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HIA REF: 134

Witness Name **HIA 134**

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF **HIA 134**I, **HIA 134** will say as follows:-Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Belfast.
2. I don't know much about my background. I was placed in St. Joseph's Babies Home when I was three weeks old. I never knew my biological father.
3. I remained there until I was transferred to Nazareth House when I was three.

Nazareth House Belfast (22nd June 1965 – 14th August 1974)

4. I was moved to Nazareth House when I was three and stayed there for nine years until I was twelve. I never felt like I could ask anyone why I was there; there was nobody to ask.
5. My first memory of being in Nazareth House was us all lining up to change our underwear. There would have been about seven or eight rows of us all lined up.
6. My troubles began when **SR 199** came into our group. I must have been about eight or nine years old. We didn't see eye to eye at all and I was always afraid of her. She seemed to have it out for me. I was a bit of an

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oddball in the group. I don't know if that's because I was being financially supported by my stepfather in [REDACTED] which I didn't know at the time. There were times I got dresses and dolls sent to me but they were never given to me. We dared not to question it.

7. There was an older girl in the home called **NHB 76** who sexually molested me. It happened more than one time. She made me smack her and made me touch her breast. She touched my breasts too. After our bath she would dry me but she wasn't drying me right. She made me touch her below the waist. It was tough - I didn't want to do it but she was a big girl and I had to do what she told me. She used to bring us to bed and one night I told my best friend **NHB 103** that **NHB 76** made me feel her bum. All of a sudden the door barged open and **NHB 76** said **HIA 134** get out of bed and stand outside **SR 199** office now". I was never so scared in all my life standing there in the dark.
8. **SR 199** came then and told me to repeat what I had said to **NHB 103** so I did. Of course I was made out to be a liar. **SR 199** said I was just making it up for attention. It was really humiliating. Even when I spoke the truth she didn't believe me. This has affected my faith in the authorities to this day. I went back to bed and cried myself to sleep. I was about eight or nine at the time. That left me feeling really dirty and ashamed. Then telling **SR 199** the truth and not being believed left me devastated.
9. I had chores to do in the home and after this **SR 199** made me do even more. I was in charge of the bathtubs. There were about five or six baths and they were never clean enough because she wouldn't let me use Ajax; she would only let me use carbolic soap. One of the older girls gave me Ajax once and I had the baths sparkling but then I got whacked by **SR 199** for using Ajax. I also had to clean everybody's shoes and this cubby hole where they kept brooms and things. I was scared of the cubby hole because it was so small and dark. It got smaller the further you walked into it. It was really dark but I had to clean it every day. I was only seven or eight years old. **SR 199** was very cold and I felt much neglected in the home.

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10. I used to tap the big girls on the shoulder for attention. I remember one incident when the nuns were asking who scribbled on the wall and nobody would own up. I put my hand up and said I did it even though I hadn't, just for the attention. I got spanked by **SR 199** for this but the abuse from her was generally more mental than physical. I was totally crushed by **SR 199** **SR 199** saying I had made up the story about **NHB 76** I broke my arm in the house but **SR 199** didn't believe me so I went around for three days in pain with a broken arm before they got me a cast. It happened outside. We were playing with a rope with wooden handles and one of the kids pushed me and the rope hit my wrist. It hasn't been right since. There was a doctor who we saw maybe once every four months and he said I had to go to the hospital to get a cast.

11. I went to school onsite in Nazareth House. My education was really poor. I wasn't very good in school; I had problems learning but I was a good little athlete. They should have acknowledged that I needed special care because I had an attention disorder. Now I take medication for attention disorder.

12. The best times were with the sponsors. They were strangers who volunteered their time. They cared about you and made you laugh. We used to go to Christmas parties outside Nazareth House but my name was never on the list of children who were going. I was always left out. Ever since I told on **NHB 76** **SR 199** checked my name off the list for speaking the truth. At Christmas we just got a toothbrush without toothpaste. The nuns never made sure our teeth were cleaned and I had trouble with my teeth as a result.

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always on the
List

13. Summertime was good in the home. If we didn't get anybody to take us out for the summer, we would play skip rope and throw balls against the wall. I was taken out by an old woman once when I was about seven and she was very good to me. I was meant to be taken by a younger couple but I had nits and they didn't want me so they gave me to their mother. I had thousands of creepers all over my eyebrows. Their mother was a lovely woman; she had a heart of gold. She cleaned my hair and spent hours fine combing my hair by

HIA 134 ~~Head even came on my eyebrows~~

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she noticed sores from scratching all the time on my head & took care of them the best she could.

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the fireplace. I remember my teeth were falling out at the time and she made me believe in the tooth fairy. She lived in a beautiful cottage with billy goats and sheep and I got to spend the whole summer there. I can't remember the woman's name – I used to call her 'granny'. It was the best summer of my life to this day. It was like heaven but going back to the home was horrible.

14. My grandfather used to visit me in the home a lot. I remember him being in the waiting room and I would do cartwheels to get his attention. I would hustle him for money and leave the visiting room with a few pennies in my pocket which I'd show off to the other kids the next day in school. I would try to act like an outsider instead of a home girl. You could always tell the girls from the home as we all wore the same sort of clothes. My grandfather sexually abused me in Nazareth House but I kept it a secret or I wouldn't have got the pennies. He would get me to put my knickers down and he wanted me to touch his penis. The nuns weren't physically there when it happened but it was under their supervision. My granny used to visit me as well. I loved my granny and I never told her anything about what my grandfather was doing. My mum's sister [REDACTED] took me to C & A to see Santa Claus once. The nuns put a dirty old jumper on me and when I look at the picture now I think they could have put a clean jumper on me.

15. My mother was living in [REDACTED] the entire time I was in Nazareth House. It was the only home I knew for the first twelve years of my life. My mother married [REDACTED] man and he was supporting me financially while I was in the home. It was her dream for me to go to [REDACTED] and have the whole family together. I later learned that I was supposed to leave Nazareth House when I was about four but then something didn't work out with the paperwork so the nuns kept me for another eight years.

16. There was a boy in the home called [REDACTED] who I fancied. He was in [REDACTED] group and we went into the bathroom together. We were in the last bathtub and he hurt me but I pushed him off before he went any deeper. He was an altar boy. I wouldn't call what happened rape as it was sort of sensual and I was as curious as he was but we shouldn't have been left

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unsupervised. I was only nine or ten years old at the time and [REDACTED] HIA 368 was about twelve or thirteen. He had more control and I knew it wasn't right.

17. When I was about twelve years old, I was told I had a visitor. It turned out to be some woman I had never met claiming to be my mother. I walked into the visiting room and she was sitting there in a pink coat. I didn't walk over to her or give her a hug or anything like that. I was only interested in the bag she had in her hand because I knew there were sweets in it and that's all I wanted. She sat me down and said she was going to take me to [REDACTED]. That was the only time I had a good feeling since staying with the old woman. I just said "you're my mum" and she gave me the bag of sweets.

18. I saw my mother about five times after that with my granny. I had to go and get my passport photos taken and go to the doctor and things like that. I left Nazareth House on 14th August 1974 when I was twelve years old. I went to live in [REDACTED] with my mother and her husband but I brought all the negativity to [REDACTED] with me. I stuffed it all down until I spoke to the Inquiry. It felt good talking about it after all those years.

Life after care

19. My mother and I didn't get along well. She used to say to me "what did they teach you in that school at all, they didn't teach you a thing did they, why don't you shut your legs and sit like a lady?" I only knew her for a year and a half and she was always calling me a cheeky thing. She died of cancer then and I stayed living with her husband, my stepdad for one year. He and I didn't get along either and one day he just said to me "who do you think paid for you through that school – I did and you're not even my daughter". That was crushing.

20. My stepdad didn't want me so I moved in with his brother and then I went to live with my aunt [REDACTED] who was my mother's sister. I stayed with her for a couple of years but then I got suspended and quit school and she didn't want me anymore. When I was seventeen I got my own place and got a job

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labelling sweaters. I have two older half sisters called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and one younger half sister called [REDACTED]. I also have a half brother called [REDACTED]. I became close to [REDACTED] when my mother died - I took her under my wing but we are not in touch anymore. She lives in [REDACTED] and my other sisters live in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

21. I had a hard time of it when I left Nazareth House. I felt so lost. There was no routine and nothing was scheduled. It was like living on another planet. I was missing my chums from Nazareth House. I turned to pot and alcohol to block it all out. I became chemically dependent on crack cocaine and I was in and out of jail. I was modelling for a while but then I got hooked on drugs. I don't know how I survived it all except by the grace of God. I've been clean nine years now and have had a job in a hotel for eight years. I'm finally getting it together now. I've just turned 52. I never married nor had children. I had a boyfriend for nine years but we are no longer together. I didn't like being touched by him and it affected our relationship. He was the second person to show he cared about me after the old woman. I've got my dog [REDACTED] and I love her.

22. The abuse I suffered in Nazareth House has affected me deeply. I haven't really had much sex with a boyfriend as a result of the pain I suffered with [REDACTED] HIA 368. The abuse by [REDACTED] NHB 76 has never left me either. I don't like anybody touching me at all. Nazareth House has most definitely affected my life and has been haunting me to this day.

23. When people talk about their memories from childhood I can't join in and that messes with my head. I get flashbacks too. I don't know why my mother put me in the convent to begin with and why everything was so hush hush. I was the only child she put in there. I have never gotten answers to my questions.

24. The one thing the nuns taught me was faith and that has always stayed with me. I have always had God in my life and I still do. I don't know where I would be without my faith; it has kept me alive to this day.

25. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to the police.

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Statement of Truth

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

Signed

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Dated

12-1-14