

Mary Ayland † Mary Ball † Anne Barlow † Sophia Barnes † Susan Bateman †
Bridget Bates † Sarah Bennett † Alice Bolger † Alison Brady † Brigid Brady †
Cecilia Ann Brady † Mary Anne Brady † Mary Anne Brady † Mary Anne Brady †
† Emma Buckley † Fanny Buckley † Mary Burnett † Anne Burton † Christina
Butler † Elizabeth Byrne † Marie Byrne † Eliza
Cafferty † Margaret Callaghan † Ann Carroll † Elizabeth Caulfield † Rose
Cavanagh † Isabelle Clarke † Isabelle Clarke † Elizabeth Cogan † Eliza Collins
† Emily Collins † Mary Connor † Mary Connor † Sarah Connor † Margaret
Corcoran † Catherine Coyle † Nora Coyle † Elizabeth Culliton † Peggy
Cummins † Sarah Davidson † Kate Deane † Margaret Diamond † Bridget
Donovan † Brigid Doodly † Mary Doyle † Dolomena Doyle † Elizabeth Duffy
† Agnes Dunne † Anne Dunne † Elizabeth Dunne † Margaret Dunne † Mary
Dunne † Johanna Dunphy † Alicia Ennis † Elizabeth Fagan † Tessie Fallon †
Margaret Fallon † Mary Clare Fallon † Frances Finn † Kathleen Finn † Kathleen
Floyd † Alice Gannon † Alice Gannon † Alice Gannon † Alice Gannon † Anne
Grady † Annie Gannon † Annie Gannon † Annie Gannon † Annie Gannon † Anne
† Elsie Guest † Anne Hayden † Sarah Hanlon † Christina Harrison † Nellie
Harrison † Edith Havenly † Margaret Hayden † Mary Hayden † Wilma Mary
Hertzburg † Ann Teresa Hickey † Frances Hickey † Julia Holmes † Bridget
Howe † Henrietta Hussey † Alice Igoe † Josephine Kavanagh † Mary Ann
Kavanagh † Mary Kavanagh † Rose Kavanagh † Esther Keenan † Bridie Kelly
† Eliza Kelly † Julia Kelly † Mary Kelly † Mary Kelly † Bella Kemp † Jane
Kenna † Margaret Keogh † Kate Kiernan † Lizzie Kiernan † Mary Kinsella †
Mary Kinsella † Mary Anna Lawlor † Jane Leadon † Belinda Leonard † Mary
Leonard † Margaret Lewis † Annie Lutton † Joan Maguire † Rose Ann Maguire
† Mary Mahan † Mary Maher † Margaret Martin † Bridget Masterson † Martha
May † Alice McAuley † Catherine McConnell † Margaret McCormack †
Una McDonald † Eileen McGinn † Ellen M. McKearney † Ellen McKenna †
Elizabeth McKinley † Mary McMahon † Bridget McNally † Eliza McNally †
Eliza McNally † Lizzie Meider † Elizabeth Mooney † Mary Mooney † Molly
Moore † Mary Ann Morgan † Anne Morrissey † Catherine Mulholland † Mary
Mulholland † Mary Ann Murray † Mary Ann Murray † Mary Ann Murray †
† Christina O'Brien † Catherine O'Leary † Ellen O'Leary † Kathleen O'Leary †
Terence O'Leary † Terence O'Leary † Terence O'Leary † Terence O'Leary †
Prendergast † Prendergast † Prendergast † Prendergast † Prendergast †
† Mary Quinn † Mary Quinn † Mary Quinn † Mary Quinn † Mary Quinn †
Margaret Quinn † Margaret Quinn † Margaret Quinn † Margaret Quinn †
Bridget Supple † Kate Tierney † Catherine Tighe † Julia Treacy † Helena Tropey
† Maria Walsh † Brigid Walsh † Brigid Walsh † Brigid Walsh † Brigid Walsh †

*“The State shall endeavour to ensure that the
strength and health of workers, men and women, and
the tender age of children shall not be abused and
that citizens shall not be forced by economic
necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their sex,
age or strength.”*

The History

Ireland has suffered a great many tragedies in her long history. There are those we hear of every day — the "Troubles," the great Famine — Irish sorrows and issues we are all familiar with. But hidden beneath the surface, lies a tragedy just as great, just as terrible and just as unimaginable. And it is only just beginning to break through to the light of truth.

It is the story of thousands of Ireland's women, judged “sinners” by the cruel Church-driven society of the late 20th century through present day. Their crime? Bearing children out of wedlock; leaving abusive husbands or home situations. The punishment? A lifetime of "penitence" spent in the service of the Sisters of Charity, Mercy, Good Shepherd and other orders, performing domestic chores...harsh, thankless chores such as laundering prison uniforms, clerical washing, hotel linens cleaning and caring for elderly nuns or their aging peers, still trapped behind the walls of Ireland's numerous convent laundries.

They are the “Magdalenes,” ironically called after Mary the Magdalene, who served her Jesus loyally and was rewarded with his forgiveness and love. No such rewards exist for these “penitents.” They were told to forever hide their shame inside these walls, work under harsh, spartan conditions; driven unmercifully by the sisters and often abused by them as well. It is a story Ireland has every right to be ashamed of, which is perhaps why it has only come to light recently.

In 1993, property held by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge in Dublin which once served as a convent laundry was to be sold to a developer for public use. It was known at that time that some 133 graves existed, unmarked, in a cemetery on the convent grounds. The graves belonged to women who had worked in the service of the convent all their lives, buried without notification to possible family...unmarked, unremembered. When knowledge of the graves became public, a cry arose in the streets of Dublin and some families came forth to identify and claim some of the women as their long-lost daughters, mothers, grandmothers and sisters. Yet many remained unidentified. At the time of the 1993 discovery, a memorial was established and the remaining, unclaimed bodies were to be cremated and reinterred in the Glasnevin cemetery in Dublin. But a problem arose: an initial exhumation order was given for 133 bodies (and only 75 death certificates existed), and at time of exhumation, another 22 bodies were discovered. No additional exhumation order was obtained or given, and the 155 bodies were cremated and moved with little fanfare.

In 2003, *Irish Times* journalists, Mary Raftery followed by Joe Humphries, revealed there were no death certificates extant for many of these women (and their children, some of whom were also found buried on the High Park grounds). One body reportedly was missing a skull. It has always been illegal in Ireland to fail to report a death. One must wonder why — what has the Church to hide regarding these deaths?

In addition to graves gone unmarked, so too, living women go "unmarked," languishing still inside the convent walls — unclaimed by their respective families as many were given false names or ages upon admittance, making their true identification enormously difficult. Even in death these women suffered callous, inhumane treatment and were robbed of their dignity.

About Justice for Magdalenes

In 1993, upon the discovery of the 133 graves at High Park Convent, a small group of women formed the **Magdalen Memorial Committee (MMC)**. Originally founded by Patricia McDonald, Bláthnaid Ní Chinnéide and Margo Kelly, they sought to establish a memorial to the 133 women. This included a park bench established in St. Stephen's Green and a ceremony which took place in 1996. Later, when the remains exhumed from High Park Convent were reinterred at Glasnevin cemetery, memorial gravestones were installed. Poignant tributes are often left at these gravesites including flowers, toys and children's shoes.



*Park bench and
memorial plaque,
St. Stephen's Green,
Dublin.*

In 2002, the Residential Institutions Redress Act was passed, which addressed abuse and neglect suffered by thousands of Irish children in industrial schools and other state-licensed residential institutions. Unfortunately, Magdalene survivors were omitted from this group and to date have been unable to achieve justice for the horrors they endured.

Once the MMC's goals were met it eventually disbanded until 2003, when Mary Raftery broke the story of the suspicious circumstances surrounding the High Park exhumations. At that point, several women, some of whom had mothers who spent time behind Magdalene walls, desired to continue the work done by the MMC and they resurrected the organisation which would eventually become **Justice for Magdalenes (JFM)** in 2004. JFM expanded their mission to include legislative and reform work to ensure that survivors of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries would not be forgotten, despite the State and religious orders' tacit refusal to acknowledge or apologise to them.



High Park gravesite, Glasnevin cemetery, Dublin.

Justice for Magdalenes seeks to promote and represent the interests of the Magdalene Women, to respectfully promote equality and seek justice for the women formerly incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries and to seek the establishment and improvements of support as well as advisory and re-integration services provided for survivors. The organisation is based in County Cavan and we operate three phone lines available to anyone in Ireland, the United States and United Kingdom. We also maintain a website at **www.magdalenelaundries.com** and an online group through Yahoo! Groups open to academics, researchers, supporters and others with an interest in the Laundries.

Justice For Magdalenes

Crocknahattina

Baileborough, Co. Cavan

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In Ireland: (353) 86 4059491

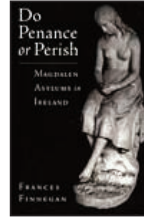
In the US: (1) 215-589-9329 In the UK: (44) 208-346-7479

Additional reading

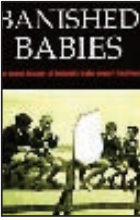
Justice for Magdalenes recommends the following books and film for more information on the Magdalene Laundries and the related issue of adoption in and from Ireland.



Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment
by James M. Smith



Do Penance or Perish
by Frances Finnegan



Banished Babies
by Mike Milotte



Suffer the Little Children by
Mary Raftery & Eoin
O'Sullivan



The God Squad
by Paddy Doyle



Hannah's Shame
by Derek Leinster



The Light in the Window
by June Goulding



The Magdalene Sisters
directed by Peter Mullan

Website resources

www.magdalenelaundries.com

www.netreach.net/~steed/magdalen.html

www.paddydoyle.com

www.adoption.ie

www.adoptionloss.ie

www.derekleinster.com

Justice for Magdalenes in the media

Justice for Magdalenes has recently been in the media's focus as a result of our renewed push for redress, including a proposed Redress bill, on behalf of survivors of Laundries. We have also launched a number of official queries (resulting in a scheduled Parliamentary Question the week of 5 October), and written letters to An Taoiseach, the newspapers, appropriate ministers and TDs across parties. JFM committee members have engaged on RTE Liveline, Newstalk 106, 4FM and other outlets. We have received formal responses from Minister for Education & Science, Mr. Batt O'Keeffe (see next page) through the kind auspices of Mr. Tom Kitt TD, who acted on our behalf. JFM has also issued a number of press releases throughout 2009. All of the preceding may be viewed and downloaded from www.magdalenelaundries.com.

The fight for justice has also been extensively covered by the following Irish and U.S. media outlets:

www.irishtimes.ie
www.independent.ie
www.examiner.ie
www.rte.ie
www.4fm.ie
www.newstalk.ie
www.boston.com

News articles are also linked from our website. JFM maintains a Yahoo! group at groups.yahoo.com/group/Justice_for_Magdalenes.



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*Official response letter from Minister for
Education & Science Batt O'Keeffe to
Tom Kitt TD, 4 September 2009*

Mr. Tom Kitt, TD
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

PLEASE QUOTE REF NUMBER ON ALL CORRESPONDENCE
Our Ref: 0904695/SR

 September 2009

Dear Tom

Thank you for your recent letter on behalf of Mr. James Smith, Associate Professor, English Department and Irish Studies Programme, Boston College, USA in relation to the Magdalen Laundries.

I wish to advise you in the first instance that the Magdalen laundries are not listed in the Schedule to the Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002, as they were not subject to State regulation or supervision. However, Section 1 (3) of the Act provides that "an applicant who was resident in an institution and was transferred from that institution to another place of residence which carried on the business of a laundry and who suffered abuse while resident in that laundry shall be deemed, at the time of the abuse, to have been resident in that institution." The justification for this provision is that the State was still responsible for the welfare and protection of children who were transferred to a Magdalen laundry from a State regulated institution provided they were not officially discharged from the scheduled institution. Consequently, persons who were in a Scheduled institution and were transferred to a laundry during the course of their official period of residency may fall to be considered for an award by the Redress Board in respect of their residency in the laundry.

In terms of establishing a distinct scheme for former employees of the Magdalen Laundries, the situation in relation to children who were taken into the laundries privately or who entered the laundries as adults is quite different to persons who were resident in State run institutions. The Magdalen laundries were privately owned and operated establishments which did not come within the responsibility of the State. The State did not refer individuals to Magdalen Laundries nor was it complicit in referring individuals to them.

I should point out, however, that a person's ineligibility to be considered for an award under the terms of the current Redress Scheme does not affect their statutory right to pursue any other legal avenue which may be open to them.

I hope this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely



Batt O'Keeffe TD
Minister for Education & Science

11:18 FROM-

T-262 P.002/002 F-711

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luailbhride,
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Mr Tom Kitt TD
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

*Official 'apology' letter from Minister for
Education & Science Batt O'Keeffe to
Tom Kitt TD, 23 September 2009*

PLEASE QUOTE REF NUMBER ON ALL CORRESPONDENCE

Our Ref: 0904695 SR

23 September 2009

Dear Tom,

I refer to my letter to you of 4th September in relation to the Magdalene Laundries. You were making representations on behalf of Mr. James Smith, Associate Professor, Boston College.

As you are aware, in that letter I referred to the women who worked in the Magdalene Laundries as "employees". I deeply regret any offence caused by my use of the term 'employees' when referring to these women. I fully acknowledge that the word 'workers' would have been more appropriate.

I would be obliged if you could please pass a copy of this letter on to Mr. Smith.

Yours sincerely

Batt O'Keeffe TD
Minister for Education and Science

Legal work

Justice for Magdalenes has campaigned for the last fourteen years to seek redress for survivors of Irish laundries. Repeated attempts to be recognized under the Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002, have been unsuccessful as the Church and State have denied complicity in remanding young girls and women to Magdalene institutions as well as oversight for their care and rights as Irish citizens.

Recently, JFM submitted a separate Redress draft proposal to members of the Dáil and Seanad, as well as An Taoiseach and government ministers. It is our hope that during the 2009-2010 session, this proposal will be presented and enacted. JFM are most grateful to TDs Tom Kitt, Ruairi Quinn, Eamonn Gilmore, Pat Rabbitte, Joan Burton, Kathleen Lynch and others for their solid support of our efforts. In late September 2009, Tom Kitt formally questioned Minister for Education and Science Batt O’Keeffe on the State’s role in committal to and oversight of the Laundries. Mr. O’Keeffe’s initial response (previous pages) was stunningly inaccurate and has been highly criticised in the media. His follow-up ‘apology’ was equally outrageous.

Following is the JFM proposed Redress bill.

PROPOSED REDRESS SCHEME FOR SURVIVORS OF IRELAND'S MAGDALEN LAUNDRIES

- I: Aim**
- II: Key Terms**
- III: State Apology**
- IV: State Redress Scheme**

I: Aim

To establish a distinct Redress scheme for survivors of Ireland's Magdalen Laundries

II: Key Terms:

Involuntary Committal: Women (typically young girls) transferred to the Magdalen Laundry from State residential institutions, e.g., Industrial and Reformatory School.

Location: After the foundation of the State (1922), Laundries operated in Galway and Dun Laoghaire (Mercy), Waterford, New Ross, Limerick, and Cork (Good Shepherds), Donnybrook and Cork (Sisters of Charity), Drumcondra and Gloucester/Sean McDermott Streets (Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge). Bethany House in Dublin operated as a Magdalen institution for members of the Protestant community. The last Magdalen ceased operating as a commercial laundry on October 25, 1996.

Magdalen Laundry: Institutions attached to Convents operated by female religious in which incarcerated women, called "penitents," worked at laundry and other for-profit enterprises. These women were denied freedom of movement. They were unpaid for their labor. They were denied their given names. The daily routine emphasized prayer, silence, and work. Women had to be signed out of the Magdalen, and many remained to live, work, and ultimately die, behind convent walls.

Referred committal: This category includes women referred to the Magdalen Laundries by the Courts, typically having accepted a suspended sentence upon "voluntarily" agreeing to enter a convent for a specified amount of time. Also, includes women referred to the Magdalen Laundries by the Courts while on remand and awaiting trial (Criminal Justice Act, 1960).

Religious Congregations: The Sisters of Mercy, The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge, The Sisters of Charity, The Good Shepherd Sisters

State: Government of the Saorstát and later the Republic of Ireland.

"Voluntary" Committal: Woman (of any age) deposited at the Magdalen Convent by a family member, employer, social worker, Gardai, local doctor, etc.

III. Elements of a State Apology

The state apologizes for its failure to protect adequately the constitutional rights of citizens committed to the nation's Magdalen Laundries. The State acknowledges that it failed to protect the Magdalen women's basic human rights (regardless of whether they were committed voluntarily, involuntarily, or referred), rights guaranteed to other citizens.

In particular, the State apologizes to those young women involuntarily committed to the Magdalen Laundries, especially to girls transferred from state-licensed residential institutions directly into the Magdalen Laundries. The State will statutorily guarantee access for these victims of institutional abuse (up to the age of 21 years of age upon committal) in accordance with the Residential Institutions Redress Act (2002) and any subsequent amending legislation.

The state acknowledges that the Magdalen Laundries were punishing and abusive in nature, and that the state failed to insist that these institutions comply with various legislative measures ensuring workers' rights (e.g., a working wage, safe work conditions, hours of work per day and per week, vacation time, etc.)

The state acknowledges that it failed to ensure some measure of regulation and inspection of these institutions, which although owned and operated by Catholic Religious Congregations, were routinely used by the Courts for women found guilty of certain crimes and or for women on remand and awaiting trial. In doing so, the State apologizes to women committed to the Magdalen institutions having being referred through the state's judicial system.

The state acknowledges and apologizes for its complicity in the abuse of all women in the Magdalen Laundries by virtue of its ongoing support of the religious congregations operating these institutions, e.g., by providing lucrative contracts of laundry from prisons, hospitals, the military, etc., and by consistently referring a labor force to the laundries via the courts.

Finally, the state urges the four religious congregations directly involved in operating the laundry institutions, the Catholic hierarchy who oversaw the congregations, and the families of those women committed to the Magdalen Laundries, to issue their respective apologies for the abuse, mistreatment, and abandonment of these women.

IV: Elements of a State Redress Scheme for Victims and Survivors of the Magdalen Laundries

The nature of the State's relationship to the Magdalen Laundries was different to that of the so-called residential institutions. At no time did the State license, regulate or inspect the Magdalen Laundries. Oversight and management always remained in the hands of the religious congregations and the local members of the Catholic hierarchy. The Laundry enterprise, and related enterprises, was always operated on a for-profit basis. But because of the charitable status of the enterprise these laundry institutions were exempt from certain provisions of the Companies and Factory Acts.

Despite these differences in the nature of its relationship to the Magdalen Laundries, the State recognizes its historic failure to intervene and adequately protect the women in these institutions by supporting the following measures:

- The State will establish a Trust fund for reparation in lieu of wages not afforded to workers during their respective incarceration. The State urges the Religious orders to contribute equal monies to this Trust.
- The State will provide a pension for survivors of the Magdalen Laundries upon reaching the age of 65 years.
- The State will provide aid in the form of housing assistance to survivors in need. In particular, the State will assist women still in the care of the religious congregations who, if given the opportunity, would seek alternative independent living arrangements.

Voices of our Magdalene women washed out of history for too long

Ireland's Magdalene survivors are being denied a distinct redress scheme despite the state's culpability, writes James M. Smith

Sunday Tribune, Ireland, 12 July 2009



Irish society still needs to confront the abuse of thousands of women in Magdalene laundries

“Are you the man who wrote the Magdalene book?” A voice, hesitant and frail, asked from the other end of my office phone. “I just finished it. I read about 10 pages a day.” She called to share her story. She wanted someone to listen. She needed someone to understand.

Her mother died when she was seven. Initially, she and a younger sister were cared for within the extended family. The farm required her father's attention. At 14, he deposited her with the Good Shepherd nuns in New Ross. Her sister was sent to the congregation's Limerick convent.

The Good Shepherd Sisters managed industrial schools at both these locations. They also operated a reformatory school for girls in Limerick. But the two teenage sisters would live and work with the adult women in the Magdalene laundry. They remained enslaved, unpaid for their labour, for almost five years.

The Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse evades this woman's experience of childhood abuse. She was disappeared directly into the Magdalene laundry. There was no judge. No “cruelty man”. No committal order. She never was a ward of state. She was just dumped. Consequently, she exists in a legal limbo.

The Residential Institutions Redress Board ignores her experience of childhood abuse. The Dublin-based lawyers responded to her queries. She insisted she was a Magdalene and was never in the industrial school. They told her there was little they could do. The advocacy group 'Justice for Magdalenes' helped petition the redress board on her behalf. Again, her case was not taken up. Her childhood abuse didn't fit the legal parameters.

The recently published Ryan report tells a horrendous story. Irish society responds with anger, a sense of betrayal, and oft-stated disbelief. It seems intent on holding the religious congregations accountable. The government now accepts the report's major recommendations. The Dáil passed an all-party motion pledging to cherish all the children of the state equally. But what about those victims and survivors of institutional abuse not addressed by the report? What about Ireland's Magdalene women and their families? Now is precisely the juncture that Irish society – state, church, religious congregations, families, and local communities – should confront head-on the abuse of thousands of women in Ireland's Magdalene laundries.

The Magdalene laundries were excluded from the Residential Institutions Redress legislation. They were deemed private, charitable institutions. Women, the state asserted, voluntarily committed themselves seeking asylum. The four religious congregations involved in operating Ireland's laundries – the Good Shepherds, Sisters of Charity, Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge, Mercy Sisters – all gave testimony before the commission's confidential committee. But, they only addressed their management of industrial and reformatory schools. Magdalene survivors were not invited to appear before the confidential committee. The commission, of course, was charged with inquiring into child abuse. Magdalenes were, in the main, women not children. And age continues to inform the state's rationale for disqualifying survivors' claims for redress. So too, however, does the question of liability. Unlike the industrial and reformatory schools system, the government disclaims any function in licensing or inspecting the laundries. It purports never to have funded them directly.

But the state always relied on the availability of the Magdalene laundries to conceal “problem women”. It continually facilitated the transfer of women into the nuns' care. It helped make possible a labour force through court referrals. It apportioned lucrative contracts for state institutional laundry for places such as hospitals and the military. After 1960, it provided the nuns with capitation grants for women on remand from the courts.

The state always ignored the flagrant disregard for the women's civil and constitutional rights: false imprisonment; the absence of due process; exploitative and dangerous work practices; the denial of educational and human developmental resources; as well as emotional, physical and, in some cases, sexual abuse. The Department of Justice never regulated institutions routinely used by members of the judiciary to incarcerate Irish citizens.

Ireland's Magdalene survivors are denied a distinct redress and reparations scheme despite the state's culpability, complicity, and collusion in these abusive institutions. And no one in Ireland – not the religious congregations, not the hierarchy, not the state – has apologised to the Magdalene communities.

The Residential Institutions Redress Act (2002) did include, but only as an afterthought, young girls illegally transferred from industrial and reformatory schools to Magdalene laundries.

Many of these “preventative” cases, as they were called, rejoined society in their early 20s. Some have sought the redress they were entitled to. Others decided to remain in the sheltered environs of the convent all their lives. What about these women's lost childhoods? What about the abuse they suffered?

And what about the young children disappeared directly into Magdalene institutions, like the woman who picked up the phone to call me? What about her sister? What about the others? The Kennedy Report (1970) documents some “617 children...resident in 'Voluntary Homes which have not applied for approval'.” We are left to guess how many of this number lost their childhoods in Magdalene Laundries.

And what of the larger Magdalene community of adult women? Is their experience of physical and emotional abuse somehow less worthy of acknowledgment, redress, and reparation than that of children? Is contemporary Irish society comfortable with this compartmentalisation of abuse?

In places like Drumcondra, Cork, and New Ross, laundries and industrial schools stood side by side. In Limerick, a system of underground tunnels ensured both populations could attend church and then return to their separate buildings without ever seeing each other. Indeed, survivor testimony speaks to mothers and children separated by walls within the one convent complex without ever knowing of the other's whereabouts.

Is the abuse experienced by these woman and children somehow fundamentally different? Is it conceivable that nuns abused children and didn't abuse adult women in a different part of the same institution? Or, is contemporary Irish society suggesting that the Magdalene women somehow deserved the treatment they received?

The woman who called me is a survivor of institutional child abuse. She remains scarred by her childhood experience. Elderly and alone, she is angry about the past, afraid for the future. Irish society now demands accountability for child abuse at the state's industrial and reformatory schools. When will it do likewise for the abuse of girls and women in the nation's Magdalene laundries?

Reprinted with kind permission from James Smith.

Ghosts

by Amy 'Gavriela' Maxime Ze'eva Person
(1969-1997)

It was a summer's evening in 1997, not long before Gavi departed this mortal coil. She had been chatting online with JFM committee member Mari Steed and Mari had sent her some articles on the Irish Magdalene Laundries, a topic that, along with the Irish adoption schemes, she'd not been familiar with (not unreasonable, considering she was a half-Jewish bastard with but the most tenuous connections to Ireland). Not half an hour later, "Ghosts" arrived in Mari's inbox. Gavi's Jewish and Celtic ancestors had drawn the Muse to her. Those of us who have lived this experience could not express what Gavi so eloquently drew from her soul. We are privileged to share her words here.

We are the ghosts of the children no more. We lay in the graveyard of the home for unwed mothers, next to the church with the beautiful rose window, underneath the disturbed soil of Ireland. Our mothers came here, sharing secrets, being quiet, toiling and attending Mass with each other, though they never shared their true names. There was a momentary sisterhood, it seemed, and we thought we might one day live here, and be happy.

We each knew our mothers very well, and some of them talked to us every day, in their little rooms, alone. Sometimes there was anger, sometimes crying, but we were always with them, and felt close. In our whispers to each other, underneath the grass, we've shared how each of our mothers grew austere silent as the day of our birth approached.

Some of us withered from all the unhappiness, and left our mothers early, and here came to rest. Others traveled the birth canal, just like any of you living, but our mothers disappeared so suddenly, we died of fright.

But we don't speak to frighten you. We call to you because you are our brethren. In each other, we have found comfort, but our ears are keen in the silent air, and we know many more of us lay, all over the earth, forgotten.

We never lived to understand what was so important to your ways that made our growth, our awareness, so brief. And though we are now part of the trees, the light, and the air, our spirits stay sunken, unidentified.

We understand we are bastards, and we know there are the living among our kind. You are our brethren and you can hear us in the night when you think about your own mysteries, and wonder.

Every time you speak out for the bastards, you bless another one of us with a name, another with a face. Whenever you feel isolated, you can call to us and we will hear. Use your breath, your precious life, and change the world's ways for all of us. Know we were loved by at least one silent heart.

Be strong, and love each other, and the world will surely change.

Yes, I'd like to donate to the cause for justice for survivors of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries.

Name: _____

E-mail (optional): _____

Please feel free to share your email address – even if you choose not to donate – and we'll include you on our mailing list for future updates. If you contact us for assistance as a survivor or on behalf of a survivor, all information will be held in strictest confidence. We do not share any information without the express permission of the owner of the information.

Please make your check payable to the **Justice for Magdalenes** and mail it to
Crocknahattina, Baileborough, Co. Cavan, Rep. of Ireland.