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HIA REF: 162

Witness Name: HIA 162

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 162

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] I lived with my parents and five siblings. They were [REDACTED] I was the second youngest child in the house. My father was previously in the Army and was a strict disciplinarian. After he left the Army, he continued to work and was never unemployed as far as I can remember. My mother also believed in firm discipline in the family home.
2. I was classified as a bad child and considered wild and hyperactive. I could not sit still and was always fidgeting or constantly looking for something to do. Nowadays I would in all probability be labelled as having ADHD but when I was a child people did not know enough about that type of condition. I was frequently slapped because that was felt to be the appropriate way of chastising a child who was seemingly out of control.
3. I appeared in court from I was 10 years of age and this was for offences such as breaking into a shop. I was expelled from my local Grammar school for fighting and also from the Secondary School which I subsequently attended. I appeared before Omagh Court when I was 13 years old and received a Training School Order which was served at St Patrick's Training School in Belfast.

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St Patrick's Training School Belfast

4. I was taken to St Patrick's straight from court on 30th January 1973. One of my older friends had been there previously and told me about pillow fights and other games and it sounded like a good place. I had very strict parents and it seemed like a good place to go compared to my home. It was going to be something different from the life I was used to. He did not tell me about some of the other things which went on at St Patrick's.

5. I absconded from St Patrick's at every opportunity I could. I was there for two years and ten months in total but I believe that during my time there I probably absconded between ten and fifteen times. I used to try to go back to [REDACTED] and would have to hitch lifts. Sometimes even the police would have brought me home thinking I had no way home. There were gangs in St Patrick's and there was a lot of bullying. The Brothers knew what was going on and they watched from the sidelines. They only intervened if things got very serious. I never told my parents what was going on at St Patrick's but just told them that I did not want to go back. My parents held me until one of the Brothers came to collect me and drive me back. On other occasions when I ran away I would hang around in certain areas of Belfast because I knew that the Police were unlikely to come into those areas to look for me due to the political situation at the time. Then I would make my way home to [REDACTED] I knew that if I stayed away from the city centre I had a better chance of not being located.

6. I am aware from news reports that there are allegations of child abuse but in my time at St Patrick's I was molested by some of the older boys but not by the Christian Brothers. A couple of the Brothers did beat me but I was used to that because I was beaten at home and at school because of my hyperactivity. Things did happen that as a young boy I didn't understand at the time. Some of the Brothers would rub themselves up against the boys. At the time we didn't know what this meant. The woodwork teacher used to push up behind us as we bent over the lathe and then laugh it off. He did this to me and I saw him do it to other boys although we didn't speak about it.

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7. The major problem I had during that time was with the IRA. I know that on one occasion the night watchman allowed masked men into the dormitory where I slept in order to give me a punishment beating. There were a number of other boys around when these masked men arrived and there was a mass fight. The masked men then made off because of the commotion. There were never any Brothers around when this was happening. The night-watchmen later told me they would say I was found wandering outside the dormitory. I absconded that night and walked to the house of a boy called [REDACTED]. He was also in St Patrick's but was on a period of home leave. His mother allowed me to stay that night but when I went to bed she phoned the Training School to let them know where I was. I understand that she was only doing what she thought was best for me but I left the next morning as soon as I could.
8. The Training School had a number of boys who had been remanded there due to suspected involvement with paramilitaries. There was a lot of Republican involvement in the school at the time and the Brothers seemed to let them do what they wanted and seemed to support them. I had the impression that they were treated a lot better than people such as myself who were not involved in that type of activity. I am aware that explosives were found in the grounds and I remember that I was arrested with a number of other boys and taken to Fort Mona for interrogation. I had absolutely nothing to do with that sort of thing. The Brothers became very anti-IRA after a while.
9. Two older boys beat me regularly and once they took me to Black Mountain and tortured me for five or six hours. The boys were called **SPT 45** and **SPT 46** who were both from Derry. They made me stand with my hands out holding rocks and hit me. They said that they were from the IRA and that I had been an informer and because of me the uncle of another boy had been interned. It was all nonsense and I do not believe that the boys were actually part of the IRA and were just pretending that they were. I was taken back to St Patrick's that night and was bleeding and bruised. I never received any medical treatment for the injuries I received that day. I remember that later that night the Irish National

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Anthem was played and all the boys stood to attention. A housemaster called **SPT 47** saw this and was very annoyed at the other boys.

10. The sexual abuse which I suffered at the hands of the older boys happened when I was on holidays in Cushendall. Every summer a group of boys would go to this house in Cushendall which was owned by the Brothers. There were six or seven boys sharing a bedroom. I had terrible experiences there because I was small and looked very feminine at that time. I believe that due to this I got more abuse than anyone else. This group of older boys made me give them oral sex and masturbate them every night during my first week there. There were more than four boys in that group. I ran away after this first week and never returned to Cushendall. I believe that the Brothers and the staff must have been aware of what was going on and I would be shocked if they were not.
11. The Brothers always seemed to have their favourite boys and those boys got whatever they wanted. If they did not like the food for example they could get something else that they did like. I did not get that option. The food in general was good and there was always enough. On a Sunday there was always a fry. However if you left any food on your plate you were in trouble and got slapped. Sometimes the Brothers would kick you in the back of the ankle with their big heavy brogue shoes. It was very painful and took a few days to heal. We had some chores to do but these were usually just shining the floors. We were also allowed to smoke which I thought was strange. We also got pocket money to spend in the internal shop.
12. Sometimes I was humiliated in St Patrick's. The toilet paper we were given to use was like tracing paper. Every week the laundry was washed and if there were any marks on my underwear then it was hung on top of the television so that everyone could see. I was the subject of ridicule about this and the other boys called me names throughout my entire time at St Patrick's. I was given my clothes from the clothes store. They weren't clothes I would have chosen but they were fine but normally two sizes too big.

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13. It was so boring in St Patrick's because there was so little to do. I remember that there was an old pool table but it did not have any felt on it. It was just slate and six pockets. There was also a table tennis table that boys could use. Some of the older boys were given power by the Brothers and were able to leave the grounds and look for people who absconded. If they found a boy who had absconded they were allowed to beat him and they were never reprimanded by the Brothers.
14. I went to school for a few hours every day but it was very poor. There was one English composition to be done in each week and there was a prize for the best one. There were no books, no Maths or English lessons and there was never any homework. I remember **BR 87** just sat at the top of the classroom and read the paper. The teachers did not really teach anything and if I complained about the poor standards I was beaten.
15. There were never any birthday cards or presents in St Patrick's. On your birthday the routine was that the boys sang Happy Birthday to you and then you were beaten up. At Christmas and other holiday times I was allowed home.
16. My parents came to see me whenever they could but they lived in [REDACTED] and it was not easy for them to visit all the time. I did not tell my parents what was going on at St Patrick's but I do remember that I made a complaint to one of the Welfare staff. I think she was called **SPT 48** I remember that within an hour of making the complaint I was beaten and taken to the punishment cell. The cells at St Patrick's were the worst cells that I ever experienced. The cell was inside a cupboard and had no windows, just bricks made of glass and a hard bed. There was only a half mattress on the bed and there was no food. I was kept there for three or four days. It was solitary confinement and it did not matter how loud I shouted because no one came to help me.
17. Approximately six months after I made the complaint I was sent to the Borstal in Millisle. I remember that shortly before I went to Millisle I was visited by two Brothers in Crumlin Road Gaol which was a holding centre for boys going to Borstal. I think that it was **BR 20** and **BR 87** The visit took place

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in a cell and was a closed visit with no one else present. I thought that it was strange because I did not think any Brothers would go to visit a boy in jail. The Brothers recommend to the court that you have to leave St Patrick's because they cannot control you so it was odd that they would take the time to visit me.

18. They told me to say nothing about what had been going on at St Patrick's. I felt intimidated by them because there was no one else in the cell. **BR 20** was known to molest children at St Patrick's and I knew about it even though he did not actually abuse me. It was well known throughout St Patrick's what he was doing. I remember **BR 20** was always taking the new smaller boys by the hand. I remember him taking one of the young boys who came from the orphanage called **SPT 49** under his wing, and **BR 20** always seemed to have him by the hand. **BR 46** conducted himself in the same way.

Millisle Borstal

19. Borstal was very violent but there was no sexual abuse to my knowledge. Everyone is beaten on their first day there. I remember a prison officer called Punchy Skillen who ran the laundry. He used to pretend to rub up against you in front of everyone and everyone thought it was funny. One day he hit me over the head with a hammer. It was extremely regimented in Borstal and there were rules for everything. If I did not follow the rules to the letter then I would be beaten by the staff. The prison officers were tough and were always looking for faults in what I was doing or the state of my cell. If there was a problem then I either was beaten or locked up for the day.
20. I also remember an incident at Magilligan which occurred between August and November 1976. I was with a number of other boys and we were listening to the charts show on the radio. A Prison Officer shouted at us to turn the radio off but no one bothered. Around an hour later the riot squad appeared with dogs and forced us back to our compound. I remember that we started to sing the number one song, which was by Suzie Quattro, and the riot squad took us out one by one. We were beaten by the Prison Officers, some of whom were drunk because

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they had a drinking club nearby. We were all taken to the punishment block and kept there until the bruises healed. After we healed, we were brought before the Governor on a charge of rioting but found not guilty. Despite being found not guilty we were tormented for weeks by the Prison Officers. They beat us and gave us extra punishments. Some of the other boys involved were [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from Derry, [REDACTED] from Enniskillen a boy from [REDACTED] Belfast called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] from Belfast

Life after care

21. I was released from Borstal when I was about 18 and I returned to [REDACTED]. I lived by myself for the majority of the time and I was also in and out of prison. I was 26 when I decided to move to England. I then decided to move back to Belfast about 5 years ago. I had a life in England but once the recession hit I lost my home because I could not make the mortgage repayments. I then decided to make a fresh start back in Northern Ireland.
22. I have been married twice but I now live alone and am not in a relationship. I have a daughter who lives in Northern Ireland but I do not see her as much as I would like. I work as a plasterer and am trying my best to get on with my life. It is not easy sometimes because memories come into your head and it can be hard to forget them. I have never received counselling regarding my time in care. I try to think of other things and my motto is to sing Happy Birthday because that normally makes me forget.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

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Dated

3/03/15

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