

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 257

Witness Name: HIA 257

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 257

I, HIA 257 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] I was abandoned by my birth mother shortly after I was born and placed in an orphanage run by the Sisters of Nazareth in Portadown. This was a baby home and I was later transferred to Nazareth Lodge Nursery.

Nazareth Lodge, 1961 - 1966

2. When I was approximately 18 months I was fostered out by a family named [REDACTED]. The [REDACTED] family were going to adopt me so somehow my surname was changed in the process from [REDACTED] to my new family's surname. I had a social worker assigned to me at the time. Her name was NHB 59. I remember seeing her in [REDACTED] which was [REDACTED] address at the time and she was still about when I was eleven years of age as I had her for my sponsor for my confirmation. Although I visited the [REDACTED] during summer holidays and at weekends, I always had to go back to the convent during term time especially when I started nursery.

PRIVATE

3. A fantastic nun called **SR 71** was extremely kind to me. She taught my class in the nursery. I loved her. She was softly spoken and left such an impression that I when in later life married, invited her and a **SR 45** who was also in charge of me, to my wedding. Also **SR 45** taught my children.

4. In Bethlehem nursery I recall games being organised by staff to keep us children entertained and I also remember going to Ballyhornan for a week on holiday with the nuns. The two staff who were in charge of the two groups were **NL 143** who later became **NL 143** She was in charge of Sr Gonscecas group and also **NHB 24** who was in charge of Sr Anthony's group. Both of these girls were later transferred up to Nazareth House about a year after I left.

5. There was a young boy I remember who slept across from me and he never stopped crying, I remember the staff encountered big problems as he also refused to eat. I now know this was my husband and he was kept in the nursery until he was 7 waiting for his adoption to go through.

6. One day **SR 71** took me to the side and explained that I would have to move up to the big house up the road (Nazareth House) as I was now going to have to go to the primary school. I remember clearly answering her. I told her I would run away if I was forced to move and she knew that I meant it so she promised me that I could walk down with the girls who were going to see their brothers on a Saturday and therefore I could see her. So I agreed to move.

Nazareth House, Belfast, 31st August 1966 – 29th February 1976

7. I think it was on my second visit on a Saturday that I was going down to see **SR 71** and she wasn't there. I remember deliberately kneeling on a bit of glass so that they would have to keep me there, the glass was removed and plastered up but I had to go back to the house.

PRIVATE

8. I remember the cot going out the door in [REDACTED] as [REDACTED] was giving it to another neighbour. I remember the [REDACTED] family who lived across the road and the birthday parties we were invited to in the street. You brought your cup with you to get a drink of lemonade, sang Happy Birthday and away you went. Everytime I was with [REDACTED] whom I thought was my mum, I found it very unsettling going back to the convent. I always had a lot of friends when I returned to the convent as I had a load of sweets but then when the sweets were gone so were my friends. Nazareth House was massive compared to where I had lived before. There must have been more than 50 girls in my group which was called St Anne's and **SR 116** was the nun in charge.
9. When I first went into Nazareth House, we slept in a huge dormitory in iron beds. The house was eventually renovated however and smaller rooms were created. Each group had their own apartment as such. We all got new comfortable beds. The dining rooms were made smaller as well, and at meal times we would just eat with our own group. There was a house mother for every group, who would have supervised us.
10. I remember seeing girls getting hit and I was also smacked myself by Sister **SR 116**. She didn't prowl round with a bamboo cane all day smacking, she only used it when you broke the rules. **HIA 14** slept in the bed facing me. Also a girl called **NL 134** [REDACTED] I remember [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and I remember their names were changed from [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] I was friends with [REDACTED] but I remember her beating me up. In fact I was beat up and abused by other girls until I was able to hold my own, but that was the way things were.
11. One Saturday I had to do adoration with one of the [REDACTED] Sisters. I remember talking to **HIA 134** and when we were finished I remember [REDACTED] telling me to stand outside **SR 116** cell because I was talking during adoration. I remember being filled with fear because I knew it was a punishable offence. I had been standing a while when **SR 116**

PRIVATE

came and she asked me why I was standing at her cell. I said the first thing I could think of and that was that I didn't want to go to the [REDACTED] House that week-end. I remember her being very sweet to me explaining that the [REDACTED] loved me. Shortly after that I was called to the Gate as [REDACTED] had arrived to take me home so I was able to relax until Monday morning. I remember my dad [REDACTED] was getting frustrated with me as I was keeping him late for work. I refused to move on several occasions but eventually we did get to my classroom in Primary 1 and [REDACTED] rapped the door. Sr **SR 116** answered as she taught me and told me to take my seat. Well I had worried for no reason as she didn't seem angry, that was, until later when I asked her to go to the toilet which was next door and she told me to stay there until she came. She walked in with a block of wood from the work bench we had in class and put me across her knee and smacked my bottom with it. I cried a little but I deserved it as I had also lied to cover up what I had done.

12. We hardly seen the nuns. They got us up in the morning and we all knelt at our beds to say the morning offering, The nuns went to mass while we got washed and dressed and then the nun was back to serve breakfast. Then the nun went and had her own breakfast. We were fed very well. I remember porridge and a cooked breakfast. Every tea time the table was set with salt, pepper, vinegar, bowl of sugar, large plate of bread, container of jam and a butter dish with butter and a pot of tea. We had our tea and if we were still hungry we were able to avail of the jam and bread made already available. The nuns would have collected food from Marks and Spencer's in a van, and I remember having chocolate éclairs, large packets of crisps and yoghurts.

13. Everything I did was a competition. I remember [REDACTED] and myself having a race to see who could eat the most bread the quickest. The competitiveness was included in everything. From polished floors to skipping in the garden, to fighting. I did Irish dancing, and the nuns made my dancing costumes. I remember there were violin and accordion classes, and we were part of a choir. We entertained the old people, and sometimes we entertained at events outside the Convent. Some people did ballet. I always wanted to go to elocution classes but I wasn't allowed because I didn't need them. There

PRIVATE

were always activities ongoing and the nuns supported us and encouraged us in whatever we were good at. We got pocket money every week. In the early days we had to spend it in the tuck shop, but later on we were taken out every Saturday. We would go swimming or to the cinema. The nuns would take us to the beach, and **NL 143** would take us on long walks with picnics, or to the museum. Parties were held for us at Christmas and Mackies was one of the biggest. As we got older we were granted a lot more freedom. The older girls could go out to dances, and were given a key to get back into the house.

14. The nuns who looked after the children, **SR 31** **SR 134** **SR 116** all worked as teachers during the day. After school we had to study and we saw the nuns at tea time to serve the food and always grace before and after meals and when we ate our tea the nun went to prayer then their own tea so we didn't see them until after 8pm which by that stage was my bedtime.
15. I think it was when I moved to primary two that **SR 116** was replaced by Sr **SR 45** and **SR 134** by **SR 153** **SR 31** remained through my whole stay at Nazareth. On Friday nights the classrooms had to be polished and dusted. Someone would polish the floors, then we all lined up across the room and had a race on our hands and knees polishing the floor, then someone machined it. On Saturday we were all assigned jobs to clean intensively then we had to check each others hair for nits and we were bathed before lunch. We were never bathed by the nuns and we learnt to undress and dress at the same time, never showing any part of the naked body. There was a large industrial laundry but we were never allowed into it. There were smaller laundries which had twin tub washing machines, and these were the only laundries we were permitted to enter.
- 16 **SR 45** only stayed about a year and was replaced by **SR 199** Up to this point I had still been seeing the **██████████** but then suddenly it all went pear shaped. The home visits to **██████████** house stopped and I sporadically seen her in the parlour which was at the front of the house. When you are a child you don't ask the questions why or how but my name at this time was changed on my clothing from **██████████** to **HIA 257** also about this time I remember

PRIVATE

being in primary three and I couldn't hear what the teacher [REDACTED] was saying. It was like being under water and then all of a sudden the noise was extremely loud. I don't remember having the problem on a one to one basis only in the classroom, also around this time [NL 143] talked me back in from standing on the outside of the window ledge which was at the highest level in the convent. I then recall being sent to psychologists and there was one I visited on the [REDACTED] as I went past the park which I played in close to [REDACTED] house. I remember looking out the window to see if I could see my mum, it was awful.

17. One day it was requested for me to go to the parlour. I was so excited I ran all the way and I remember when I opened the door how disappointed I was to find that it was a priest who had called to see me and not my mum. I remember this priest had sweets and made me sit on his knee. I do remember I felt something around my pants area where now I know he was trying to put his finger but everytime I felt it happen, I jumped up and he became very annoyed for me, I also remember he had tried several times but I wouldn't sit at peace for him and I have just remembered he told me to go and tell another girl that he wanted to see her but I am not sure who it was but I have a sneaking suspicion it was [HIA 195] I believe this priest was Brendan Smith but the pictures I have seen of him on the tv are of an old man that I don't recognise.

18. A time came when I never saw [REDACTED] family at all. I was eight years of age. Although I was a very intelligent child I lost my education and was sent to board at a special school as glue ear went undiagnosed. Because of boredom any devilment and I was in the middle. Eventually I was expelled from being a boarder and eventually expelled from the entire school at the age of 14 but still residing always at the convent throughout. [REDACTED] was the principal. He was a very kind man. I remember looking up an old street directory and finding my mum's address. I wrote a letter to her asking her why she didn't love me anymore and I asked the secretary to post it for me. I was called to the principal's office and [REDACTED] had the letter in his hand. He explained that it wasn't a good idea to send a letter as I might bring back

PRIVATE

all the hurt of the past but I know it was him who organised staff to take me out at weekends to their own houses and although there was never any name added to the presents which would be waiting for me to start a new term after Christmas, I know they came from him and his children. He was a good man who was forced due to my behaviour to cane me. He told me once that he had been advised that there was no need for me to be in a special school but that the alternative was to send me to Scotland, and that's why he had accepted me into the school.

19. The children who went to this school had learning difficulties. Most of the children leaving at the age of 16 went to work in factories, well there was no way I was going in that direction and I remember being asked what I wanted to do and I replied a secretary. It was organised that some of pupils went for two periods of typing every week and I was like a duck to water, a pure natural. Again this was all organised by him and his staff. Looking back now I can see that God was good as he sent me a lot of angels to help me, Nuns who were nice to me, a secretary who bought me sweets, staff in the convent and in school who took me for breaks to their own homes, I just thought all these people were just feeling sorry for me as I pitied myself.

20. When I was twelve and about the same time I was expelled from boarding at the school, a social worker named [REDACTED] came to see me and asked me why I was misbehaving and was there anything she could do for me. I told her I wanted to know whether my birth mother was alive or dead, when I was fourteen about the time I was learning to type, she came back with an album of a family. All the information went over my head, all I heard was that my real mother was going to see me.

21. I remember **SR 199** walking me up to the parlour, knocked the door, opened it and explained **HIA 257** this is your mother, then she closed the door and I was left with this complete stranger. I was approximately thirteen or fourteen years at the time. When she opened her mouth, I wanted the floor to swallow me up, this wasn't the woman I had been expecting, even though I had seen photos of her, in my mind It was some fairy God mother who was

PRIVATE

going to take me home. My birth mother explained that she would take me up to her house the following Sunday but when Sunday came, it was a young girl who arrived to get me and her father was waiting in the car. Once again left with strangers, a horrible sensation. I met the two boys who had no idea as to who I was. The following week [REDACTED] my birth mothers husband came for me on his own. He drove me up the old [REDACTED] lane and explained that it wasn't fair to have two woman in the house and only share one and proceeded saying that I would have to sleep in the same bed as him and my mother. I told him that would be fine and he replied that he was pleased that I was broad minded. I had imagined it was him, my mother and then me in the bed but when the time came after I had got into my half sisters bed I was called and when I told him he would have to waken up my mother to tell her to move over he patted the other side of the bed as he was in the middle and said you are sleeping here tonight. I told him no and he replied if I didn't do what he told me I would never see my family again so at that I got into bed. I was awake for most of the night as I was very frightened and I slept on my stomach.

22. When I got back to the convent, I told [REDACTED] to promise not to say a word and told her all what had happened. Obviously she had sense and spoke to **SR 199** who proceeded to ask me if I was making it up? [REDACTED] was called back and it was decided that I wouldn't stay overnight again with my family but I was allowed to see them during the day and I will never forget the hurt I experienced when my birth mother asked me to tell the nun that I had lied about [REDACTED] My half sister had been abused by her father for years. When I had my own flat years later she stayed with me.

Good Shepherd, Belfast, 1976

23. Good Shepherd wasn't a children's home. It was a hostel. The nun in charge was **SR 196** whom I really didn't like. I was still going to the school from there. On one occasion there was a parade going up the Falls Road. I found [REDACTED] address and visited her. She was shocked to see me. We

PRIVATE

maintained contact but we had a stormy relationship, because I wasn't used to the normal happenings of family life.

Terrace Hill Children's Home, 1976 - 1978

24. Eventually I was put into Terrace Hill Children's Home which was run by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They were a very nice couple. I was allowed to stay longer than I should have been because I was happy there.

Life after care

25. After Terrace Hill, I asked to be put into a halfway house, because I thought that this would assist me in getting used to life outside the home. I was raped whilst still under the care of Social Services although I did not advise them of what had happened. I was also raped on a subsequent occasion. I believe that I was drugged on both occasions.

26. The hardest bit about leaving care was being on my own. I went to the tech and then was able to get administrative jobs. When I applied for my first job I was asked what crime I had committed in order for me to be in a children's home. On one occasion, I recall money was stolen from the workplace, and the manager automatically presumed it was me because I was an orphan. As orphans we were never expected to succeed, we were always classed as second class citizens. There was corporal punishment everywhere but the mental torture that social services could have saved me from if they had of done their homework properly is immense. The other torture in my life is the stigma that I suffered from going to a special school. I have always tried to cover that aspect of my background.

27. I do not blame the nuns for what happened to me. Everywhere you go in life, there are good people and there are bad people. I believe that the nuns tried their best for me. There were children who lived at home with their parents but were worse off than ourselves. I don't believe the government supported any of us in anyway, and I don't agree with the decisions that were made on

PRIVATE

my life. The fact that I always had a social worker makes matters worse as I should never have been introduced to a family and lead to believe that they were my kin for 8 years of my life. The trauma going to and from the convent was intense and then being taken off the family without any explanations was the worst thing possible to put a child through. Then to loose my education. I never got to do science, biology, chemistry. I long to get the opportunity still but there are no such courses and I can't turn back the clock.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 257

Dated

29/7/16

1968

Reg. No

at 14753.

[REDACTED] HIA 257 [REDACTED]

Admitted 31. 8. 1960.

from St. Joseph's Babies' Home.

HIA 257 is a very disturbed child who is having psychiatric treatment. Before coming to Mananeth House HIA 257 had been fostered by [REDACTED]. This arrangement proved unsatisfactory, as [REDACTED] felt unable to cope with HIA 257 tantrums. Finally the latter was re-admitted to care.

[REDACTED]