to a house and I can guarantee you they would not have changed that.

PM: I'd be coming twelve or fourteen, that evening when he passed by the house. How he found where I was. it was unreal.

KM: We used to visit Peter's uncle then. He was getting on in years; there was an aunt there as well, but she died not too long after we meeting her. She always wanted Peter in the house, but, I suppose, it was out of their hands really. They wouldn't be allowed anyway. They wouldn't have the - they wouldn't be forward enough to fight for Peter. They were extremely quiet people. They were people that would let others walk all over them and just say nothing. So, they weren't going to fight. There was no question that Peter could ever be there.

PM: They were in a very, very poor situation. The land was very bad, three quarters of it covered in water. Very poor.

KM: Peter's mother never ever spoke about her past. Never.

MC: You never asked her, did you Peter?

PM: I never knew what to ask.

KM: Now, she did mention at one stage about Peter's father; that he was buried in the graveyard in Claregalway. He died a couple of years before. that—

PM: Four years before I met her, he died.

KM: Now, we know - Peter did DNA, he sent off to Ancestry. The reason we did it was not to find his father, but to find more about his mother. It ended up we found his father.

PM: We are ninety-nine per cent sure. My sister could be a full sister, not a half-sister.

KM: What we discovered afterward was, when Peter was born, and a year later his mother, was sent to Loughrea County Home again. She was there as, according to the records, a domestic. She was residential. Through DNA, and cousins that were found, that were related on his father's side, we were able to narrow it down with the help of a professional genealogist, who came on board to help. Our daughter joined up with him and worked it out that we are ninety-nine per cent sure of who is father is.

PM: We know where he's buried now.

KM: There was three in the family, two brothers and a sister. We discovered that the older brother owned the farm and that the younger brother, who was Peter's father, we think, was sent at quite a young age to Loughrea County Home. So, he could have been in the home -

PM: He could have been working in It or something.

KM: No, he was a patient. He could have been in the Home, the same time as Peter's mother. There's always the possibility that he's the father of Marian, Marian Bridget.

PM: On the birth cert, the name of the father is blacked out. **See Doc #2 listed above**

MC: So, a name was put on originally, on Marian's birth cert?

PM: Oh, yeah, with most families, they take the name of, the state—

KM: But the name is never allowed to be put on it generally

MC: But your birth cert, your father's name, is it blacked out or not there?

PM: Blacked out.

MC: Oh, blacked out.

PM: But in Marian's, it looks like it was rubbed out and photocopied. You can see little parts of letters

PM: The person who was in that Home at the time, it could have been a priest; it could have been someone working in the place.

KM: There is one line in a record we got—*the father of Marian Bridget Mulryan was a*—and everything else blanked out. We are wondering was it—

PM: It could have been a labourer.

KM: Or was it a patient, who could be Peter's father.

PM: We don't know unless we find the body of Marian.

MC: And do a DNA.

KM: We'll never know otherwise. We checked up. We found the headstone of his father and his uncle. Then, there was a sister. We couldn't find anything, only that she came up in the census of 1911 and she was eighteen years of age. It was like as if she disappeared after that.

PM: We can't trace her anywhere

KM: The professional genealogist, Maurice Gleeson is his name, he found someone with the same name, same address but five years in the difference of the birthdate, as a patient in the psychiatric hospital, St Bridget's psychiatric hospital here in Ballinasloe. That same girl died at twenty-four from T.B. We think it might have been her, even though the birthdate is incorrect, but then again, they weren't often accurate years ago. No burial record so far.

In the fifth interim report [Report from the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, April 2019] it mentions how unclaimed bodies were sent for research to Galway. It was during those years. We do not know could she have been one of them. We don't know, and the problem is we can never write to anyone to find out because they wouldn't regard Peter as being a nephew. We will never know that.

PM: We are missing a whole lot of cousins, second cousins, third cousins, a whole pile of them now. In England, a lot of them.

KM: There are some cousins in England that Peter hasn't met, on the father's side.

MC: You have met with some cousins?

PM: Yes.

MC: Are they just accepting that you are related?

PM: Oh, yeah.

KM: It was through the cousins in England, they were the closest, they did a DNA as well and it matched. It was the closest we could get and that's how it was narrowed down to this man.

MC: They, obviously, had never heard any story in relation to a child that their father would have had, or their relation had?

PM: No. They were neighbours actually [Peter's birth parents] They were just across the fields from one another. The houses.

MC: These relatives that you've met?

PM: His father would have been just down the road from his mother.

KM: We were guessing that because there was no transport at that time.

PM: They had to be close by.

KM: Where could she have gone to? We did hear from his uncle as well that she used to go down to that house to do cleaning for two brothers who lived in the house.

PM: A small house

KM: And local knowledge of who the older people suspected was the father. They were saying the same family.

MC: And the DNA then bore that out.

So, that's your story. There's a lot of bits missing alright, which is frustrating.

KM: It is. We brought TUSLA [The Child and Family Agency] to court –

PM: That's the people I was reared with now [*Showing a photograph*] – that elderly woman. She's beside me there. **See photo #1**

MC: This is you?

PM: That's me there and that's my foster mother. He was reared in the house.

MC: This is the other man who was in the house. I'll copy these photographs when we are finished chatting. Is that okay?

PM: That guy is still alive, so I don't want that photograph in it.

MC: We can cut it off if you would like the picture of yourself as a young boy. I can crop the picture so that he is taken out of it. Is that okay?

PM: Yeah.

MC: Before we do the photographs, is there anything else you want to add to what we said there. We've covered a lot of the issues around your birth, your mother's story, which is a very tragic story really. All her life spent in –

KM: We went down the legal road looking for information on Peter's sister, and we ended up in the high court. TUSLA was there. They fought us every step of the way. They brought in a barrister; they had a representative representing them there. Lucky enough, we had a barrister representing us, and a solicitor that didn't really charge us a huge amount, otherwise we wouldn't have been able. We were there, ourselves, eight times and they were given three months to come up with the information.

PM: That was 2017 when that happened. Three years gone now and no comeback. But it will be coming live again.

MC: Is it looking for records in relation to Marian that you are doing this? You believe that they have records other than what they have given you? They have just given a death cert at the minute.

KM: At the beginning they said that Peter wasn't entitled to it because his mother and father weren't married.

PM: It was shocking to hear that.

KM: She was probably a half-sister. He wasn't regarded as next of kin because his mother and father weren't married.

PM: Isn't that awful

KM: That was the beginning, then they went the next step where they threatened the Law Society on our solicitor because he kept after them. Then the next step was, they said they would look into it. Then the next step was, they had assigned a social worker to it, we don't know whether they had or not. Then they stopped contacting us, they wouldn't reply to anything.

PM: No reply to anything.

KM: Then we went to court. Our barrister and solicitor were there at least twenty times, but we were there eight times. In the middle of that, Peter was diagnosed with cancer, he was going through that at the same time.

PM: We're still waiting.

KM: There was an agreement, in the end, that they would assign somebody, and they would look up all the information, and they would come back to us. That was the twenty-sixth of July 2017. We are now in 2020 and we still have not got anything.

MC: No response.

PM: We can't say much more on that because the case is still active.

KM: We haven't closed it down. We might just go back again. They are just not cooperating. Their barrister was paid for by tax-payers money. There was no need for their barrister.

MC: Are they saying, there are no records or, that you can't be allowed access them?

KM: They didn't say that there were no records, because they agreed to look up all the information. They didn't come back to us, they just didn't. So, we're no further on really. With a bit of hassle, we got a little bit more information on Peter, than we got previously. The first letter, as I said, was two paragraphs. Then, with a lot of pushing, we got a little bit more, this is where the report said that he was a small slight child, reasonably well dressed, fairly healthy, I think was on it.

MC: Was this a report from a welfare officer?

PM: It was, yeah.

KM: You should have mentioned how you were prepared for the inspection.

PM: When, what they used to call, the 'lady', the nurse, used to call, I'd be dressed up in my Sunday clothes then. They knew exactly, the time and date, because, phones weren't plentiful that time, what they used to do was, they'd contact - the Galway County Council would contact the local post office, and the local post office would pass it on to the local postman, who would tell us, where I was, what was happening. They'd say they were coming next Thursday, we'll say. After school, she would call and I'd be with my good clothes on, dressed up, brushed up to look well.

KM: And the cloth used on your cheeks.

PM: Oh yeah, they'd be rubbed and all that.

KM: So that he'd have a good colour.

MC: Rosy cheeks.

PM: That was a fact. That's why the report was down as, '*reasonably well dressed*', but that was my good clothes, but they wouldn't see me in the rags.

KM: What was it you used to wear? Old shirt sleeves for socks.

PM: I was allowed no socks in the wellingtons all winter. Old shirts, I used to take the sleeves off them and that's what I'd put on me.

MC: Was the house in good condition, where you were staying?

PM: It was in good condition. It was fine.

MC: You had your own room?

PM: I had my own room.

KM: You didn't all the time though.

PM: Well, at the very start, I was put into that woman's bed to keep her warm.

KM: The foster mother's bed.

PM: That's where I was until I was about fifteen or sixteen.

KM: She was crippled with arthritis.

PM: I used to have to put stuff on her back, before I'd go to school in the morning - *Deep Heat*-type stuff, for the arthritis, because she had no one to do it for her. I didn't mind that.

In 2016, I looked for counselling, I wanted help. I rang the office in Dublin, and I was told I wasn't entitled to it. I said, 'Why?' 'Were you in a school where there were priests and brothers?' I said, 'No.' 'You're not entitled to that.'

KM: They said clerical abuse, or if you were in an industrial school, you were entitled to it.

PM: You were entitled to counselling then. Do you know why I wasn't entitled to it? Well, that's why I wasn't entitled to it, but If I said a priest abused me, that wouldn't go through any record, I'd be paid out straight away, paid money - a hundred thousand. They didn't go to any court or anything, but as long as they had proof that such a priest did exist – handout, there was no problem with that. They'd do it like that. *[clicks fingers]* There is so much of that went on and people don't know that. They paid out straight away, they didn't want it going through the courts, they controlled that as well, that's a fact.

KM: They said unless you suffered clerical abuse or were in an industrial school, you weren't entitled to counselling.

PM: Basic counselling, I wasn't entitled to it, but before I finished my phone call, I said, 'It's like this, if I don't get it, I'm going to the media.' In two hours, they rang back—

KM: They said they'd have to have a meeting about it. They rang back and offered a counsellor.

PM: Straight away.

KM: The National Counselling Service offered you, but there was a waiting list at the time. They offered you counselling here in Ballinasloe, and you asked them not to send you to Ballinasloe, because it's a small town, and he would have known the counsellor. So, you ended up having to go to Galway. You used to get the train into Galway, it was a bit of a walk then to get to where it was. But, it was only eight weeks.

MC: It was through the health service, you got that? You applied to the HSE for this.

KM: Yes. The National Counselling Service you rang.

PM: Wasn't it quick they changed their mind? Once I mentioned the media. That worked.

KM: But, eight weeks is not long enough. What good is eight weeks?

PM: Then, who gave it? TUSLA

KM: I know well that when you went in, and they'd say, 'How are you?' and he'd say, 'Fine,' but they are supposed to know different. Eight weeks is not long enough for a lifetime.

MC: Did you find in any way beneficial?

PM: It depends on who you met. The first one I met wasn't great.

MC: Were you meeting different people?

PM: Yeah, the first time—

KM: After the first time, you were called back again and when you were called back, but overall, it was eight weeks, it was a different person you talked to.

PM: That's marked down in my records now. If I was to get some money in the morning—

KM: No, not in this case—

PM: I don't know, I heard that it could be deducted, if you got anything from them, they will charge for it then, if I got redress. They will, they will definitely do that, if there was redress.

MC: Do you find, having met other people who are survivors— I know most of you, people that I have met, they didn't know or speak with anyone who had a similar background until very recently—

PM: That's right, until 2014, when I went on the Vincent Browne programme. That's the first time I ever spoke. I held in my system for seventy years, I never even spoke about it to my own family.

MC: Do you find that that has helped you a lot, being able to share.

PM: Oh yeah, we were going around with our heads down but that's gone, because there are so many from all walks of life.

MC: You find that there are so many people with similar backgrounds.

PM: Some got good homes, that's the luck of the draw.

KM: It's just so hard, because a lot of the survivors, their needs are so different, and there's nothing happening, people are getting old—

PM: Some got a good education, more didn't—

KM: No matter how much they got, there are still the issues of early childhood trauma.

MC: Yes, I think, first of all, any of them who experienced that level of deprivation from when you are a baby until three or four years, which of course, as ye know, ye have raised children and ye have the grandchildren, they are such essential years. Everybody even if they got to a good situation had to deal with that and then obviously the issue in relation to identity. That's common to everybody as well and has left its mark on people.

KM: It has. Some people because they didn't have education, they have major needs, the likes of housing, basic requirements, and they don't have them, and they are not being provided with them. It wasn't through their own fault or anything.

MC: Okay, we'll have a look at your documents. We'll finish up our chat. Thanks very much for giving me your time, it's really good to get the voice, and to be able to preserve this for the future, so, thanks very much.

KM: You are very welcome.

I confirm that this is a true record of the interview

.....

Date.....

Peter Mulryan