

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 400

Witness Name: HIA 400

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 400

I, HIA 400 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED].
2. I attended [REDACTED] and was sexually assaulted by a teacher called [REDACTED]. I started missing school to avoid him and became involved with a gang on my estate that was committing petty crime. This behaviour snowballed and escalated into mayhem. I was brought to court for non attendance at school and burglary.

Lisnevin Assessment Unit (26/06/1974 t 24/07/1974)

3. A report was prepared for my court hearing which recommended that I be sent to Lisnevin. I was placed in Lisnevin for assessment for a month. . Apart from being hit around the head a few times I have no complaints to make about Lisnevin. It was a reasonable place with good staff who, for the most part, were caring and compassionate.
4. I was released from Lisnevin on probation and I was involved with burglaries again. I was sent to Rathgael on a Training School Order for one to three years.

HIA 400

PRIVATE

1

PRIVATE

Rathgael Training School, Bangor (05/10/1976 to September 1977)

5. I had a terrible experience in Rathgael at the hands of the other boys. I was a small, skinny child who was vulnerable and weak so I would have been a target for bullies. I experienced lots of unnecessary violence. I was placed in the Assessment Unit and ran away within the first three days of being placed there. When I returned to Rathgael the abuse started again. I was then moved to house 3.

6. I was placed in an eight bed dormitory. There were a couple of bullies in that dorm. I witnessed some horrific things. I remember every night they would make a boy called **RG 70** strip naked and dance on a table. He would be crying and these other bullies would taunt him and throw shoes at him. They made him put his penis on table and they would hit his penis with shoes. I was terrified and sensed that my turn was coming. I knew I was vulnerable and unable to stand up for myself. The worst crime that you could commit in Rathgael was to tout on the other boys so it was too risky to tell any of the staff if you were bullied. I think Rathgael was badly managed and therefore there was no protection for the boys from other boys.

7. There were about twenty boys in the unit and there was a gang of about five or six who ruled the place and everyone was afraid of them. They were like vultures and they used every opportunity to inflict hurt and pain on the more vulnerable boys. They did a thing called "hooding" and there was no way to avoid this. There was a communal room where the boys watched television and when you were sitting on a chair one of them came up behind you and pulled their jumper over your head and held it tightly. The rest of the unit would fly over and punch you and kick you while the jumper was still being held over your head. There was not a day that passed when I didn't either receive or see someone else receive a "hooding", a beating or be spat on. I constantly had split lips and black eyes. There was a staff room off the communal room where the boys were and the staff tended to stay in there and chat so the boys were left on their own with no supervision. Initially the staff asked me what had happened

HIA 400

PRIVATE

2

PRIVATE

but I was too afraid to say because if I had been marked as a squealer my life would have been even more intolerant.

8. There was a bully called **RG 71** who used me as his slave. He would make me run errands for him, clean his shoes and dry his hair after he had washed it. It was humiliating but I would have been beaten if I did not do as he wished.
9. I spent the first couple of months being constantly beaten and covered in bruises. I was released on Christmas parole and I decided I was not going back because I could not face it. I lived on the streets in Bangor for a month or so. I lived in a lock up garage and I lived in a tree house in somebody's garden. I was freezing as it was winter and I was committing crime to survive. I was apprehended for burglary and taken back to Rathgael.
10. When I returned to Rathgael the second time the abuse eventually stopped. The boys who were inflicting the abuse on me were committing crimes and absconding themselves so they were eventually moved to Millisle. Once that core of bullies was moved I was able to establish myself as a stronger character. I had also grown a bit. As a result the last few months that I spent in Rathgael were relatively comfortable
11. As a consequence of my absconding I was not allowed out of the unit. I was not allowed home for visits and I was not allowed to go on an outdoor pursuit excursion to Runkerry with the other boys.
12. I was in the senior school and they tended to focus on employment skills rather than academic subjects. I completed a City and Guilds in motor engineering so every morning I went to the workshop. I would sometimes tell the workshop tutor that I was needed down at house 3. I would sneak out through the forest and go home and play with my friends for the afternoon and then I would sneak back to Rathgael. My house was close to Rathgael.
13. There were the usual recreational facilities that you would expect to find in such an institution such as a television, table tennis and board games. We also had

PRIVATE

sports days and I remember a day when each house had to build a raft and race across the lake on the grounds.

14. The unit was clean, we were well fed and reasonably well looked after. I found the staff in Rathgael reasonable apart from their lack of awareness of what was happening and their inability to manage the bullying. There was no investigation if they saw you with a black eye and accepted your word if you said you got it from falling. I think they were negligent in the care they provided. They provided very little supervision and spent most of their time in the staff room rather than looking after us. You lived in fear if there was a member of staff on duty who spent a lot of time in the staff room as you knew that you had no protection from the bullies during that shift.
15. There was not a lot of interaction between the staff and the boys. There was a points system and the points added up to privileges such as weekend leave. That system did not work well for me as I lost any points I had accumulated when I ran away.
16. When I was in Rathgael I received no visits from social workers. My mum visited me regularly. My father was a chronic alcoholic so he never visited me. I am not sure he was even aware I was in any institution.
17. When I absconded I committed crimes to survive. I was on remand and was returned to Rathgael after each court appearance until I turned seventeen. Once I turned seventeen I was no longer able to stay in a training school so I was remanded to Crumlin Road jail. I was sentenced to six months to two years in borstal.

The Maze (1977)

18. It was common practice to be sent to a closed borstal for the first few months after being committed to borstal. If you proved yourself to the Board they could then move you to an open borstal. When I was committed to borstal there was no purpose built closed borstal so I was sent to the H-blocks. I was in H4 A-wing which was the borstal wing. The other three legs of that block were for regular

HIA 400

PRIVATE

4

PRIVATE

prisoners. I spent three months there. It was severe and not at all like training school.

19. There was a prison officer called [REDACTED] who was an animal. He even encouraged people to call him "the animal". On the first day or two of arriving he called me and another boy into his office. He beat us and threatened us that if we stepped out of line we would get an even worse beating. I think he did that with most of the boys to give them a taste of what would happen. I became quite afraid of him but he never bothered with me after that.
20. We were given "skids" to wear over our shoes which were like two bits of carpet with straps sewn in to them. The prison officers made you slide everywhere when you were wearing the "skids" to keep the floors shiny after they were waxed. Some of the prison officers would slap you around the head if you lifted your feet as they wanted you to slide to keep the floors shiny. I believe they did this to exert power and control over us and as an excuse to hit us around the head.
21. We had regular cell inspections and our cells were expected to be at an immaculate standard. The prison officers would inspect your cell with a high ranking officer and when they came in you had to jump to attention. If there was a speck of dust you risked being beaten. There was a man called [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who was the chief prison officer and he inspected my cell one day. He ran his finger over every ledge and climbed up on things but my cell was immaculate. We were in our cells for hours and hours every day with nothing else to do so they were immaculate. When he couldn't find anything he lifted the chair in my cell, turned it over and removed the rubber stopper at the bottom of the leg. He ran his finger round the inside of the hollow leg and found a speck of dust. He stuck it in my face and asked me what it was. When I replied "dust, Sir" he punched me in the face and knocked me out. There was with another prison officer with him who was a lovely man. I think his name was [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. He clearly disapproved of what [REDACTED] was doing and looked upset by it. He returned to my cell about half an hour after the inspection was

HIA 400

PRIVATE

5

PRIVATE

over and apologised for [REDACTED] behaviour. He gave me half an ounce of tobacco which I thought was a really nice gesture.

22. There was a boy called [REDACTED] who came on to the wing. I think he was involved with the junior wing of the IRA and he had been involved in planting a car bomb which killed a prison officer's niece. He was sentenced to six months to two years and when he was brought on to our wing he was put on a chair in the middle of the corridor and we were put on lock down in our cells. The prison guard whose niece had been killed came over from another wing to beat him up. I could hear the beating and his screams from my cell. The boy was left in a mess and the prison officers came round and warned us all that we did not hear anything or we were next.
23. There was a Board of visitors who came in and asked us how we were being treated and whether we were ok. Before they visited the prison officers would come in to our cells and warn us that if we said anything negative about them we would be beaten to death. The price to pay for saying anything would have been too great so their visits were rendered a farce..
24. The purpose built closed borstal eventually opened behind the open borstal in Millisle and I was moved.

Millisle Borstal (September 1977 to November 1978)

25. I was one of the first people to be resident in the closed borstal and I think we were placed there long before it was ready. There was an error with the catering so we were all starving for the first few weeks. I remember eating my toothpaste as I was so hungry. When the catering was sorted out the portions were adequate. There was no education or workshops established in the early days so we were in 23 hour lock up for almost a month.
26. Our cells were very basic with just a bed, a chair and a urine pot. We were woken up at six in the morning. We had to sit on the chair and we were not allowed to sit or lie on our beds during the day. If the prison officers caught you

HIA 400

PRIVATE

6

PRIVATE

on your bed when they were doing their checks they would put you on report. We were only allowed out of our cells for meals. There was no one to talk to and nothing to do. I found somewhere in my room where I could hid things so I made myself a chess board and made chess pieces out of papers for rolling tobacco. I would chew them and dry them on the radiator. I was able to play chess with myself to pass the time but I was always terrified of being caught.

27. We were made to do "punishment" PE. We were worked so hard that I vomited on one occasion. The prison officers called me all the names of the day for vomiting. I was made to clean it up and go back to the PE immediately after. I also saw other boys vomiting.
28. The boys who had bullied me in Rathgael had ended up in borstal and I was terrified of meeting them again and having to go through what I went through in Rathgael. When I arrived at the closed borstal they had been moved to the open borstal which was a great relief. I then tried to prolong my stay in the closed borstal to avoid those boys. The conditions in the closed borstal were very harsh but it was better for me than facing those boys again. I had to play a difficult game of not behaving well enough to be moved to the open borstal but not behaving so badly that I was beaten or put in solitary confinement in the closed borstal. Most people spend three or four months in the closed borstal but I was there for nine months.
29. One month a group of us were told we were going to the open borstal and the prison officer jokingly said "hands up who doesn't want to go". I put my hand up and said that I did not want to go and that I was not joking. I was marched back to my cell and told that I would go where I was told to go. I knew that if I refused to go I would be put on report and would lose the privilege of going to the open borstal. The following day the Governor called me in to his office to ask me why I did not want to go. I was afraid to tell him about the bullying so I told him that I did not like change. He told me that I did not have a choice in the matter however he was a good man and knew that there was something more to it. He asked me if someone was hurting me. I stuck to my story of not liking change because I thought that if anybody knew that I had been telling tales my life would

HIA 400

PRIVATE

7

PRIVATE

be intolerable. He was called [REDACTED] ML 71 and I had a lot of respect for him. He agreed not to send me that day and told the prison officers in the closed borstal that I was to work in his office every day. I was told not to tell anyone so the other boys were not aware that I was being taken out of my cell every day to go to the Governor's office. After a month or so I finally felt comfortable enough to tell him the real reason why I did not want to go to the open borstal. He said he could guarantee me protection but I told him that with all due respect I doubted whether that protection would work on the ground. He asked what I would do if he forced me to go. I said that I would do whatever damage in the open borstal that was necessary to get me placed back in the closed borstal. He said he thought I was bluffing and I said I wasn't. Thankfully he did not call my bluff and I was left in the closed borstal for another month. I was then told one day to pack my bag as I was being moved to the open borstal. I was terrified and I refused to go. Prior to that a nurse had come in to my room, woke me up and told me to drink a small cup of green liquid. When I asked what it was for she had told me that it would calm me down and that if I didn't drink it she would put me on report. She was obviously trying to medicate me before I was told about the move. I realised that something was about to happen and I refused to take the medicine. When I was told to pack my bags I have never been more frightened in my life. I crouched behind my chair hiding for about an hour. Six prison officers then came in to my cell to physically take me out to the van that took me to the open borstal. During this struggle bits of hair were pulled out of my head, I was punched in the face so hard that my tooth came through my lip. They wrapped my arms around me and carried me out to the van. I remember trying to fight back and trying to bite them. One of the prison officers was called [REDACTED] LN 22 and I remember him repeatedly punching me. When I arrived at the open borstal I was put in a cell and left for a few hours. I was bruised and bleeding and received no medical attention. I was so angry that [REDACTED] ML 71 would do this to me after we had built up a relationship. After I had been left in the cell for a couple of hours I was taken to see [REDACTED] ML 71. When he saw me he asked what had happened as the injuries I had received from the beating were clear to see. I lost my temper with him as I felt so betrayed. He told me he had given the order to move me but he had also told them not to lay a finger on me. I believed him when he said that it had not been his intention for me to get

HIA 400

PRIVATE

8

PRIVATE

hurt. He said that he thought I would settle once I was down in the open borstal and asked me to give it a chance for two weeks. He gave me his word that he would move me back to the closed borstal if the bullying started again. I stayed in the open borstal and I decided that I was not going to let anyone hurt me again. For the first time in my life I started to stand up for myself.

30. I decided to stand up to **RG 71** who was one of the boys who had bullied me in Rathgael. The first time I saw him he was standing in the queue in the dining hall. I was terrified but I walked up to him and jumped the queue in front of him. I was waiting for him to start beating me and I was prepared to fight back but he said he did not want any trouble because he was due for release in six weeks time. I quickly became the dangerous kid who everyone backed away from and I liked that. I was still terrified but I was never beaten up again and the rest of my time in that institution was easier in respect of the other boys.
31. The abuse I received after that was at the hands of the staff. There was a man called Punchy Skillen who was in charge of the laundry. He played a "game" where he would chase you and if he caught you he would pretend to touch you up. If you grabbed his nipple he would freeze and you could escape. Periodically you would be sent to the laundry to get something which was dangerous as he would throw a hammer or a spanner at you as soon as you appeared at the door. He hit a boy with a hammer and split his head open. It was part of his "games" and everyone was afraid of being sent to his laundry room for something as you knew you were going to get something thrown at you or sexually assaulted.
32. We used to play a game called "murder ball". The game consisted of two teams of ten, a medicine ball in the middle and a big mat at each side of the room. The object of the game was for each team to try to get the ball on to the other mat by any means necessary. You were allowed to kick and punch. I liked that game and I thought it was a good way to allow all the boys to get rid of any tension.
33. There was **ML 5** who was a decent man most of the time but he could lose his temper easily. He brought us up to the gym one day to play "murder

PRIVATE

ball" but when we got up there some of the boys decided they wanted to play football instead. I hated football, refused to play and started to walk away. [REDACTED]

ML 5 lost his temper and kicked me in the back as I was walking away. I was knocked down and really hurt. He put me on report for disobedience and told me to go to the Principal's office. I knew that would mean the end of open borstal and my sentence wouldn't be reduced. As I was walking away **ML 5** **ML 5** obviously had second thoughts about putting me on report. He called me back and asked me to do linesman. I refused and he asked me just to stand on the edge and watch. I agreed to stand at the edge of the pitch but I refused to watch. He laughed and said okay. I escaped being put on report and I respected him for that.

34. There was another prison officer called **ML 3**. He was quite good to me and would have given me tobacco and things. I was in the dormitory corridor with him one day and he told me to go in to the Catholic boys' room while they were out and rip up their books. I didn't want to do it but I didn't dare say no to him. Another day in the common room he whispered to me to hit the boy sitting in front of me. I said no and he threatened to put me on report if I didn't do what he wanted. I punched the other boy as I was told and we both started fighting with each other. I think **ML 3** wanted me to do it for his entertainment. We were separated by other prison officers and they put the other boy on report. I always felt guilty about that but I was only trying to survive.

35. There was a prison officer in the open borstal called **ML 4** who made my life unbearable by calling me names and humiliating me in front of the other boys. I used to have a feeling of dread any time he was on duty. He used to bring porn in and share it with some of the boys. Thankfully I was not part of that select group. He would whisper threats in my ear that he would make me a borstal failure by making sure I failed the Board to get out. If you failed three consecutive Boards you would be sent back to the closed borstal to serve your full sentence. One morning he came in to the dining hall at breakfast time and got the attention of the eighty boys there. There was an unwritten rule that you did not go up for seconds and if you did the other boys would make seagull noises. He picked up a sausage and when he had everyone's attention he put it

PRIVATE

on my plate, laughing. I threw it on the floor. He told me to pick it up or he would put me on report. I told him if he put me on report I would tell his boss what he had done to deliberately try to humiliate me. He stormed out of the room and didn't put me on report. From then on he seemed to be out to get me. He constantly called me names and threatened to make me a borstal failure. When I went for my third Board he laughed at me when I was walking out and called me a "borstal failure". I was made a borstal failure but [REDACTED] ML 71 who I had a good relationship with, overturned it. This meant that I was getting out in ten weeks and I was delighted. When I returned to the common room one of the prison officers called [REDACTED] ML 4 made a comment about me going back to closed borstal. I said that I had got my special privileges and was being released in ten weeks. He was furious and threatened to make me a borstal failure before the ten weeks were over. He was unsuccessful and I was released ten weeks later.

36. My account of these experiences is a sample of the abuse I suffered and the things that should never have happened to me. Life was a daily struggle and I lived in fear not knowing what was going to happen to me from one day to the next.

Life After Care

37. In the closed borstal there was a drug education programme which taught us the pros and cons of taking drugs. The programme had the wrong effect on me because I ended up thinking that drugs sounded great and couldn't wait to try them. I had already been a drug user when I was a child taking prescription drugs such as valium and diazepam from my Mum's medicine cabinet. I had my first overdose when I was thirteen. After borstal I consciously sought out street drugs and discovered magic mushrooms. I had no idea about dosages and took 600 of them along with three bottles of cider and cannabis. It took me eleven years to get the voices out of my head. I was asking people to kill me to help me escape from it. I was having panic attacks. I was afraid to leave the house or look in the mirror. It was by far the worst thing that has ever happened to me. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't eat and dropped in weight to nine stone. After about

PRIVATE

nine months I turned to alcohol and sedatives. My life was in turmoil and I was incredibly bitter against authority and society.

38. I was part of a gang of petty criminals in Bangor. When I was in my early twenties one member of this gang started going to an unemployment club in a youth centre. I started to go with him and one of the leaders started to take an interest in me. For the first time in my life I saw that there was more to life than alcohol and drugs. In no time at all I was doing voluntary work and he encouraged me to go to University where I studied Youth Community Work. While I was at University I met a girl who was in my class and we had a child together.
39. Despite my good intentions I was still a drug addict and although I tried to stay clean I would binge from time to time leading to me dropping out of University. My partner also left me and took our baby. This pushed me to try harder to clean up my act. I phoned an alcohol counselling agency. I stopped drinking alcohol but I was still using drugs although the time between drug binges was getting longer and longer. I stabilised myself enough to get back into University and complete my degree. I then got a job [REDACTED] which provided drugs counselling. I felt like a fraud in the beginning because I was using drugs myself. One day I broke down and confided in my boss that I was a drug user. She admitted me to rehab that day. I thought I had committed career suicide by admitting my problems but they held the job open for me to return to once I left rehab. I stayed in that job for sixteen years.
40. I had a few minor relapses in the early days but I have now been sober for twenty seven years and clean of drugs for twenty two years. I have been attending narcotics anonymous regularly since I left rehab. I have made several short films that have been successful and I have had a number of books published.
41. When I went into recovery I tried to get my father to come to alcoholics anonymous with me but he had no interest. I tried to look after him the best I

HIA 400

PRIVATE

12


PRIVATE

could. I cleaned his flat and brought him new clothes. About ten years ago he was found unconscious in his flat. He did not recover and passed away.

42. Part of the 12 step programme I followed involved me making amends with people. Making amends with my mother was a priority because of her loyalty and love for me. The first thing I did was to take her on holiday to Turkey and since then we have developed a wonderful relationship. I have also repaired my relationships with my two brothers.
43. I had another child. My two children are both at university in England. We also have a wonderful relationship.
44. As an outcome of this Inquiry I would like to see a structure in place to prevent abuse happening in the future. I hope genuine lessons are learned and real changes made.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed  _____

Dated 19/APRIL/2015