

HIA REF: 359

Witness Name: HIA359

## THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

## WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA359

HIA359, will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on the [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. I was known as [REDACTED] [REDACTED] when I was born and I changed my name to HIA359 [REDACTED] by deed poll in the [REDACTED]
2. My mother died [REDACTED]. My mother and father were married but my father left after I was born. I had no brothers or sisters. I didn't have any aunts or uncles that I was aware of. I had a grandfather on my mother's side and a step grandmother. My grandfather looked after me and he was very good to me. He died when I was [REDACTED] and my step grandmother didn't want to look after me. I was put into the Good Shepherd Orphanage in Limerick when I was [REDACTED] years old.
3. I think I was about [REDACTED] when I was sent to Good Shepherd in Newry. It is hard to remember my age because I never celebrated my birthdays. I was sent to Newry after being in hospital in Limerick. I had ill-health and heart problems from when I was very young. I was in hospital with rheumatic fever and Saint Vitus Dance. [REDACTED] in the Good Shepherd in Limerick told me they were sending me North because the air was fresher and healthier. That was all I was told and I always wondered why they sent me to Newry. Life was hard

in Limerick. If I wet the bed I was made to put the wet sheet over my head and stand in the fire escape. In the bath or shower we had to wear a gown and we were told not to look up or down and to this day I still have body issues. I didn't work in the laundry when I was in Limerick. I did attend school. I was sad leaving Limerick and confused. I cannot remember exactly how I got to Newry but I do remember a priest, **GSC23** collecting me from Goragwood Train Station in Co. Armagh and he took me to the Good Shepherd in Newry. I think it was in the winter time. I remember feeling cold.

### Good Shepherd Newry **[REDACTED]**

4. I don't remember much about going into the Good Shepherd in Newry. I do remember feeling petrified and scared. It was the most awful lonely feeling. Newry was so far away and I found it difficult to get use to the accents. The Good Shepherd in Newry had a school, a mother and baby home and a laundry. It also had a small farm and a bakery. The nun in charge was called **[REDACTED]**  
**GSC24**
5. There must have been about eighty girls in the Good Shepherd in Newry. Girls like me who came from orphanages and girls that came from the Courts and other Good Shepherd places in the north and south. The girls were all ages. I was the second youngest. There were much older women there too. There was an old lady **GSC25** in her **[REDACTED]** with ulcers over her legs. She would say to us don't go out into the big bad world. She had never been outside the gates. She told us she and her brother were taken away and she didn't know where he was. I remember **GSC25** working in the laundry.
6. The first thing I remember about Newry was **GSC26** teaching in the classroom. I knew her from Limerick. They moved the nuns around quite a lot. I remember the school lessons and sitting at the desks. I was very bad at sums. I got whacked with the ruler across my knuckles once for getting a question wrong. I think I was in the classroom for a while before I was sent to work in the laundry and the bakery. We all wore a uniform. It was a dress made

out of well washed flour bags which were dyed pink. It was tight like a bodice to cover our bust.

7. We would get up at 6am every morning and went to Mass at 7am. After Mass we had breakfast and then had cleaning duties. We would clean the church, corridors or dormitories before class. When I was in the classroom we did embroidery and work in the evenings. The nun's took us to a field beside the Convent to pick potatoes. It was known as the 'Portadown field'. I think the nuns owned it. It was freezing. I remember being on my hands and knees picking the potatoes by hand into a bucket. The farm attached to the field kept a horse, cows and a few chickens. I remember one of the girls had to get up at 5.30am in the morning to go to the farm. I never worked on the farm. I did work in the bakery. When I was on bakery duty and I got up at 5am. They had huge ovens. We made bread. One nun supervised. She wasn't always there, she drifted in and out. I don't know if the bread was sold or if it was for us. We did get bread to eat at meal times.
8. The food was ok. I remember sitting on the benches in the canteen. For breakfast we would have porridge. Dinner was around 12.30pm. They sometimes gave us liver stew for dinner. It was horrible but you would have to sit there until you ate it. We use to push it up our sleeves. They gave us beestings pudding made from cow's milk once and I thought it was scrambled egg. It was awful. Supper was around 7pm. I was always hungry. One time, when I was working in the laundry, I was so hungry I ate a newspaper sitting in the packing room. Several nuns supervised meal times. They would sit in the canteen reading a book. We weren't allowed to talk at meal times and if you were being punished for something you would have to kneel on the floor and eat your food. There was also a penance table where you would have to stand and drink cocoa with no milk or sugar. I remember one time sweets went missing. Everyone was being blamed so as punishment we all got cocoa with no milk or sugar for our breakfast.
9. There were four dormitories in Good Shepherd Newry. They were called A, B, C and D and they were like bungalows. The nuns moved us around quite a lot so I

slept in different dormitories. I believe it was to ensure we didn't form any attachments. They also changed our names and gave us numbers. I was called [REDACTED] and I think my number was 11. The nuns often called you by your number. They told us we weren't allowed to discuss where we came from or our family history. There were a few other girls from the South. There was one girl from Waterford and one girl from Wexford. They were older than me. I think myself and a girl called GSC27 were the youngest in the convent before a girl called GSC28 came from Warrenpoint. We were allowed to talk in the evenings in the TV room but we were only allowed to watch TV on a Saturday night for two hours.

10. The nuns let us dance on a Sunday night in the recreation room. I always danced with GSC27 because she was brilliant at the quick step. However, if the nuns thought you were getting too close they would pull you apart and they would give you a chair and you would have to dance with the chair. I felt like hitting them with the chair.

11. I remember another girl called GSC29 in Good Shepherd Newry. When I had the mumps we shared a room. GSC29 had the freedom to come and go. I will always remember her. I think she may have been in [REDACTED]. She had beautiful red shoes and a tartan skirt. She looked after us sometimes. She was lovely. She would go away to Clifton for months and then come back again. Some girls were allowed to go into Newry. I don't think they worked in Newry. They were just special and sent on messages. I was never allowed to go. I also remember there was a stray dog in Newry and an epileptic girl. The dog would dance around the girl to try and calm her down but the nuns took the dog away. We would laugh because we thought the dog was dancing but the dog must have sensed something was wrong with the girl.

12. I was petrified of one particular girl. She was called GSC31 and she had mental health issues. She would get up in the middle of the night and attack somebody. The nuns would send her to Armagh and she would come back few weeks later and it would happen again. She was very dangerous because she would pick up a knife and swing for you. Everybody in the dormitory was afraid to sleep. All the



The lace got caught on the iron. I got caught and I was whacked over it. I also worked in the packing room in the laundry. I mixed up the packing orders several times and was punished. I always mistook Castleisland for Coalisland and I would mix up the laundry for Banbridge. I liked the packing room because it was smaller and I had contact with some people. I would be stocking the laundry and people came to collect it. I usually had contact with the laundry man who took the laundry in and out. He was called **GSC32**. The laundry came from outside.

17. I remember one time I fell over a bundle of ironing in the packing room by accident. The nuns beat me with a cane on the back of the legs. That was a bad beating. I tried not to cry. If you cried the nuns may have beat you more. The nuns usually hit me on the back of the legs as opposed to my upper body. They would have been conscious of my health at times as I think the nuns in Limerick told them. There was a nun called **GSC30** and she was like a doctor. She was very understanding and kind. I remember she gave me a sweet from her pocket. I think she was moved on.

18. I remember a time I was on an old bicycle which the nuns owned. I had a touch of vertigo and I don't think the breaks were working properly. I couldn't stop the bike and I crashed into one of the nuns by accident. I got beat with a strap and wasn't allowed to watch television as punishment. The emotional abuse was just as bad as the physical beatings. The nuns would have told you were useless one hundred times a day and that nobody wanted you.

19. I remember when the mother and baby home opened in Newry. I remember it being finished and seeing an odd movement. We were kept separate from the mother and baby home. There was a girl who was pregnant. We called her **GSC33**. She was the first one in the mother and baby home. We would see her in Mass every morning. She would sit in the back bench. She then came to the laundry afterwards and there was nothing said about the baby. She wasn't allowed to talk about it. The baby was gone and that was it. She worked in the laundry for a good while.

20. When I was Newry I got my appendix out in Daisy Hill Hospital and was sent to a hospital in Rathfriland. I can't remember what age I was. There was a lovely nurse there that took me under her wing. She would let me accompany her when she was doing her rounds on night duty. I was very fond of her and she said she would love to adopt me. She came to visit me when I came back to Good Shepherd on a Saturday. That lasted a week or two because the nuns stopped me from seeing her. I kept begging them to tell me why. If you wanted to talk to the nuns about anything you had to make an appointment so I made an appointment to see GSC24 and she sent for me. I questioned why I wasn't allowed to see the nurse. I was told her husband was from the Church of Ireland and she was Catholic. It was a mixed marriage so I wasn't allowed any more contact. I will never forgive the nuns for that. It broke my heart.
21. On the 12<sup>th</sup> July we used to pretend to be sick at Mass because we wanted to go out and climb on the roof to see the Orangemen go by. We weren't allowed on the roof but Newry had a flat roof that we could easily climb onto it. The Orangemen would rip off the Good Shepherd gold plate sign and throw it on the railway line every year. I remember one year the Orangemen were going to camp in field that belonged to the convent and we were brought into the Church to pray hard that it would rain on them because the nuns were afraid if they came into the field it would get out of control.
22. There was a swimming pool beside the dormitories. It was made out of cement bricks. We had swimming togs made out of flour bags that were washed and dyed. We were allowed into the swimming pool on a Friday evening but we couldn't swim because there was nobody there to teach you. I didn't like the water. It was dirty.
23. I think somebody checked on me once to see how I was getting on in Newry. The Good Shepherd in Newry was better than Limerick. I remember one Christmas in Limerick when Santa came and brought presents and The Red Cross gave a beautiful presentation. Lots of people came and they got toys, bracelets and lovely cakes were set out for every table but there was nothing left for us. They took everything. The nun's family or parents probably got all the



cake. If you did anything wrong shortly before Santa came you got a whacking down in the playground on Christmas day in Limerick. I don't like Christmas.

24. I got paid £2.50 when I left the Good Shepherd laundry in Newry. When I was seventeen or eighteen I was sent to work [REDACTED]. A Magdalene nun took me down to [REDACTED] to her family home and then put me on a bus to [REDACTED]. She was called [REDACTED] and she was from the Mourne Road, Drimnagh in Co. Dublin. She wore the Magdalene clothes, the black robe and rosary beads. I kept in touch with GSC36 [REDACTED] for a while after I left Newry. She was lovely.

### Life after care

25. I worked in [REDACTED] for two months. It was run by the Sisters of Mercy. I didn't know why I was going to [REDACTED]. I arrived in a pink dress made out of flour bags. I was so embarrassed by my clothing. They must have known where I came from. I was put on the telephone first and now and again I was put in the ambulance to collect a patient.

26. One night I went out to a dancehall called the [REDACTED]. The next morning the Matron said HIA359 [REDACTED] if you think you are going to run round [REDACTED] at night you can pack your bags and go back to the orphanage. I started to cry because I told nobody where I came from and she said it in front of everyone. I wasn't allowed to go out they wanted me to be a good little girl. I was paid in the hospital and waited for my second month's wages and I hopped on a boat at [REDACTED] and went to [REDACTED].

27. On the boat to [REDACTED] I met a family from Kerry. They must have known I was running away. The man with the family bought me breakfast and bought me pineapple juice. It was the first time I had pineapple juice. He minded me on the boat and when we arrived in London we went to the [REDACTED] on [REDACTED]. He got me there and the Agency got me a job in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] a hospital run by the Church of Ireland. The Matron asked me would I



like to start off in PTS. I told her I had no schooling or training. She thought I was clever and I started in PTS. That Christmas was the first time I got a present. She put a beautiful pair of shoes under the tree for me.

28. I then went on the hospital wards and I loved it. However, my heart started to give me trouble again and I left nursing. I got pregnant in England. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I came back to Ireland. I worked in the [REDACTED] in Dublin. I liked it. One day I saw one of the nuns from Limerick and she followed me. She said it was lovely to see me and but I did not want to talk to her.

29. After that I went to work in [REDACTED] It closed and then I went to [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I liked working in the hospitals. I retired in the 1990s. I never got married. I was in a long term relationship. I had no more children. My health is not great now. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

30. To this day I don't like being on my own. If I am on my own I panic. At home I have to have the door open so I can see out. I don't like being locked in or enclosed spaces. I got locked in the dark by the nuns several times and it seems to have stuck with me. Now, when I go to sleep, I like light of some description like a night light or bedroom door open so I don't feel trapped.

31. I still remember being told by the nuns that nobody would have me and I was useless. To this day there are certain places I will not go into. I won't go into Brown Thomas in Dublin because I think I am not good enough to go in there. There are lots of places I won't go. If I look in and see somebody very well dressed I won't go in. I could walk into a room and there could be six women. If I don't like the look of one I would have a fear. There are certain women I can't take to. I don't know why that is.

32. I find I have more contact with Church of Ireland than I do with the Catholic Church. They are nicer and listen to you. I won't go into the Catholic Church if I have to sit at the front. I will go into the Church of Ireland as I don't feel as

judged. I think it's a direct consequence of being told I was useless. When you are told often enough you believe it.

33. I received [REDACTED] under the Redress Scheme in the Republic of Ireland. As part of the process I received counselling and I have now been with my Psychologist [REDACTED] for thirteen years.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed **HIA359** [REDACTED]

Dated 20-12-15