

10 MAR 2016

HIA REF: 421

Witness Name: HIA 421

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 421

I, HIA 421 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on the HIA 421.
2. I have an older brother called LS 17, two younger sisters called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and a younger brother called [REDACTED]. I had an older sister called [REDACTED] who died in 1980. I never knew my father.
3. My mother was very violent and physically abusive. Social Services were involved with my mother before I was born. My siblings and I were treated very badly at home. I remember being burnt and beaten and I was in hospital with broken limbs. My medical records state I weighed 19lb when I was 2 years old and I was in hospital several times with dysentery. My siblings and I were in and out of care several times throughout our childhood.
4. My brother LS 17 and I were taken to Lissue when I was approximately 5 years old. I don't know the particular reason why I was admitted to Lissue. I assume it had something to do with my mother mistreating us at home.

Lissue House (1976)

5. I remember my first day in Lissue. I was brought into a big building with massive doors and a long corridor. At the time I didn't know what Lissue was but it felt like a hospital. I remember the staff ushered **LS 17** and me away while my mother went down the corridor and left us. I cannot remember how long I stayed in Lissue but I do remember it was a horrible place. It was very strict and there was no care or affection from the staff. I remember lots of children crying and screaming all the time. It seemed like nobody cared that the children were unhappy. It was a cold and frightening place. I went into Lissue wearing my normal clothes and I remember wearing odd pyjamas whilst I was in there. I don't know where the clothes came from.
6. I shared a room with **LS 17** at the start. I was frightened by my brother. He had behavioural problems and was really violent. He was always trying to break and smash things, and trying to escape. I remember the staff tied **LS 17** arms in a child's jacket to restrain him. He would kick out and scream hysterically. He would also thump me and take his anger out on me. I don't understand why I wasn't protected from him. I cannot recall how long I shared a room with **LS 17** before I was moved to single room.
7. The staff were very physical and rough. They pulled me by my arms and my hair and trailed me down the stairs. I was shoved, dragged, and thrown into my room and locked in on several occasions. It was an awful place to be in. I saw children being dragged along the floor by their arms into their rooms and being restrained. I found it upsetting because I did not know why I was there. I remember on one occasion a staff member pulled me by my neck. I cannot recall if they were female or male. I cannot recall what the staff looked like. I don't know if it was because I was young or if it's because I was in Lissue for a short time. I just remember the feeling of being scared and wanting to go home.
8. I wet my bed from when I was really young and I constantly wet my bed in Lissue. The staff refused to change my bed sheets. I would be left wearing the same wet underwear for days. It was sore and when I complained about it the

staff would drag me into the bathroom and throw me into the bath. I was bathed in cold water with disinfectant. It smelt like something a cleaner would mop the floors with. I remember my skin was roaring red when they washed and scrubbed me down. It was very sore. After my bath I would be left standing freezing with no towel. This happened frequently because I was a constant bed wetter. I had to sleep on the floor quite a lot when my bed was wet. The sheets were never changed and it smelt appalling. I could not sleep properly and I found it hard to cope during the day because I was so tired.

9. I also found it difficult to eat in Lissue. If I refused to eat my meals the staff would leave the food sitting until it was eaten the next day. It could have been sitting for a day or more. Sometimes when I was so hungry I would eat it. Some of the food did not taste good. I remember getting cereal or toast in the mornings and potatoes for dinner. Morning times were mayhem. I remember children screaming and banging at the table.
10. I remember sitting in a group room where I use to stare out the window. I never interacted or bonded with anyone. The children were not allowed to talk and communication was not encouraged. I cannot recall any specific staff members. I just remember them all as unkind and uncaring. I had no one to talk to about my bed wetting. I had blisters from wetting the bed and I was never given any cream to sooth my sores. I felt I was being locked up in a dungeon because I was strange or because I had upset people or because nobody cared. It was like a nightmare. My mother did not visit me and I don't know how long I was in Lissue for. After Lissue, I just remember living back home with my mother, my brothers and my sisters again.
11. My life went from one extreme to another after I left Lissue. When I was back in my mother's care, we lived in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] on the [REDACTED] Road, where I suffered horrific physical and sexual abuse. My brother **LS 17** was in and out of care and he was sexually abused by Father Brendan Smyth. When he was at home, he and his friends sexually abused me and my sisters. I was approximately 6 or 7 years old when the sexual abuse started. **LS 17** was approximately 8 or 9 years old. My mother also allowed her boyfriends, and married men, to come in

to our home and abuse us. It was really bad. These men sexual abused, beat and urinated on us. [REDACTED] and I suffered severe sexual and psychological abuse. [REDACTED] was the youngest so her abuse was more psychological and physical. I was the oldest so I took the brunt of it to protect my sisters. We couldn't defend ourselves. We use to stay out all night and hide in derelict houses when **LS 17** was home because we knew what was going to happen to us if we stayed at home.

12. After Lissue I went to school at [REDACTED] Primary School. The dinner ladies in [REDACTED] gave me and my sisters extra portions for dinner. They knew we were not being fed at home. The summer times were horrible. There was no food at home. I started selling myself to get money for food. It sounds terrible but I used the money to feed my siblings. I didn't want my sisters and my little brother [REDACTED] to starve. This went on for years. I remember a girl in [REDACTED] Primary School told me the same thing was happening to her so I thought it was acceptable and a normal part of life.

13. There so much cruelty and violence at home. One time **LS 17** threw me into a bath of scalding hot water and I was burnt really badly. My mother sent me to school and my clothes were stuck to the side of my arm with open blisters. My primary school teacher [REDACTED] took me to the school nurse. I was in excruciating pain and my clothes had been stuck to my body for days. I was admitted to the Royal. The Headmaster of [REDACTED] and my mother came to the Royal and the doctor was very concerned as to how I received these burns. My mother said I was messing around and fell into the bath. We had black eyes and missing teeth going to school. **LS 17** pulled out our teeth. He hit us with darts and burnt us with sticks and nothing was done about it. We clearly showed the signs of abuse and nobody did anything. Looking back, I know that sexual abuse was a taboo subject and nobody would have talked about it but the physical abuse was clear for everyone to see. We had several social workers assigned to us over the years but they did nothing.

14. My mother was aware of what was happening to us. She didn't do anything. She was having an incestuous relationship with **LS 17** I talked to my mother

about this one day and she brought me round to [REDACTED] Chapel to Father
 LS 82 I told [REDACTED] LS 82 everything I had said to my mother. I did not
 realise my mother was trying to protect herself. [REDACTED] LS 82 hit me across the
 face and told me to never speak about it again. My mother later had a child to
 LS 17 which was put up for adoption.

15. I asked a priest for help and he took advantage of the situation I was in. [REDACTED]
 LS 83 caught me stealing from [REDACTED] Chapel. I use to steal from the
 money box all the time so my sisters and I could eat. I asked him not to tell my
 mother and I told him about the sexual abuse going on at home. He said he
 would keep it a secret if I would help the ladies at the chapel with the flowers and
 help them tidy up and lift the candles. I attended the chapel for several months
 before I was sexually abused by [REDACTED] LS 83 I felt like it was just another
 man. He started to give me money which I needed to feed my brother and
 sisters. This went on for a few years too. I reported this abuse to the PPS
 recently but [REDACTED] LS 83 has not yet been prosecuted.

16. I did tell my social worker [REDACTED] about what was happening at home. He
 was useless. We had lots of social workers but [REDACTED] was the main one. My
 sisters and I went to visit him several times in [REDACTED] and then
 when he moved to [REDACTED] We clearly had visible physical injuries and we
 would tell him what was happening at home but he kept taking us back home
 and would tell our mother what we said. My mother would then beat us. He knew
 that we were all being physically, mentally and sexually abused and he did
 nothing about it.

17. I went to secondary school in [REDACTED] College for about 6-8 months and got
 expelled. I was then sent to the [REDACTED] School for girls which was run by
 nuns. I remember the head nun, [REDACTED] LS 63 was very violent. She slapped
 my face and pulled me by my hair and caned me several times. I spent most of
 my time in a room beside her office out of the class room. I felt she always
 picked on me. I remember another nun who always walked up and down the
 bathroom watching you when you were in the shower after P.E. We weren't
 allowed to wash properly. If the nun saw you washing your private parts, you

would have got whacked across the back of the legs with a stick so I got use to not washing properly. I kept on running away from school back home which was worse. It got to the stage where my life was a big ball of misery no matter where I went. On year, at the Christmas concert, I was caught messing about with my friends. **LS 63** gave me a big slap in front of all the parents and trailed me down the isle of the Chapel and pulled me outside. I hit her to get away from her. After that incident I was put out of the [REDACTED] School and was sent to the Jaffa Centre on the Cliftonville Road. I was only in the Jaffa Centre for a number of weeks before I was taken into care. I was admitted to Somerton's Children's Home and St. Joseph's Children's Home up the Ravenhill Road beside the Nazareth Nuns and continued to attend the Jaffa Centre. The education part in the Jaffa Centre was excellent and I started to excel. I went on trips and completed 6 City and Guilds qualifications.

Somerton Children's Home

18. My siblings and I were taken into Somerton Children's Home after the abuse at home was finally exposed. A neighbour witnessed my sister [REDACTED] being sexually abused by my brother and it was reported to the police and the army. The army took us to the police station. We were in the police station for ten hours getting medical examinations and interviews. We had to tell the police everything that was happening to us. My sisters and I were brought to the Royal Victoria Hospital for treatment. I remember the doctors brought dolls out and we had to show the doctors what happened to us using the dolls. The doctors were horrified. We were able to tell them we had been badly abused.
19. We were put into Somerton Children's Home for a few days. Somerton Children's Home was brilliant. However, they took my little brother [REDACTED] away without telling me or my sisters. He was only around 3 years old. We didn't see [REDACTED] for a few months. He was our little baby brother. [REDACTED] wasn't sexually abused like me and my sisters but he suffered physical abuse. [REDACTED] was fostered and he was with his foster family for over 20 years. He had a good life. After Somerton my sisters and I were put into St. Joseph's Children's Home. My mother and **LS 17** were convicted with several offences and the Court granted an order placing me and my siblings into full-time care.

St Joseph's Children's Home (1985-1986)

20. I found St. Joseph's difficult because I was put in a unit with young people with all different types of issues and problems. I was just turning approximately 13 or 14 years old. I shared a room with my sisters for a while before we were separated. I use to steal food and hide it under my bed. I was afraid of being hungry again.
21. [REDACTED] was in charge and she was vile. Everybody was frightened of her. She took an instant dislike to me. Due to my previous experiences with nuns I would have played up and made it clear I did not like her either. She was very physical and very strong. She was a bully and would have pinned you against the wall. She dragged me by the hair, pinned me to the ground, and slapped me on several occasions. She would have nipped her nails into me. When she came near me I would have punched out to get away from her. One day she trailed me across two beds by my hair.
22. In St Joseph's there were units for short stays and units for long stays. In between the units there was a centre block and a chapel where the children from Nazareth House would come on a Sunday and we would join them for Mass. We knew the nuns in Nazareth House were very strict. Nobody lived in the centre block. It was just a big building with loads of rooms. The nuns in St Joseph's used it to lock me away sometimes as punishment. They locked me away for days until I apologised for my actions. It was absolutely terrifying being locked in at night when the lights were turned off. I was petrified of the dark and couldn't sleep. St. Joseph's was not the right environment for me. After St. Joseph's I was placed in Sharonmore Children's Home when I was approximately 14 or 15 years old.

Sharonmore Children's Home (dates unknown)

23. When I was in Sharonmore I received counselling from the Rape & Incest Line. I loved Sharonmore because of the people there such as [REDACTED] and my key worker [REDACTED]. They went out of their way to support me and I have a lot of fond memories of Sharonmore. I left when I was 18 and half years old. When I was

in Sharonmore I studied catering through the College of Business Studies. I loved it. I started to put on weight. I was still stealing food. To this day I have an eating problem. I over eat sometimes and when I feel low I cannot eat.

Life After Care

24. I should have been in care since I left Lissue instead of being allowed home where all the abuse was happening. I hold Social Services responsible. I don't know why I was placed in Lissue in the first place. Over the years I have received a lot of my medical records but I find it difficult going through them and reading things about my family and the abuse I suffered. It brings up a lot of bad memories and it has been very damaging and affected my health. The years of abuse has scarred me both mentally and physically. I started to self-harm and I wet the bed right up until I was 18 years old.
25. I had a breakdown several years ago and I was diagnosed with PTSD and clinical depression and anxiety. It just caught up with me one day and I snapped. I rely now on daily medication to keep me level. It stops me from crying and numbs me. I remember going to the Rape & Incest Line counselling service a few times when I was in Sharonmore. The counsellor [REDACTED] was horrible. She asked me if I gave the green light too much to my brother. I attacked her and never went back. I seen her years later and she tried to apologise.
26. I was employed by the [REDACTED] Educational & Library Board. I worked with young people who had been abused and ended up working in [REDACTED] Chapel in [REDACTED] Belfast. It didn't work out because people knew my history and knew what had happened to me. I then went to work for the [REDACTED] Board for 7 or 8 years and loved it. I worked with victims of abuse, helping them and supporting them, and looking for relevant signs. I had been a victim of abuse myself and I could relate to what they were going through. Unfortunately cuts were made and I was made redundant. I haven't worked for about 6 or 7 years. I feel lost. I feel like I need to be out there helping victims again.

27. My first partner was physically abusive towards me. It was acceptable to me. All I was concerned about was keeping my family unit together and that my children were okay. I had three children. I was so protective. I now have two granddaughters and a grandson who I worship. My children saved me. I could have gone through a vicious cycle after going through the system. I have been in a relationship with my current partner for several years. We knew each other from when we were sixteen. We went our separate ways, made mistakes and met up again. He is a decent and caring man.
28. My mother died in 1993. She was beaten to death and found in a house in [REDACTED] Street. When my sisters and I were in St. Joseph's, my mother was in the [REDACTED] Women's Hostel on the [REDACTED] Road. She tried to apologise but too much damage had been done. I did not want to see her. I could not forgive her for all the abuse she let happen. I had no contact with **LS 17** after Sharonmore. I knew he was in and out of Lisnevin and Hydebank and ended up living on the [REDACTED] Road in Belfast.
29. I have a lot of regrets about self-harming. I have scars on my arms and legs but that was how I dealt with the abuse. I don't know how many times I attempted suicide. The last time I attempted suicide it really scared me because I ended up in hospital. If my son hadn't found me I wouldn't be here today. I think about suicide often but then I think about my children and I could not put them through that trauma.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 421

Dated 28/2/2016