

Man raised at nuns' home only learned the truth 29 years after death



MYSTERY: Tony Kelly at children's grave at Castlepollard mother and baby home, where his sister was born

By **Alison O'Reilly**

A MAN who was fostered out from a mother and baby home to 10 families has said that he attended his own mother's funeral without knowing who she was.

Tony Kelly from Tallaght in west Dublin only discovered the identity of his birth mother last year after searching for her for more than two decades – and after attending her funeral 30 years ago.

Tony, 68, who grew up to become a champion wrestler, is also searching for his sister, who was born one year before him at Castlepollard Mother and Baby Home.

There is an unmarked child grave at the home containing an unknown number of children.

'My mother was Bridget Kelly from the Meath area and she had two children, myself and my sister Jane, who was born in Castlepollard. There are no other records for Jane and I'm desperate to find her.'

'My mother went on to get married seven years later, after we were given up. She died in 1984 and she is buried in Deansgrange in south Dublin with her husband.'

I went to a funeral without knowing it was my mother's

'Urge came over me as if there was a fire in me'

'I attended my own mother's funeral and I didn't even know. I had been looking for her and a person who knew who she was and knew I was looking for her rang me up. He said, "I'd like you to go to a funeral for a Kelly woman, you might see someone you might know."

'It was 9.40am and it was in the Holy Family Church in Kill Avenue, Dún Laoghaire, and I lit a candle and the coffin was over on the right-hand side and I walked over.'

'The church was empty, and all of a sudden an urge came over me as if there was a fire inside me and I was slowly dragged up towards the coffin. I'll never forget it. When I was leaving the graveside, I overheard a man say to a woman, "Go on, talk to him".'

'She kept looking at me but never spoke. I drove away.'

'I found out last year when I got my birth cert that it was the funeral of my mother. I never got the chance to meet her.'

Tony was born on June 15, 1946, in Holles Street Hospital in Dublin and spent a couple of weeks with his mother, who was 29, before he was sent to St Teresa's Mother and Baby Home in Blackrock, run by the



MUSCLES: Growing up to become a wrestler, Tony, right, took on renowned champion Giant Haystacks in a contest in the UK. Tony's mother, top left, died before Tony met her; below left, Tony as a boy, on the right in image, with his then foster mother Mrs Staunton and her son Vincent

Daughters of Charity. He says he was abused at the home by the nuns. He was later fostered out to 10 families before being sent to Mayo to stay with a family until he was 18.

'I was sexually abused by a garda and a superintendent.'

'I left the last home in Mayo when I was around 16 and went on to become a champion wrestler against Giant Haystacks, to name but one. I loved it.'

Tony has spent the past 20 years

piecing together his family's history and has uncovered a lot of information.

'You can't get anything unless you look for it yourself in archives and the likes – it's not easy. Every time you try you'll be told, "No, there's no records for that."

'My mother was a domestic and worked in houses around Dublin. I never would have known about my sister Jane only a woman who knew my mother told me. I then

got her birth certificate and I knew she existed.' Tony travelled to Castlepollard for the first time this month to see the children's grave.

'Standing in this mass grave yard where all these innocent children were so cruelly buried, I could not believe it. My God, you would not bury an animal like that.'

'It is pure evil and this wretched State has an awful lot to answer for. When I saw the death records and children being recorded as

congenital idiots, it's a shameful and hurtful way to describe an innocent-born child.'

'I don't know if Jane is buried here, I don't know where she is, but I'll keep searching.'

'We should be entitled to our records at least. It's a crying shame that no one will give us answers officially. I'd love to know where Jane is and I hope I'll find her. I'd love to meet her.'

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CHILD: Tony at a foster home in Swinford, Co. Mayo, in 1956

ISPCC's Caroline speaks of her disgust at the Tuam scandal

By **Eoin Murphy**

ISPCC board member Caroline Downey has said she is sickened and ashamed at the level of abuse that led to the Tuam babies' scandal – and that it had prompted memories of the Ann Lovett case, the reason she became involved with the ISPCC.

The Celebrity Apprentice



boss, who has been with the children's charity for more than 25 years, said she was horrified to learn of the baby grave in Tuam.

The mother of three said she was ashamed that it had been allowed this to happen. She said: 'I felt sick when I read and keep reading

SUPPORT: ISPCC board member Caroline Downey

what went on in Ireland at that time and the horror stories in the mother and baby homes.

'We condemn other countries for their human rights violations and we were as bad. Shame on all those people who allowed, took part in and covered up what went on.'

Ms Downey, who is a director for music promotions giant MCD, became involved with the ISPCC when teenager Ann Lovett died in 1984 after giving birth on her own beside a grotto in Granard, Co. Longford,

too ashamed to tell anyone that she was pregnant. Ms Downey was pregnant with her first child at the time.

'A lot of people don't write about the fact that her sister killed herself,' Caroline says. 'I was pregnant and I was freaking out and I was 24. I just couldn't imagine what it must have been like being 15, in the pitch dark, and giving birth alone.'

The ISPCC has welcomed the announcement of a full inquiry into the homes.