

Witness Name: Paul Tukunoa SWEENEY

Statement No.: WITN0007001

Dated: 30.11.2020

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF PAUL TUKUNOA SWEENEY

I, Paul Tukunoa SWEENEY, will say as follows:

Introduction

1. My full name is Paul Tukunoa Sweeney. I was born on GRO-C 1960 and I am now 60 years old. I am now known as Paora Sweeney.
2. I am of Ngāti Porou descent.
3. My evidence is about the abuse I experienced under State care following the death of my parents. It relates to my time in two foster homes in Taumarunui, and boys' homes.
4. I was born in Mangakino to my mother, June, and my father Paora (Paul) Tukunoa Sweeney.
5. I had seven brothers and sisters. My little sister got pneumonia when she was nine months old and passed away.
6. The family moved around a bit because of my father's work. We moved from Harataunga, Kennedy Bay to Aratiatia, then to Mangakino, Atiamuri and then to Turangi.
7. We were really poor, but I remember having a very happy childhood up until I was about 11 years old.

8. My dad was a Boiler Maker, or something like that. He was a great man in the Coromandel; he was like a Rangatira in the community. He had a mana about him.
9. He was a fantastic father. He'd come in from work and we would race each other to take his boots off or help to pull his overalls off.
10. My parents were never violent, dad never laid a hand on any of us, my mum wouldn't hit us either. She might screw my ear though.
11. Both my parents died within months of each other when I think I was around 11 years old.
12. My mother and my sister were in a car crash in Hamilton in 1973, my mother was killed in the crash, but my sister GRO-B survived.
13. I remember the night that we found out. My father hugged me, and he said, "Son, there's been an accident. Your mum's been in an accident." I didn't know she had died. I didn't quite understand what death was. I didn't realise that she wasn't coming home, even at the funeral I didn't quite realise. We didn't know Mum was gone.
14. Then, six weeks later, my father had a stroke and he died.
15. My sister came and woke me up. She said, "Paul, come and help me, something's the matter with Dad". We went into the room and he was lying on the floor, he couldn't talk. We couldn't pick him up and we rung the Police because we didn't know the ambulance number and they called the ambulance. They took him to hospital, where he died.
16. Six weeks after my dad died my 16-year-old sister passed away.
17. My family came down and my dad's cousin's wife, GRO-B took all of the girls. GRO-B-1 and his wife, GRO-B-2 took my brother GRO-B because they were going to whāngai him. After they took him they changed his name to GRO-B
18. GRO-B and I were very close. They asked me to go with them so that I could help settle him into his new house. I didn't really know what that meant at the time.
19. I went with them to Whakamaru. We had been there for a few months and one morning I could hear GRO-B screaming. I went outside, and GRO-B-2 was hitting him with a stick because he wouldn't feed the chickens. We had never been hit in

our lives, so I attacked her. She had fuzzy hair, so I grabbed her by it and I really attacked her. Then she said, GRO-B-1's going to kill you when he comes home". So, I grabbed my little brother and I kissed him goodbye. I said, "I've got to go".

20. That was probably one of the hardest things that I've ever had to do in my life, leaving him there. He was only six, but I couldn't take him. I was only 11 or 12 myself and he was crying at the gate. But I had to go because I believed GRO-B-1 was going to kill me. I had to leave him, and I left him there.
21. The biggest hurt for GRO-B wasn't the beatings but was me leaving him there. GRO-B has always blamed me for leaving him there, he still blames me today.

Living on the streets

22. I walked from Whakamaru to Turangi. It took me about four or five days, maybe even a week, but I walked there because I was hiding. The cars would come, and I'd hide away, thinking GRO-B-1 was looking for me; so I jumped and hid away every time a car came along.
23. I'd sleep on the side of the road. I remember I was sitting outside the garage on the corner of the turn off at Kuratau near Turangi. There was a garage there in those days. It got dark and the man came out of the garage. He was locking up the garage and he said, "Are you all right? Are you waiting for someone?" I said, "Yeah." I was too scared to say, "No." He said, "What time are they coming?" I said, "I don't know." He got the pies out of the warmer and he gave them to me and he gave me a drink of Coca-Cola. He thought I was waiting for someone. I didn't want to say that I'd run away, I thought he might ring GRO-B-1 or something, so I walked from there to Turangi.
24. When he turned off the lights and left, the realisation that I had nowhere to go and I was all alone hit me. I was heading home to Turangi, but I didn't have a home or family there anymore.
25. When I got to Turangi I went to the homes of people we had called Aunty and Uncle, but they didn't want to know me. They weren't really our family. When I'd go to their places they'd chuck me out.
26. I've made sure my kids only call their actual uncles and aunts, Uncle and Aunty. I don't want them calling just anyone Uncle and Aunty. That was devastating.

27. I would go out and about with my mates around Turangi at night. I would break into buses at night and sleep in them. I stayed with a mate that I used to go to school with, but his father found me after he sneaked me into the house and kicked me out.
28. I made a hut underneath the rugby clubrooms; my friends gave me some blankets. One night I broke into the building and stole some pies and alcohol. I did this several times. I started drinking the alcohol, I started drinking myself into another world really, in that world I could talk to my mum. So I did that all the time.
29. I think I was picked up by the Police one night when I was the last one out and about. I walked everyone home and they picked me up and asked who I was. I didn't really know.
30. They took me to Social Welfare who put me in a care home at Taumarunui. I ran away because I was just treated like a slave there. I was called a black cunt and a nigger. I had never been called those things in my life before. I didn't even have a bed there, so I ran away.

GRO-B-3 and GRO-B-4 – Care Home: Taumarunui

31. I went back to Turangi, but I got picked up again and put in another home in Taumarunui. That was the house of GRO-B-3 GRO-B-4. It was a nice house and GRO-B-3 was nice to me. GRO-B-3 used to drive a Caltex truck and was away all the time for long periods.
32. When he went away GRO-B-4 started having sex with me. I think I might have been 12 years old at this stage. It wasn't a good experience. In fact, it was a filthy experience. It was always, "Don't let GRO-B-3 know that you were in the room" or, "Don't let GRO-B-3 know this." It was like this thing. I was in fear that GRO-B-3 was going to find out and hurt me, but it wasn't even me doing it; but I didn't know that back then.
33. GRO-B-4 would give me chocolates and sweets and threaten me not to tell GRO-B-3
34. She said she would show me how to drive the car and would take me out to some back road and have sex with me in the car. She just did what she wanted with me.

35. When [GRO-B-3] was home she would keep doing things behind his back. When [GRO-B-3] wasn't there she would make me have sex with her most days. She would make me do things to her on the pool table.
36. I was probably at [GRO-B-3
GRO-B-4]'s for around six months.
37. I ran away from [GRO-B-3
GRO-B-4]'s because I was scared of [GRO-B-3]. I was worried that [GRO-B-4] would tell him and [GRO-B-3] would hurt me. [GRO-B-3] was a bit of a drunk.

Running away

38. When I ran away I ended up on the street in Taumarunui. I slept in a bunker by the subway. There I met a Māori guy called Paulie and he took me home to his place one night. His brother was in the Mongrel Mob and his mother was huge, she had splits in her skin that were weeping all the time and had to be washed. She stunk, the whole house stunk, but they accepted me. I loved it there, she would give me cuddles, I actually loved her.
39. I started robbing shops, so I could fit in and pay my way.
40. The older brother gave me an old lazy dog Mongrel Mob patch and I treasured that, but I had to rob shops for him. We would go out and do burglaries and rob trains. Sometimes we might strike it lucky. We would sit amongst alcohol and drink.
41. One night the guys Paulie and I were with attacked some campers by the river. One guy ran their tent over. One of the campers was injured really badly. I tried to remove the belt buckle from his head; I took my tee shirt off and wrapped it around his head. Then the Police came because the tee shirt had my name and family home address on it.
42. I ran back to [GRO-B-4] place and hid under her bed. [GRO-B-4] took me to the Police station. The Police actually commended me for trying to help.
43. After that I ran away from [GRO-B-3
GRO-B-4]'s again because she continued to sexually abuse me.
44. At the time I didn't even know it was abuse, so I didn't think of telling anyone like a Social Worker. When I told the boys it was a cool thing, but it wasn't really and it made me feel so uncomfortable.

45. When I ran away, my sister, [GRO-B] and I hitchhiked from Turangi up to see my brother in prison. I told him what [GRO-B-4] did to me. Many years later when he got out of prison he punished them for it. I think he went to jail for it.
46. I went back to Turangi and I was sleeping in my hut and buses and things. One night, I got very sick. I thought I was going to die or something with my sore throat. I went to the car sales yard where my mother was working at the time of her death and I broke into a car there. I just broke into it, I couldn't drive a car, I just wanted to be close to my mum. I put a car seat cover over me and went to sleep. I was found there by the Security Guard and taken to Taupo Police Station.
47. I was taken to Court and charged with breaking into cars, this was late 1974, the Judge said, "you need to be placed in protective custody".
48. Nobody ever spoke to me about what was going on or the fact that I was on my own, maybe I was too young for them to talk to me.
49. Many years later when I was working as a drug and alcohol Counsellor I saw [GRO-B-4] in Hamilton. I saw her twice actually. The first time, I was in a fight in the Dinsdale Pub and [GRO-B-4] was there. That's the first time that I'd seen her since she abused me. The next time I saw her at a service station in Hamilton, I was filling up my work car. She tried to give me her address. I just wouldn't talk to her; I left.

Melville Boys' Home: Hamilton

50. I was then taken to Melville Boys' Home in Hamilton.
51. When I arrived it was late at night and I was put straight into secure; it was known as the 'pound' or 'digger'. I was in there for a week or maybe longer.
52. The pound or digger was just a steel bed and mattress, they would come and take the mattress away each morning and give it back to you at night. It had a toilet and a window up high.

[GRO-C]

Physical training

53. In the morning, they woke me up, they woke us all up, and took us into the gym and we had to have this thing called runaway PT. We had runaway PT because two people had run away from the boys' home and they thought somebody would break and tell them where they'd gone.
54. It was PT but the duck walk was the hardest thing. We had to duck walk around the football field and we had to say, "Quack." We had to go around the paddock and if you fell over, you'd get a kick, or you'd get pulled up by the hair or punched or something. That was runaway PT. I mean they just tortured us really as little kids.
55. During PT we had to do lots of star jumps and press-ups. It was the first time that I'd seen star jumps. These were exercises to humiliate us. They would make people do them until they were crying.

Excessive punishments and physical abuse

56. About a day or two later they caught the boys who had run away and brought them back to Melville.
57. The Housemasters made them bend over a gym horse thing and gave them a hiding with a belt, we had to stand there and watch. This made me feel grateful to be locked away in secure.
58. I had my head banged on the wall and got gripped around the throat by a staff member that first day because I didn't know what was going on or what I was supposed to be doing.
59. That was done by two Māori Housemasters, GRO-B-5 and GRO-B-6, they were just thugs and bullies. Years later, I heard that we were wayward children and needed discipline, so that's what they were doing, disciplining us, but it was just thuggery. It was a kick, a punch, a pull of your hair, a bang of your head on the wall, whenever they felt like doing it.
60. Mr GRO-B-5 had a beard, was well-groomed, with jet-black hair and was strongly built. Mr GRO-B-6 was a big Māori guy and he had an afro. I would play tennis against them and beat them, then I would be hit for beating them.

61. The morning that I got out of secure, the bell went at 10 o'clock, like school playtime or something, but we weren't in school. We had to line up on these two yellow lines. The man walked down, he had two baskets. One had apples in it, one had bananas or something like that. He came down the line and everyone was choosing what they wanted. He came to me and I didn't quite know what to do. He said, "What do you want?" I said, "Ah/Um." He bashed his elbow into my mouth and he put my bottom teeth through my lip.
62. He did this with his elbow and he said, "I can't see any fuckin' ahs in the basket. What do you want?" I said, "Um" and he said, "Cheeky bastard." He grabbed my hair, he stood me by the wall and he said, "Don't you move." I mimied my pants as I stood by the wall I think. Later on I found myself in bed. I must have fallen over or something, I don't know how I got there, one minute I was standing there, then the next I was in bed. That was my first experience out of the pound.
63. On Fridays you could get a chocolate or something at the canteen. I said "um" again and got dragged out by the hair and strangled around my neck, choked by the same Housemasters.

The death of my sister

64. One day they came and took me to Court in Taupo for sentencing.
65. While I was being held at the Court in Taupo, my 16-year-old sister, GRO-B came down from Hamilton to visit me. This was the sister that was in the car crash with my mum. She survived the car crash, but she was terribly scarred on her face.
66. Me and her, we were the closest ones in our family. She had got a ride down to see me at the Police station because I was in Court for having got into that car that the Security Guard had found me in when I was living around Turangi. She was allowed to come in. I remember the words of the Judge there. He said, "We're going to put you in protective custody." I've always remembered that because no one was looking after me.
67. My sister was allowed to talk to me in the cells, she brought some Coke and chicken and chips.

68. When it was time for her to go, we hugged and kissed, and she said she would come and see me on Saturday.
69. That night my sister was hitchhiking home around the lake and she got hit by a motorbike and was killed. I didn't know that she had been in that accident and got back to Melville at about 11pm that night. I was put back in the pound.
70. The pound was full and there was another person in the room, so they put a mattress on the floor for me. Then, they went out, closed the door and turned the light off. I know this sounds spooky but when the light went off in the room my eyes started adjusting to the dark and in the corner of the room, something wasn't changing. It was like a person was standing in the corner of the room.
71. I was laying on the floor and that person came right over to me and laid on top of me. There was a fella in the bed and I was screaming, "Press the buzzer, press the buzzer," but he wouldn't press the buzzer. I could see these teeth smiling at me and then it lifted off me. Just as it was going back into the corner, I started crying and calling out, "Mum, don't go." It went back towards the corner again and disappeared into the wall. I was laying on the floor.
72. All of a sudden, the guy sitting on the bed, said, "Is your name Paul Sweeney?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Paul, it's me, [GRO-B]" They were our neighbours in Turangi. He said, "I heard you calling out to your mother. I couldn't see anything." That was the night my sister died. I felt like my mother came to me in the cell that night to tell me what had happened to my sister.
73. I didn't know why but the next morning they took me to a movie, the boys in the pound aren't usually allowed to watch the movie, but they let me out to see it. The movie was called *Smile*, with Charlie Chaplin. I was sitting there watching and I got a tap on the shoulder. They said, "Mr Simons wants to see you." Mr Simons was the Principal. I went in there and he said to me, "I don't want to have to tell you this but there's been a serious accident and your sister's in hospital and she's not likely to live long." She had probably already died at this stage.
74. I went back to my cell in the pound and I was crying. This fella, I think it was Mr [GRO-B-6] came to the door. He bashed on the door. He said, "Shut your fuckin' mouth or I'll come in there and kick your fuckin' arse."

75. Years and years later, I was down at the Franklin Hotel one night and Mr GRO-B-6 came down and he apologised to me. He came in and he asked to talk to me outside. I went outside with him. I thought we were going to have a fight or something, but he just had tears in his eyes. He said, "I just wanted to tell you that that night that your sister died, I didn't realise that" – or something to that effect.

Treatment by the staff and the Kingpin system

76. At Melville the staff talked to you like you were a criminal. The language and the treatment wasn't good; it wasn't good for me there. I didn't get beaten by other boys there. People laid off me because my sister had just died. I was just a loner there.
77. There were lots of fights there and there were stand-overs. There was a Kingpin; that always happens in all of those places.
78. Although there was lots of physical violence at Melville there was no sexual activity there that I noticed. I only started hearing about that when I got to Hokio and I think that it was happening more at Hokio than it was a Kohitere.

St Paul's College: Ponsonby, Auckland

79. When I was at the school in Melville they gave me a test, which I passed. I was funded by the Māori Education Foundation to go on a scholarship to St Paul's College, in Ponsonby, Auckland. It was a boarding school and they told me that I was going there.
80. By then I was pretty mucked up and I was always in trouble. I wasn't handling my life, I had no friends and no family. Other boys' mothers would come, and my heart would break because mine couldn't come. I just didn't fit in there. I had fights every day.
81. I remember that Brother David Lavin and Mr McDonald were fantastic to me.

Physical abuse from staff

82. But I was always before [GRO-B-7], who was a Priest, and [GRO-B-8] who was a Teacher; they would both beat me.
83. When staff there tried to make me do something, I wouldn't do it. I couldn't do it; so I'd get sent to the office.
84. [GRO-B-8] was not a good person. He was abusive to other kids and would beat them with his shoes. I think he was a Sports Facilitator, not a Brother or a Priest. He was Pākehā, might have been quite short, German-looking and was balding.
85. [GRO-B-7] had ginger hair and was quite tall. He once caned me over the school's radio, so that the whole school could hear it.
86. They used to cane you on the hands, not on your backside there. He caned me twice, on two different occasions, and then he started punching me because caning wasn't working.

Running away

87. I don't think it could work because I wasn't good. I was actually a mess. I ran away from there. I ran away a couple of times. Brother David Levin and Mr McDonald found me one time. The next time I took off back to Turangi. I made it all the way back there. But I wasn't there for long.
88. The Police picked me up and took me back to Melville again. From there I went to Hokio very briefly, and then on to Kohitere.
89. By this stage I don't think that much was working for me. I was a hurt kid. When I look back now I realise that I should have had grief and loss counselling for the loss of my parents and my sisters, but I wasn't given anything, I was beaten instead.

Hokio Beach Training School: Levin

90. I was moved to Hokio, but I was only there for a few days. They must have made some sort of mistake, because then they took me to Kohitere.

91. When I arrived at Hokio I was taken to a long dormitory. I remember thinking the shower room was a scary looking place.
92. Apparently, there was a Priest there that was abusing kids.
93. I remember going to the beach while I was there, and I saw one fella that was being dragged along by a staff member. But nothing happened to me in the short time that I was there.

Kohitere Boys' Training Centre: Levin

94. When I got to Kohitere, that was an eye opener. It was the early days, probably the crazy days. That was the start of the gangs.
95. I think I was in there for around a year to 18 months.
96. There were two wings at Kohitere, Tui Villa was the Mongrel Mob villa and Kiwi Villa was the Black Power villa. I was in Tui Villa. There were daily conflicts between the two gangs.

Initiation and hierarchy

97. The day that I got there I had my initiation. They had this tennis court and it was fenced in, like a basketball court, but it had a tall wire fence around it. You'd get called in there to play the game, "Come in, we need someone." When you got in there the other boys all stood around the sides and they would attack you in there.
98. It was a hiding. When I look back onto it now, I understand that. In the following years, I was the one doing that. You go through this hierarchy thing. You start from the spanker to the spanker hard, they used to call it. Spanker, you're the new boy. Spanker hard, you're an old boy, you've been initiated.

Daily life

99. I think there might have been some schooling at Kohitere, but I can't really remember. I do remember doing woodwork and building a ship.
100. There were no cultural activities. There was a lot of involvement from the church and local Young Farmers Club.

101. You had to line up for lunch, down the corridor. The Housemasters would tell you off and would come and kick and punch you. When you were at the dinner table, if you didn't have good table manners you would be hit.

Treatment by staff

102. Kohitere was the play farm. The Officers all knew what was going on. It was like a game to them. Really, when you have a look at them, the Officers, they're just ordinary people that were down at the pub one day and then they got a job at Kohitere. They came out there, they're not trained for anything. They knock you about, just like how they would handle their own kids at home.

103. One thing that I realised though, when I got a sustained beating from one of these staff members, a fella called [GRO-B]. He came out of the Army, [GRO-B]. When I look back on it, he got me to come to the camp where he could beat me for the three days that I was there. When I look at it, he beat me in a way that there was no marks. He beat me with headlocks, twisting my arms and squeezing my neck until I'd be screaming. He would call me names as well.

104. I don't know why I was taken on that camp, because it was a camp for the new boys. By that time, I wasn't a new boy. I think [GRO-B] planned to take me there to beat me up and show me unarmed combat.

105. [GRO-B] was a big ex-Army man, with a little moustache, he usually wore shorts and I think he was Pākehā.

106. When I look back, these Welfare Officers, they were my role models. They were now my parents. But fear was their way of disciplining. They would hurt you, abuse you, beat you, punch you, kick you and put you in a place where you had to listen. The thing with that is, that's where I learnt my parenting from. That's the only thing that I knew.

Physical training

107. The staff running PT wanted to humiliate you. Sometimes you had to do it with no clothes on and sometimes we would have to push the big steel roller on the cricket pitch. You had to run around and touch the pillars. It was a big power game. They had power over me and would try to see how tough I was. A lot of the time you had to fight to survive.

Secure

108. At Kohitere I became the 'secure king'. I was in solitary all the time. I would have been in there for months. They had just opened the new solitary block there and I spent a lot of my time there, isolated from the rest.

109. I was actually doing what they taught me. When I look back on it, they taught me that fear works, so when you're in the home with the guys, you do the same to the guys that are in there. They showed me that.

110. Then when I did to other boys what I had been taught, they'd put me in the pound for it. I was just the secure king there at the time. I was always in there. It became a macho thing, getting locked up there. When you're in the pound, it's not good.

111. The PT in there was designed to break you. Not all the officers were like that either. There were some fantastic men there. Mr Manly, he was such a great guy. He was great to me anyway.

112. When you're in the pound, of course, you don't know the time, so you watched the sun coming up the blocks on the wall and the shadow. You know when it gets to that block, it's lunch time. When it gets to this block, it's PT and then tea time.

113. Trouble is, if you don't do something right, they take your mattress off you and throw water on the floor, so you've got to stand there all day because you can't sit in the water. That's how they punish you. They take the mattress at five o'clock in the morning or something like that. Then, they'll come in and if you haven't been toeing the line in there or do something wrong, they'll throw a bucket of water on the floor.

114. You can't sit down. You've got to just stand around in the wet and then you've got to mop it up when they bring the mattress back in. It was like that. It was abuse and it was constant. It was a funny thing because there's nice men and there's bad man. It's this funny thing being played out.

115. In secure there was no schooling. You ate your three meals a day in your cell. You were locked up and just got let out for PT.

116. I don't think that secure was good for me. When I was in there I would think about my parents and my sister. When you came out it gave you an aura amongst the boys.

Kohitere changed me

117. All I know is that my character was shaped out of that, my life was shaped out of that. When I look back, we had such a great family life at home. My parents were wonderful to us. They never even hit us. We didn't know that. That was foreign to us. Then, this happened and I turned into something else along the way.

118. I felt the sad thing was that I started doing the same thing to new people that came in. At night time I would hear people crying for their mother and I would jump over the wall and beat them up. I did that because I had no mother. I didn't do those things before I got there.

Sexual abuse

119. I think Kohitere was an experience. There was a lot of sexual stuff happening in Kohitere. I probably wasn't subjected to that because I'd been in so many fights by then. I wasn't fighting because I was a tough person there. The rejection thing was so big for me. When I look back on it now, I realise that I would hurt people before they hurt me and then I was in control of it.

120. Sexual attacks were constantly talked about, someone would say GRO-B's on tonight." GRO-B was the night watchman. He'd had a stroke and you could hear him dragging his leg when he came down the corridor. He looked weird and had teeth that stuck out. He was skinny and may have been a Māori fella.

121. Everyone knew to watch out when GRO-B was on nights.

122. You'd hear people crying in their bed at night and you'd think [GRO-B] will go in their room. [GRO-B] will go in there because they're crying and we'd be saying, "don't cry, shut up." All the rumours were about him going into their rooms and playing with them, then later on, we'd hear that that's what was actually happening. That didn't happen to me. As I've said, I think it didn't happen to me because I had so many fights there.

Fights

123. I got in fights with various people in Kohitere, the staff wouldn't stop it. They would just stand and watch, and then throw you in the pound. That's how it was, that was the language of the place. They all knew what was happening, but that was the culture of the place. It helped everything flow, it's just how it was.

124. The fights that I got in at Kohitere would have been recorded because I went to secure afterwards. Once I nearly had my ear ripped off in a fight.

125. I had a fight with a fella, [GRO-B] while I was there. It was the biggest fight in Kohitere. It was one of the great fights, and it went for ages. It was in the games room, the Officers were standing at the door, but they just let it go on. [GRO-B] was Black Power.

126. [GRO-B] was one of the staff members who watched the fight. He was bald and pretty old. He took me to the pound afterwards. He was a wanker.

127. I had another fight with a guy in there, [GRO-B]. I cracked his skull and then I went to the pound for a long time. He was a Black Power fella as well.

128. Years later I saw [GRO-B] in Paparua prison. The last time that I'd seen him I had cracked his head open. He was the leader of the Black Power in that prison at the time.

129. When you've been in the boys' homes, all through my prison life, I met the same people all the way through. When I cracked [GRO-B]'s head, that followed me through the prison system. I had to fight my way through the prison system because of that.

Gangs

130. I think that the gangs came from Kohitere. We were taught to do that stuff. Kohitere was the start of it all, the gang problem in the country today comes from there. A lot of the boys from Kohitere were in the gangs with me later on. They were mostly Māori.

Leaving Kohitere

131. The reason that I left Kohitere was because I was offered a job. The Huria brothers visited Kohitere and I talked to them while they were there. A couple of days later Mr McCardinal asked if I wanted a job with them insulating houses. One of the brothers invited me to move in with him and that's how I left Kohitere.

Hoki Detention Centre

132. I went home to Turangi for Xmas, there was a big fight on the street and I got involved in it, and then I was sent to the Detention Centre (DC).

133. I think it was in 1975 that I went to Hoki DC, because I got into that fight. The Court didn't know what to do with me.

134. When I was in DC, my brothers, [GRO-B] and [GRO-B], were in the prison next door to me, Hautu. It was the first time that the three of us had been together for many years. They'd send a stock man across with all sorts of contraband for me. I'd tell them where I was going to be, so they'd come up off the farm to catch up with me. We hadn't seen each other for a long time.

135. It was so good to be in DC at that time because I got to see them there. I missed them. They were the part of my family that I was so close to, my two older brothers. The three of us have been very close over the years.

136. I hated DC to start with, but then I loved it after a while. It was like an army training camp. We had to run with packs on our backs and do forestry work.

Borstals

137. I got out of DC and I ended up in a borstal about a week later. I'm not too sure of my age at the time, but I think that I was around 14-15 years-old. I had nowhere to go, so at least I was getting off the street. I'd just get in trouble again and get sent back to the borstal.
138. In some way, because I had a heart condition, they provided me with medication in the borstal, so I'm glad that happened. I had rheumatic fever when I was young, and it left me with a heart murmur. Because my brother wasn't looked after, he died at 36. Everything caved in on him in the end, so I think I was probably lucky to be having those medications.
139. By the time that I went from the DC to the borstal I had become part of the Mongrel Mob system. I wasn't affiliated with a specific chapter; the lazy dog patch that that man had given me years ago had no fixed abode underneath it.
140. When I got out of the borstal, I think it might have been in '76 sometime. I went to Hamilton and tried to start a Mongrel Mob chapter there. I wasn't out for long before I went back to the borstal again. Borstal was a bit of a thing for me.

Waipiata Borstal: Ranfurly

141. In borstals you were regarded as men and so you were treated accordingly.
142. The Prison Officers there weren't afraid. If you did something wrong to one of them, they would beat you up. I think they were doing it to make you behave and to make you fear them.
143. They'd come into your cell at night just to give you a bashing. So, you learnt to barricade yourself in at night, because the door would open, and they would drag you out and give you a bashing. That happened to me, so I learnt to protect myself.
144. I got a beating in the gym from the Gym Teacher. He held me back after the fitness session and he and his colleague gave me a bit of a hiding. I think they were just breaking me into borstal life.
145. That Gym Teacher was called GRO-B, he was a blonde headed guy, who was very fit looking in those days.

146. I remember that the Ranfurly pound was very cold. You could see out of the window, but it had a bar on it. You had to work your way up from the pound.
147. I ended up being moved down from Waipiata Borstal to a borstal in Invercargill. They had me for inciting a riot. I'd had a fight with a few other guys, but I didn't incite a riot. Anyway, they moved me out of there in a jeep during the middle of the night.

Invercargill Borstal

148. The staff there were really violent. I was locked in the pound for a very long time, so GRO-B was the only man that I saw while I was locked up. He was an ex-Army Māori man, with a moustache. He would just give you the bash.
149. While in the pound we had to do exercise. There was an octagon shaped courtyard in the middle of the cell block, which we would walk around. Then we'd have a shower and be locked up again.
150. Mr Glass was a bully. I hit Mr Glass because he tried to make me shave without water. So, I went on charge for that.
151. I was on the borstal scene for a very long time.

Release from the care of Social Welfare

152. After I was released from Invercargill I flew to Wellington.
153. I was picked up from the airport by a Black Power member. He took me back to the Black Power pad and he wanted me to stay in Wellington with them.
154. I stayed the night there with them and then the next day I flew to Hamilton. I was probably around 17 by then.
155. I was never told when I was released from Social Welfare's care. I was told when I became a State ward, but not when it ended.

156. Social Welfare did nothing for me. My only crime was that I was an orphan. I hadn't done anything and then I'm chucked into all these places and really, they turned me into something that I wasn't. I wasn't that, I was just trying to survive. I didn't want to be fighting, I was actually scared, and I had to fight. If you don't your just not going to make it.
157. Over that whole time I thought the greatest thing was when I met my two brothers over the wire in the prison.
158. There were no cultural considerations for me the whole way through care.

Laying my family to rest

159. When my sister died in the car crash, I ran from that for my whole life. I thought that was my fault.
160. It was a beautiful moment though in 2008, when my remaining family and I went down to Turangi and dug my family up. My mum, dad, two sisters and my brother were buried in Turangi. We took them back to Harataunga to lay them to rest.
161. We dug them up like archaeologists. My mum was buried on one side, my dad was on the other and there was a man buried between them.
162. A beautiful thing had happened. There was a tree planted beside my mother's grave and the branches had gone down through my mum, gone under the man in the middle and then wrapped around my dad. The roots of the tree held them together. We were just amazed by that, so we took a branch off the tree with us and we hauled it home.
163. When we dug my sister up, the digger came in and dug the top off. So, I jumped down into the grave, because I wanted to be with my sister and I wanted to tell her that I was sorry. Anyway, when I jumped in, I could feel her legs, so I cleared everything off her; she was wrapped in a plastic bag. The coffin had rotted away and fallen to bits. But the plastic bag remained intact, it was filled with fluid and her whole body was still there.

164. She'd been in the ground for around 36-37 years and she had a white cloth over her face. I didn't touch the cloth because she'd been hit by a motorbike, but I lay down and hugged her; I cried, and I just said, [GRO-B] it wasn't my fault. It wasn't my fault." I think I needed that moment with her. I needed her to know how tough it had been for me.
165. I built the coffin with recycled kauri. I was going to put all five of them in it, but they wouldn't all fit.
166. The Mongrel Mob were there, because my brother was patched up when he died. I didn't want the Mongrel Mob to come, but I'm so glad they did. What they did for us was amazing, if only people could see that side of them. Animal came over and asked: "What's happening?" We said, "We haven't got another coffin to fit brother [GRO-B] in." He said, "I'll get a coffin, I've got one at home." It turned out that he and his father used to make coffins. So they gave us a coffin for my brother.
167. We brought my family home and we buried them in Harataunga. It was a healing process for my whole family. Actually, me, my brother and sister, we just cried our eyes out.
168. We got them all up there and we gathered all their stuff that was buried with them in this big huge canvas and we just cried. All of the Mongrel Mob were around us, all singing. When we brought my father up out of the grave, they were all doing the haka. We got a Police escort back to the Coromandel because they thought it was some sort of Mongrel Mob thing.

Impact

Education

169. I missed my schooling, but I read a lot of books in jail. There was no TVs or radios in those days, you just had books, and everyone had a library in their cells. I enjoyed reading. The more you read, the less time you do.
170. I think if the State were doing their job I would've ended up going to university. I don't think that I was a dumb kid, I just wasn't given an education. I think everything has been against me. One of the huge things for me is that I've got my father's name and I didn't want to dishonour his name.

Dealing with grief and failure to provide support

171. When I look back, I was just a really soft-hearted little kid. My mum and dad loved me, and then I had to try to survive and fight through this thing.
172. All I got in the homes was a hiding. My behaviour was such that, they thought, he's playing up. But I wasn't playing up; my family were gone, and I didn't know what to do.
173. I think what should have been done for me is that I should have been given some help to deal with the grief and the loss. Today, because I've trained as a Counsellor now, I understand that. I think that's the thing that I was running from. I was tremendously hurt, I had strangers running my life, I had strangers hitting me, strangers calling me black nigger, black this. My family never did that.
174. I didn't get help for that until I was around 32 years old. I got a Psychologist and I just started telling the truth. I've still got the report, but he said this: "The loss of my mother and my sister, all the women in my life (because I went to jail for rape), and the abuse from this other woman who had now become my mother (was meant to be my mother), I had this attitude towards women." To me, when we started working through that picture I could understand what he was saying. We worked through the hurt of my mum, but he said to me, "I'm going to need some ongoing work." I think to me, that was the first time that I admitted that these were the things that were happening. I think my Psychologist had something to work with.

Drug and alcohol abuse

175. I took drugs and drank alcohol to stay out of it. I would get really out of it.
176. It all started back in Turangi when I would steal alcohol. I would drink it and find myself in another world.
177. I've had to learn another way to survive, without drugs and alcohol.

Gangs, incarceration and intergenerational impact on Māori

178. When my parents died, I had no criminal record, I hadn't done anything wrong. But when I came out of the boys' homes I was a gang member doing everything wrong: drinking and drugs. I learnt so much stuff in the boys' homes, stuff that made me a better criminal. Easier ways to pinch cars, you'd come out, try them out and then go back to jail. Kohitere shaped that in me, not so much Melville, but definitely Kohitere. Kohitere was the place.
179. It's called 'Kohitere Boys' Training Centre', but I don't know what they were training us to do? Be gang members?
180. I constantly met up with people in prison that I had known or had fights with at Kohitere. I had to fight my way through the prison system because of the fights that I had in Kohitere.
181. When I have a look at the generation of kids that I belong to and most of us in there were Māori people going through the system. In jail and those things, the Pākehā people are the niggers. It's strange to have a Pākehā on the wing. It was mostly Māori people there. You know that when you're growing up.
182. When I have a look at the stats today, I can see that they have been shaped from my generation. The kids that have come out of that, the gangs today aren't recruiting new people, they've been born into the gang. It's a tribal thing now. You have a look at the hand that rocks the cradle, it's red. Everything on the cradle is red, there's a little patch on there, they're growing up into it. They're not waiting. They're just growing up into it. I just think that's come about because of that generation of people, like me, that have come out of the system. We've all grown up in it and it's a sad picture. It's a very sad picture.
183. I'm now working with the kids of their kids today.
184. I joined the Mob really because they accepted me. That big lady I stayed with in Taumarunui, Paulie's mum, wouldn't have been accepted by anyone the way she was, but gee, I loved her. She was fantastic to me. I was sleeping on a filthy mattress on the floor, but it could've been a king's bed or something for me because I was sleeping on the street. Anything we ate, we ate it together. We had no food or anything, but then that's when the Mongrel Mob entered my life because her son was in the mob. They took me in because of my behaviour.

Relationships with women

185. There are lots of things wrong with me today and I think that's come out of my childhood.
186. What happened with [GRO-B-4] has destroyed my life in so many ways, my relationships with women especially. I want to share this, and I'm not proud of this at all, but I grew up hitting women. I didn't know why, I just thought it was normal because I was in the Mongrel Mob, who cared.
187. [GRO-B] was my son [GRO-B-8]'s mum. We got married in Paparua Prison in September of 1990. She [passed away] on the 8th of March 1995. When I look back at that relationship, I was a terrible partner, I wasn't a husband.
188. When I married my second wife, [GRO-B-9], I was a thousand times better. She was a lovely middle-class lady, a beautiful lady. I actually ended up modelling my life on her. That's why [GRO-B-8] is the way he is today, because she was just a beautiful mum. When she finally left, I modelled my life on everything she would do in the house. I started cooking, ironing, cleaning, all the things that you don't do as a Mongrel Mob member, things that I learned from her.
189. By then I knew that it was wrong to hit women, so I didn't do that. But what happened then was when my wife would come and ask me something, normal things, about maybe the telephone bill or something. I wouldn't know how to handle it, so I'd run away and hide in another room. She'd try to come in and I'd put a knife in the door and lock her out. she'd be banging on the door, "What's the matter? Get out," I'd say, "Go away, go away."
190. One time I slept in the tool shed to escape. This went on for a long time and I felt threatened by her. I realised if that was 20 years earlier, I would've hit her, because I thought that's what you do, but then I knew this was wrong, so I didn't do that.
191. This happened again when I went to work in the prison. A lady who started working there before me tried to talk to me about something and I ran away from her. I locked myself in my office, and she kept banging on the door. We ended up before our boss, and I said, "If this is going to continue, I'm going to be out of here."

192. That night I was carpooling home with one of my Counsellor friends and she asked me what happened that day. I told her, and she asked what that reminded me of. I said it reminded me of my wife and when she used to do that. Then, she said, "What does that remind you of?" All of a sudden, I realised it reminded me of GRO-B-4. She was dominating me as a child. All my life, with women, I think I'm being dominated, so I'd react to it. I'd react in the wrong way and then I started running away. That's destroyed my relationships and my family.
193. In the Mongrel Mob, it's normal to hit them, "Shut up, do this." When I married my wife, I couldn't do that. I didn't want to do that, but I'd start running away. When this happened at work and I realised what caused it. Throughout all of my relationships, this thing with GRO-B-4 has mucked me up, even in my sexual relationships with them. During the sexual thing with GRO-B-4 there was only that little reward at the end, so to me, that became what relationships were about. It was devastating for my wife.
194. During the relationship with my second wife I became a Christian. I had a tremendous encounter with God and it really gave me the hope to change. When I married then, I think if I had married a girl that had come out of the gangs, she would have been happy with the way I was 20 years ago, but from then until now, I've had to change, change, change, change, change, because for me I met GRO-B-9.
195. When I look back at my whole life and what has happened to me, it devastated my relationship with GRO-B-9. I never had a chance really, even though I thought I was, I was nowhere near normal. There was so much I could've done better, I just didn't know. I just had no idea. Some of the stuff that I did was stuck in how I'd lived. People think, well, is that your Māori culture? It could be my Māori culture, my gang culture, my prison culture, my job culture. What culture is it? I don't think it's my Māori culture at all. It's a culture that I've acquired along the way to survive.

Turning my life around and breaking the cycle

196. I had to survive, and I did everything that I could to survive; I walked over anyone. There is so much I could have done differently with GRO-B-9 and I wish that I would've.

197. I became a Drug Counsellor in the drug unit at the prison. I wasn't feeling well at the time because I had just had cancer and was in recovery. But a friend invited me to speak at the prison. I spoke to the guys there and it was fantastic. A few days later I got a phone call from the Manager inviting me to come back and not long after that they offered me the job.
198. I think it's because of my past that I'm able to work with the guys in the prison. I've had to turn my past into something that's useful for me. It's the only education I've known. When I went to work in the jail, there were a couple of people there that were far more qualified than me, but I got the position.
199. Unfortunately, I lost that job. I got kicked out of the prison because I went to one of the gang member's funerals. He was like a brother to me. We grew up in the boys' homes, right through the jail system. It's a family thing really. The other part of that is that it's because of my relationship with him, that I had access to those boys in the jails. I was able to say the things that I said to them because of my connection with him. Anyway, I went to his funeral. I asked them if I could go and they gave me permission. But I lost my job.
200. When I see my brother today, he's in jail and he's struggling. I still blame myself a little bit for that, but I couldn't take him with me. I look at him and I see that little boy I left at the gate and it's just very hard. That's a moment that he brings up all the time.
201. My hope was to break the cycle of offending and drugs in my life and in my family.
202. I grew up hating other people. I hated Pākehā people. In jail, I took it out on them and later on, when I went to a church in Ashburton, I was the only Māori there and I was stunned by that. These people loved me, and a funny thing happened. I realised for the first time, I actually didn't know a Pākehā person in my life. I didn't. I just knew a Pākehā system that was thrashing me.
203. When I was in jail the last time, I got a seven-year sentence. [GRO-B] had run away. She left the kids in the house by themselves. She went to a party and got a babysitter. Well, the babysitters were getting babysitters and then finally no one was there, and it was just the two kids left home alone and the neighbour found them. Nana rung me up and said that they thought [GRO-B] had been sexually abused. They didn't know that for sure, but that's what they

thought. It was at that point that I realised I'm actually doing the same thing with my kids that happened to me and I decided to make some changes.

204. I didn't know what change meant. I thought change to what? Who's going to accept me, a drug addict, a prisoner, a gang member? What do I change to? Then, I had an encounter with the Lord and it gave me hope. It gave me reason to change and my heart changed straightaway, but my behaviour has taken many years. I'm glad in one way because I can talk with mens' groups and can help them with their drug and alcohol struggles.

205. The choices that I've made and my encounter with the Lord have meant that I have come a lot further and done a lot better than other people that went through the system have. For which I am very grateful.

Forgiveness

206. I didn't want to charge anyone with anything. I've been forgiven of my past and I just feel it's wrong for me to want something to happen to somebody. I think that's because I've been through counselling, it's helped me to see that sometimes something is happening for that person at that time, that manifests in a certain way, and he or she does something that they may regret. To me, maybe where those people that were supposed to be looking after me were coming from, there might have been something happening there, and they took it out on us. I didn't want to go back to my past.

Redress

207. I don't know what will make it better or how they can say sorry. Sorry doesn't cut it.

208. What I went through has disadvantaged my children because I've had to deal with my own issues. I have been handicapped severely in my ability to come back from what happened.

209. The statistics in family violence come from people like me that came through the State system.

210. How this country is going to change things I don't know. There is no one stop answer of how to deal with it. I don't know how the country comes back from this.

211. Peoples' attitudes are part of the problem; their attitudes need to change. If we can educate people on what happened in the boys' homes, then they will be educated on domestic violence and where it comes from. That would be very powerful.
212. I think that the job ahead is so big and there needs to be a task force to address the issues.
213. Social Welfare were in charge of me when I was a State ward, but all they did was take me from place to place.
214. Oranga Tamariki is a whole new doorway into the same thing happening again. There is a whole era of Māori children being taken away from their families. What was that about? Maybe they thought there was a way to better assimilate Māori kids into society, I don't know. But to me it's backfired terribly.

Looking forward

Lack of staff training

215. When I piece together what's actually happened during my life, I can now see what went wrong. The people who were meant to be watching over me left, there were no trained people involved. They were just people who applied to get a job. There was no training involved. They have training today, but back then they just got a job. They'd come from the pub, get a job and then they just treated you however they wanted to.
216. I think that's probably part of the problem too, is that none of the people back in those days were trained at all, none of them. Everything that happened at home, they brought to work, and we copped it. One of the things that I learnt from them is that fear works. You can get what you want out of someone by using fear. All of these people that came through that system, they've grown in the gangs like that. We learned that there.

Cultural considerations

217. I think Māori people should work with Māori people. Not to say that Pākehā people shouldn't be involved, but Māori people need to be involved with the process.
218. Counselling can work, but it will take more than that deal with this issue. We need to work with families, not just the one person.

219. It's going to be very hard with the gangs. They are growing every day and there is still so much hurt there from when those initial people came out of the homes. Where the gangs have really kicked on from. It's good to see a few of the gang members talking about it though.

220. Something has to change, but I don't know what the answer is.

Statement of Truth

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and was made by me knowing that it may be used as evidence by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

Signe

GRO-C

Dated: 30 November 2020