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HIA REF: SND 21

Witness Name: SND 21

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SND 21

I, SND 21 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED].

Role and responsibilities

2. I was employed as a houseparent in Termonbacca for a year and a half between [REDACTED]. Six months prior to being employed I did voluntary work in the home. This involved making tea, washing clothes and helping the children. When I was a houseparent my hours were 7am until 10pm or 3pm until 10pm seven days a week. During the time I worked in Termonbacca I attended [REDACTED] and completed a Certificate in Residential Care. During term I continued to work in the home at weekends.

3. I was a houseparent in St Gerard's group. The nun in charge of the group was SR 14. She was later replaced by SR 6. SND 57 worked as a cleaner in the group. SR 2 was in charge of the other group.

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4. I think there were approximately 17 children in my group. **HIA 127** was the youngest child in the group at 18 months old and **SND 147** was the eldest. He was 15 years old. I had no formal training in child care and was not given any in Termonbacca. I was the eldest girl at home **[REDACTED]** and I was used to looking after my brothers and sisters. My course in residential childcare introduced me to child care theory. When I tried to implement some of the theories **SR 6** said to me 'you are not coming here to introduce any theories to us'. When I tried to apply my training in any way the nuns did not like it and resisted it.
5. One day a boy called **SND 309** took a biscuit from the kitchen and **SR 6** caught him. He was only about 5 or 6 years old. As punishment she made him stand in a corner of the corridor all day. I stood up for him and told **SR 6** not to punish him that way. I told her I would not take the other children to the civic parade that day without **SND 309**. She then conceded and allowed him to go. I started to stand up for myself and to challenge certain practices in the home on occasion.

Staff

6. **SR 14** was there for approximately six months when I worked in Termonbacca. I would describe her as strict and controlling and did everything by the book. I felt that she was not emotionally attached to the children and viewed working in Termonbacca as a profession rather than a vocation. She shouted at the children a lot but I never saw her hit a child.
7. **SR 6** replaced **SR 14**. She had a strong brogue and played the accordion. She was close to her family. **SR 6** appeared to be a get up and go nun when she first arrived. She was full of fun and always smiling but again she was controlling and everything had to be spick and span. She was cross with children and often threatened 'I will give you a kick up the ass'. I did see her kick children on the bum with her boot but this was to move them along

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rather than to hurt them. **SR 6** shouted at children but I never saw her hit a child with her hand or anything else. I sensed from the children that they were uneasy in her company. When she was at prayer, which usually lasted a few hours, I was in charge of the children and they were visibly relaxed and were themselves. I allowed the children in my group to watch TV which **SR 6** would not have allowed. When I did this I always made sure there was one child keeping lookout on the corridor for **SR 6** returning. If she caught the children watching TV she would not have been pleased. When I stayed in the home on a Saturday night I allowed the boys to sit up late and watch Match of the Day. So as to not wake the nuns they had to be as quiet as mice going up to bed. I also used to play football with them and take them down the town. I tried to ensure they had fun as children should have.

8. **SR 2** was in charge of the other group in Termonbacca. I didn't think she was very nice. On one occasion I saw her and **SR 6** talking about people who donated money and were visiting the home saying 'I wish they would go now'. I didn't think she had a nice attitude to people who were trying to help them. She backstabbed people who were good to them and kind to the children. **SR 2** appeared to be the matriarch in Termonbacca. I do know that some of the boys thought that **SR 2** was kind.
9. It was a very regimented life in Termonbacca. Uniforms had to be neat and shoes had to be polished. The nuns were very concerned about portraying a good image to the outside world.
10. Older boys came back to visit the home when I was on duty at weekends. They were often left in charge of children when the nuns were at prayer. The nuns did not seem to have a problem with the boys returning. I recall boys called **SND 4**, **SND 23** and **SND 122** visiting the home. A resident called **SND 33** was in my group and he used to stay by my side when the older boys came to the home. On one occasion **SND 33** took a knife to **SND 4**. When I asked **SND 33** why he did this he said that he did not like him. When I worked in Harberton House a few years later **SND 33** who became a

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resident in Harberton, told me that he had been abused by **SND 4** in Termonbacca. I did not know this when I worked there but looking back on it he did act differently when **SND 4** was around. **SND 33** also told me that **SR 6** **SR 6** didn't like him and that she shouted and roared at him when I wasn't there.

11. There was not enough staff for the ratio of children in Termonbacca. If the nuns had had their way I would have been on duty every night but I had other commitments.

Life in Termonbacca

12. I believe that the nuns got money for each child that came to the home. At Christmas Du Pont sponsored presents for each child. On some occasions the Du Pont worker who donated the present came to the home on Christmas Day to see the children open their gifts. I believe the children kept their presents in their rooms.
13. My duties as a houseparent involved getting the children up around 6.45am and getting them ready for mass. Mass was at 7.30am every morning. After mass I served breakfast in the dining room. When the children went to school I tidied up and did the washing and ironing. Clothes were washed every day. On some occasions I brought children to my family home for the day. I took **HIA 126** and **SND 197** home. At the end of the day they did not want to return to Termonbacca. I found it hard bringing them back. I recall that **HIA 126** felt that **SR 6** wasn't nice to her at times. I think that **SND 197** was a favourite of **SR 6**
14. There was a bad tempered nun in charge of the kitchen. I think her name was **SR 64** The children told me that she had hit them. The food was just alright. It was brought up from the kitchen on a heated trolley and I served the

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food out the hatch in the canteen along with **SND 57**. If a child wanted extras there was no food left to give them.

15. There were a few children in my group that wet the bed. When this happened **SR 6** would have told the child off and made them take the sheets down and put them in the washing machine. I told **SR 6** that bedwetting was a result of feelings of separation and loss which I had learned from my course. She just looked at me and wasn't interested in what I had to say. On occasions I washed children's wet sheets and showed them how to do it so they would not get told off again. When **SR 6** was on holiday I made the children's beds and helped them as much as I could. I couldn't do this while she was there or she would have told me off.
16. Punishments in Termonbacca consisted of children being made to go to bed early, being deprived of things or not being allowed outside to play. The nuns commonly said to children 'I am in charge of you because you have no-one else'. I thought this was a cruel thing to say.
17. Children were made to do chores in the home. These included washing dishes, cleaning the kitchen, hoovering, making beds and cleaning floors. The children had to do chores from a young age.
18. I do not think poverty was the reason why the nuns ran Termonbacca in the way they did. I was of the view that the nuns were money led rather than needs led. One time I was in the convent and the nuns used the best china and had excellent furniture. They didn't eat with the children. They ate in their own dining room and I believe they ate better food than the children.
19. **SND 332** was employed by the nuns as a social worker. I thought it was a good thing that he joined. He had an office of his own and I believe that some of the older boys were close to him.

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20. I had a room in the home when I was staying overnight. One day while I was off duty in my room I heard a child crying at the end of the corridor where the toilets were. I went to see what was going on. Outside the toilets I found **SND 197** **SND 197** with her pants down at her feet. She was about 5 or 6 years old at the time. **HIA 69** came out of the toilets and scarpered. **HIA 69** was about 9 years old at the time. I lifted **SND 197** into my arms and comforted her. She said that **HIA 69** was touching her. I reported this to **SR 6**. I understand that she informed **SND 332**. I believe that **HIA 69** was removed from Termonbacca because of this incident in 1980. I think he was moved to Harberton House.

21. I do not recall any inspections in the home while I was there although children did have social workers and I would have had some involvement with them. I kept a day book which recorded appointments and daily events which involved the children.

22. I believe that **SR 6** had to leave Termonbacca and go to England but I do not know why. I believe complaints may have been made to the Mother General about her. I think she left child care.

HIA 352 (HIA 352)

23. I remember **HIA 352** in Termonbacca however I do not recall the incident which she describes. **SR 6** may have had a stick and she could have threatened children with it. However I never witnessed **SR 6** hit a child whilst I was in Termonbacca.

HIA 69 (HIA 69)

24. I recall **HIA 69** in Termonbacca and being at Shrove during the holidays. I was only there once. However I do not recall the incident which **HIA 69** describes. I would have remembered if I had pulled **SR 6** off him.

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Life after Termonbacca

25. I got increasingly frustrated with the system in Termonbacca. I was young myself, I was only 19 years old. I had learned new theories in child care and the nuns were not interested in my views or implementing my ideas despite my best efforts. The nuns did not seem to want change. As a result I left and got a job in Dublin. When I left I prayed that Termonbacca would be closed down. It wasn't a nice place and it wasn't a good place for children to be brought up. In January [REDACTED] I came back home to Derry and I got a job working as a residential social worker in Harberton House.

26. In Termonbacca the nuns were very into praying and following their own rules. I used to go home and vent my frustration to my mother. I told her 'the nuns are supposed to be with God and I had not seen any proof of that in Termonbacca'. The gentleness, kindness and compassion which the children needed wasn't provided by the nuns. I learned a lot from my time in Termonbacca. I learned how to be a better social worker.

27. I loved the children in Termonbacca. I was young myself. I did the best that I could for the children and I hope they felt they got some love and kindness from me whilst I was there.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed **SND 21**

Dated 25/4/14.