

COMING UP ►►

Singer Sam Kelly on life after *Britain's Got Talent*, p.17



Tony proudly holds a poster baring his name from his wrestling career

mass grave at Castlepollard but has not yet had any reply.

"Wait until you see this inquiry, it's going to be a shambles. I can see it. What is the use of having an inquiry unless you can compel somebody? What is the point of putting you as the head man with the best will in the world to chair an inquiry if you cannot compel the likes of me who was in charge of the mother and baby homes? They must be. What's going to happen now is they're going to say documents are destroyed or something like that. Then they'll never get to the bottom of it. It must be a full court of inquiry where people swear and all that. There's no point me being the chair of the mother and baby home in Castlepollard and saying I wouldn't have that information."

Tony experienced firsthand the lack of humanity in the mother and baby homes as he was abused in St Teresa's: "I have an inch and a half scar over the top of my left eye that I got in St Teresa's, plus the other abuse. They just walloped ya, the nuns used to go around with big long belts on them. You could be playing and get a slap of the belt any time at all. They were sadists."

Tony still has hope of meeting his sister Jane but knows she could also be in the mass

grave at Castlepollard. "She could be beside me, she could be dead, we don't know. The problem is there's thousands of Jane Kellys. They won't even tell you if she was baptised."

Tony hopes to meet his brothers and sister who were born to the same parents Joseph Nolan and Bridget Kelly, after their marriage.

Tony, 68, would have loved to get married himself but found he could never face a girl while knowing so little of where he came from or what he would tell any kids of his own: "Supposing you had a daughter and your daughter brought me home and we had tea and were sitting at the table, you ask me the ultimate question: 'Anthony, where do you come from?' I don't know. I'm asked the question regularly: Where do you come from?"

Tony's story mirrors that of Philomena Lee who found her son when it was too late. He had died and been buried in Roscrea where Philomena had been asking for information.

"A girl rang me and she said, 'do you know something? With great respect, it's such a sad case, yours would put it to shame. Your story would put that to shame, what you went through.'"



Tony pictured with Giant Haysticks during his wrestling days

way. For some unknown reason, I taped them because it was history. Hadn't I got him here all the time?

"Nobody knew about him, he kept a low profile. I didn't know who he was and when I went to my own mother's funeral, there was an old lady there. I said: 'Did you know Bridget?' She said 'I knew her well'. Then I said: 'Who's that name? Who's Joseph Nolan?' 'A great Tipperary man', she said. 'A real solid Republican'. And with that, the hearse came and we stopped the conversation. That stayed in my mind all the time: Who he was, what he was."

It was a chance meeting that took Tony to discover a mass grave at Castlepollard mother and baby home in Westmeath. This is where he knows his sister Jane was born one year before him. Hundreds of children were laid to rest in a mass grave around the back of the former home, marked only by a nail hammered into the wall. Tony met an old man who had worked there many years doing yard work and recounts the conversation and what he saw:

"There was a dismal air around the place. He said, 'there's no names but you can count the nails. Every time a baby was buried, he said, we

put a nail in the wall. Not very nice, is it?'

"They must have just thrown them in, the distance was so short. They couldn't have done it properly. I tried to count them (nails), it was two foot high and all the way along."

Tony estimated that there were roughly 320 nails: "That would be right," he said. "In some cases, there's two nails, they would be twins. I could see he was getting very emotional. He said, 'I buried a few myself. The workers got the job of doing it'.

Castlepollard mass grave

"There was an eery feeling around the place as well. They didn't even have the good manners to put a plaque or names up, somewhere where people could go. What was wrong with taking the child out and giving it a Christian burial? You wouldn't bury an animal like that. It's despicable what happened, driving a nail in a wall and that was the name."

Tony wrote to Garda Commissioner Noírin O'Sullivan asking that she look into the

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