

Woman claims no consent for adoptions: Good Shepherd sisters seek order to halt action by former ...

Carolán, Mary

The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Feb 28, 2007;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times (1859-2010) and The Weekly Irish Times (1876-1958)

pg. 4

Woman claims no consent for adoptions

Good Shepherd sisters seek order to halt action by former resident of unmarried mother homes

MARY CAROLAN

A religious order has asked the High Court to halt a case against it by a woman who alleges she was badly treated in unmarried mother homes run by the order and that it facilitated the adoption without her consent of two of her three children.

The woman, now in her 70s and described as virtually "a recluse", claims she spent up to 20 years in homes run by the Good Shepherd sisters, where her name was changed, she was compelled to work long hours without pay, put to bed at 7pm nightly in a room with barred windows and

was subject to physical neglect and inhuman and degrading treatment.

She claims that because she was illiterate she could not write home and she had no visitors. She was also not permitted to see her mother when she came to the home on one occasion.

She says when an invitation came for her to attend her daughter's wedding when the girl was aged 20, a nun had torn it up in front of her. She alleges she had jumped through a window to escape and did later manage to meet her daughter, who had been reared by a relative from birth, for the first time.

The woman also alleges that a son born to her and placed for adoption with a couple without her consent was in his 30s when she first met him. She had not met her third child, also a son and also allegedly adopted without her consent, but now had regular contact with her daughter and her first-born son.

The court heard the woman came from a large family, her father died when she was a teenager and she left school at an early age.

As a result of becoming pregnant outside marriage while working as a chambermaid, she claims she was brought by a

health board social worker to the Ard Mhuire unmarried mothers' home run by the Good Shepherd sisters in Dunboyne, Co Meath. She remained there until she was brought to hospital to have her baby, after which she was taken to another of the order's homes.

It is alleged the woman gave birth to a daughter who was taken from her without her consent and placed with a relative. She claims that when she gave birth later to a son, she had kept him with her for two years in a Good Shepherd home but then he was adopted without her consent. A third child, another boy, was also adopted without her consent.

She also claims that her mother took her out of the home for a time during which she went to England and was raped. She claims she was returned after that by her mother for periods to homes run by the Good Shepherd sisters and remained with them until 1974.

Because of her experiences in the homes, the woman claims she became afraid of the outside world and was unable to work or form relationships. A psychologist who assessed her had expressed the view the woman would have presented differently if she had reared her children. Because of alleged severe trau-

ma, the woman claims she was effectively disabled from bringing court proceedings against the order, the North Eastern Health Board and various State defendants until 2004.

Details of the woman's claim were outlined yesterday at the opening before Mr Justice Laffith O'Neill of an application by the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity - the Good Shepherd sisters - for an order halting the woman's action on grounds of delay and lack of specific detail of the claims made. A similar application has been brought by the North Eastern Health Board and the judge was told, the State

defendants may move such an application later.

The Good Shepherd sisters say their right to a fair hearing has been prejudiced by the woman's delay in bringing her claim.

They also claim the woman's claims are "garbled" and "riddled with inconsistencies".

A representative of the sisters said in an affidavit that the claims had to be seen in the context of a time when families here were unwilling to care for daughters who were pregnant outside marriage. Before the 1952 Adoption Act, children born out of wedlock were regularly sent to the US.

The hearing continues today.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.