

Irish Daily Mail

Nuns treated me like an eBay item in adoption ad

Artist Sharkey believes process was illegal and intends to sue State

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- By Alison O'Reilly news@dailymail.ie

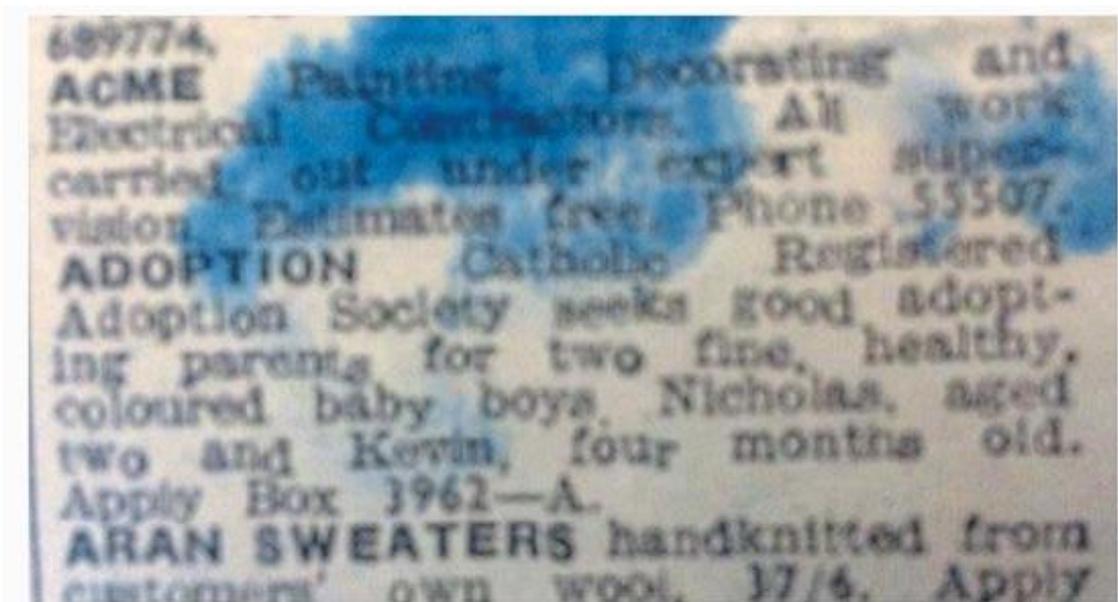


Good clothes: Four-month-old Kevin in newspaper ad

ARTIST Kevin Sharkey has hit out at how the nuns advertised his adoption as though they were selling an item on eBay.

A photograph of a four month-old Sharkey being cradled by a nun was used in a national newspaper ad in a bid to find him adoptive parents.

He was described as 'healthy' and 'coloured' in the 1961 advertisement, and the artist and former TV host said he was dressed up in good clothes specifically for the ad.



Kevin Sharkey was adopted “Fine, healthy, coloured: The Newspaper ad from 1961

Sharkey, now 56, was born in the controversial St Patrick’s mother and baby home on the Navan Road in Dublin. His 15-year-old mother gave birth to him in secret. His mother concealed her pregnancy after she had a relationship with a Nigerian man who was training to be a doctor in the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin at the time.

Having spent four months in the home, Kevin and another boy were placed in a newspaper ad for adoption. The image of Sharkey being cradled by a smiling nun portrays a very different image to that which has emerged from mother and baby homes years later.

The ad – wedged between a listing for decorators and an ad for Aran sweaters – read: ‘Adoption, Catholic Registered Adoption Society seeks good adopting parents for two fine, healthy, coloured baby boys, Nicholas aged two and Kevin four months old. Apply Box 3962 – A.’

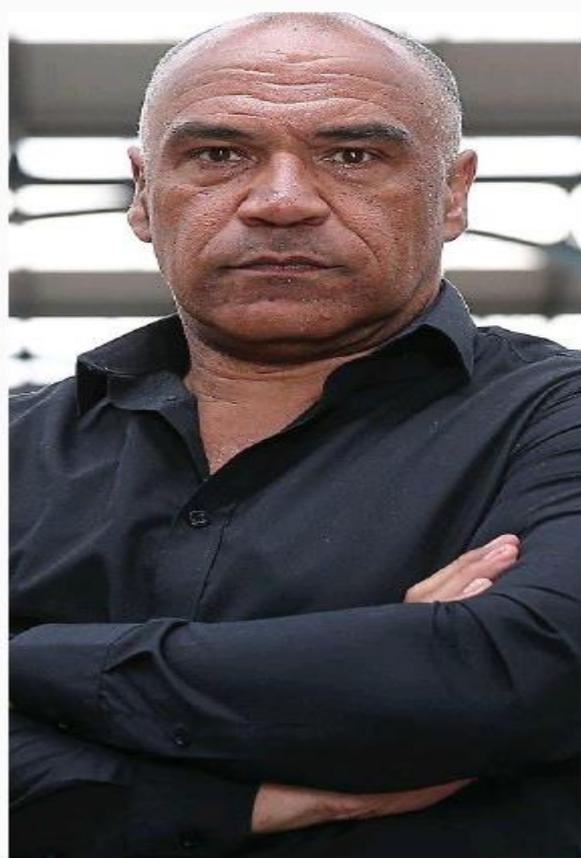
Former RTÉ presenter Kevin told the Irish Daily Mail that the manner of the advertisement showed how little respect the nuns had for children in their care. ‘It was like an eBay situation,’ he said. ‘I know I wouldn’t have worn clothes like that all the time they were only used for the photo.’

‘I don’t believe those nuns were as kind as they are making out to be, either. When you think about it, it’s shocking. Two black babies advertised in the paper like that.’

‘It amazes me that it’s only coming to light now how bad those nuns behaved towards young mothers and their babies. It really is something shocking.’

Sharkey, who was until recently destitute and homeless, also claimed he was experimented on for vaccine trials. 'I know they tested two vaccines on me.'

Sharkey also doubts he was ever officially adopted given how his mother was under the age of consent at the time and later told him when they were reunited that she 'never signed any papers'. 'I don't have a birth cert as far as I know and I'm unaware of any adoption certificate,' he said. 'Despite the advert saying it was an adoption, my adoptive parents didn't even come and collect me – they said they signed no papers... I am looking into it but I believe there's a huge possibility I was illegally adopted.' Sharkey is furious with how the Church and State treated him as a child. 'My own mother had me when she was a child, it was an accidental pregnancy and yet she had to hide it from everyone because of the Catholic Church,' he said, adding: 'The way this country was run, the religious orders and how they treated children and young mothers, it's disgraceful.' Sharkey now wants to take a case against the State over his treatment in St Patrick's. 'I had a bad start in life and was given to parents who treated me very badly,' he said. 'I plan to sue the State for what happened in the mother and baby home. I want answers and compensation for all that's happened.'



Kevin Sharkey

The treatment of children in the mother and baby homes is currently being investigated by a Commission of Investigation under Judge Yvonne Murphy.

The commission was announced in 2014 after the Irish Mail on Sunday broke the story of the mass grave in Tuam. During a recent excavation of the site, a 'significant quantity of human remains' were found in the home and a final report into the homes is due to be handed to the Minister for Children in February next year.

Tuam is just one of 14 mother and baby homes being investigated along with St Patrick's home and three county homes. Almost 800 babies and young children died at the Tuam home between 1926 and 1961. In March, it was confirmed that the remains of babies and children had been found at the site of the home.

Sharkey said: 'I am one of the lucky ones. There has to be a grave at every one of these mother and baby homes. But I have no faith in the Commission or the Government to uncover the

'They tested two vaccines on me' 'It will be a whitewash'

truth... It will be a whitewash.'

Sharkey was brought up by Peggy and Paddy Sharkey, who had five other children. His late adoptive parents regularly beat and verbally abused him, he said. He said he still loved his adoptive mother 'no matter what' and that she said sorry to him in the end.

Sharkey was 37 when he met his birth mother for the first time. However, he said it didn't go well and she told him he wasn't to tell anyone who she was.

Sharkey believes his complicated childhood, which included sexual abused by a priest, had a lasting impact on his life. Having worked in TV, art and music, he ended up penniless from failed businesses.

He recently found himself homeless but has now moved into a house in north Co. Dublin.