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HIA REF: 224

Witness Name: HIA 224

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 224

I, HIA 224 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] My mother's name was [REDACTED] and she was from [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. When she found out she was pregnant, she went to stay with her sister who was living in [REDACTED] because it was really taboo [REDACTED] to be an unmarried mother.

Nazareth House, Belfast, [REDACTED]

2. I believe I was admitted to St Joseph's Baby Home on 8th March 1949. The records would suggest I was admitted to Nazareth House on 6th July 1951, where I remained until I was sixteen years of age.
3. We stayed in a big dormitory. There were four groups initially, and then three. Each group had children of different ages. I was in St Anne's group and Sister SR 116 was in charge of the group. She had her own cell in our dormitory. She would have put us to bed and got us up in the morning.
4. Most mornings we were woken very early. We had to get washed and then go to Mass. We would be half asleep during Mass. After that we had breakfast. I

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can't recall what the food was like for breakfast. After breakfast we all had chores to do. We had to wash and scrub the floors on our hands and knees. There was a big passage that we had to clean. After breakfast we went to school.

5. We went to the primary school which was in the grounds of Nazareth House, and I was taught by **SR 189** I recall on one occasion I had to read out loud, but I couldn't pronounce a word. The nun was so cross at me. That had a big impact on me. I always felt inferior then when I was made to read out loud. I was terrible at maths. I would have liked to have learned more.
6. When I reached secondary school age, I transferred to St Monica's, where **SR 192** was the principal. I believe she was from a different Order of nuns. It was quite sad because there were so many of us and most of us were all put in class 1F, which was the lowest class. We called classes A, B and C the commercial classes. They were the top classes and the girls would have been taught short hand. The nuns clearly saw potential in them. I went from 1F, to 2F and the next year I was moved to 3D so I was quite chuffed, but I still would have loved to learn more. I liked St Monica's and felt that I was treated okay.
7. We used to wear dresses in the summer and a jumper and skirt in the winter. We had to wear aprons over our clothes to keep them clean. The nuns didn't even like us getting our aprons dirty, never mind our clothes. We were expected to keep ourselves clean and tidy. We had to show our knickers to the nuns. We were all lined up. If we had had an accident, then we were humiliated. I remember we were bathed once or twice a week and the nuns would put Jeyes fluid in the bath water. We always said it was very smarty because it would make our skin sting. We had to queue up and wait for our turn to get in the bath. The same water was used over and over again and it was always cold. We had to wash our hair with carbolic soap.
8. We had to say Grace before we ate and we had to be quiet when we were eating. I remember having bread, butter and jam for afternoon tea. We had

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stew, which I loved. We had fish on a Friday. I remember feeling hungry, particularly as we got older because we still got the same amount of food. I recall a girl called **HIA 430** asked the nun for more food, and the nun went bananas. She brought out a wrapped loaf. It was our first time seeing a loaf in its wrapping. She plonked it down in front of **HIA 430** and was saying sarcastically to **HIA 430** "you want more, there you are". Then she took the loaf back. We used to scramble to get the heel of the bread because it was bigger.

9. We dreaded being punished, and I hated witnessing punishments. The girls who were punished most seemed to be the ones who were quite brave, and outspoken. **SR 116** liked to hit us on the knuckles with a ruler but she would stop if we cried straight away. I think there was a lot that went on that we didn't witness. There was an atmosphere of fear in the home, and we would just see children crying, as if something had happened to them. Some of the children in the home had siblings, and sometimes it seemed as if they were treated a bit better because their siblings would have stuck up for them. Some girls definitely had it worse than others.
10. I recall an older nun, **SR 198** slapping me on my wrist with a ruler or a cane. It was really sore and **SR 134** had to grab her and pull her away from me. I always liked **SR 134** after that incident. She was my favourite nun. She was quite strict with other children but she was kind to me. The nuns had their favourites for some reason. If the nuns were cruel to me, I sometimes wondered if they knew something about my background that I didn't, because they always made me feel inferior. **SR 31** in particular picked on me for small things. If I was just sitting down, she would tell me to straighten up.
11. We used to have to say the decades of the Rosary out loud. There was one girl, **NHB 51** who was generally a very nice girl, but I recall on one occasion, she must have been having a bad day, and when the nun picked on her to say the decade, she refused. We all witnessed her being slapped on the hands with a ruler.

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12. We used to go out to the garden, where we made our own entertainment. We had swings and climbing frames. There were two sisters, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who came to us "late", as they weren't in the home from an early age. They were able to show us games we could play. We loved the parade going by on 12th July although we didn't understand what it meant. We used to climb up the climbing frames to have a look at what was going on. I remember playing Cowboys & Indians on one occasion, and I was tied to the climbing frame. I must have fainted in all the excitement and I woke up in bed with a bloody nose. The times spent in the garden playing our wee games were the good times.
13. I remember that we would have seen a doctor, [REDACTED] and a dentist, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. The nuns would have taken us up to see Dr [REDACTED], or he would come into the home. He was very kind. I found out my real name was [REDACTED] HIA 224 through the doctor, when he called me my full name on one occasion.
14. We had wee breaks out of the home but I can't recall where we were taken to. We would call them a taxi party because we were picked up in a taxi. There were parties at Christmas. We used to get wee gifts at Christmas, like a pen set or bath cubes, but we only had them a short time and then we wouldn't see them again. We also would have celebrated the feast days of the saints whom the nuns were named after.
15. One of the girls asked a nun when her birthday was and the nun replied February, so this girl thought that her birthday was the entire month of February. I don't recall ever having a birthday party or celebrating anyone's birthday in any way, even singing to them.
16. I had no visitors the entire time I was at Nazareth House. My mother never came to see me. On one occasion I remember seeing a document with my mother's name on it. I saw that her first name began with an [REDACTED] but I couldn't read it properly. When the time came to pick my Confirmation name, I tried to pick something close and chose the name [REDACTED].

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17. When we reached a certain age we would get together and we used to wonder about ourselves and start asking questions. We went to Fermanagh House, to get our birth certificates when we were aged about fifteen years. That was the first time that I found out my mother's name and it turned out that the nuns had the wrong birth date for me for years.
18. I left St Monica's at the age of fifteen years but I stayed on in Nazareth House for another year. I then got a live-in job looking after two children while the mother went to work. This lasted for a few months, until the mother fell pregnant again and she became a housewife. After that I went to St Joseph's Baby Home to work. I was training to be a child's nurse. That didn't work out because I couldn't survive. I was only getting £15 a month and somebody told me I would get more money if I went to England.

Life after care

19. I left Nazareth House just before my seventeenth birthday. In 1968 I moved to London with another girl, [REDACTED] I found accommodation and I worked in a factory. I met up with another girl from the home, **HIA 223** **HIA 223** I was in London for about thirty years, from 1968 until 2001. I came back to Ireland mainly because **HIA 223** wanted to. She always wanted to come back to Ireland. We share a flat together now.
20. When I was about nine or ten years of age, somebody told me that I had a brother in the Lodge. We had the same surname and it turned out that we were cousins. **HIA 308** was shipped to Australia when he was eight, but I wasn't aware. We found each other, and we met in 1977. We decided to search for our mothers as they were sisters. I found my mother that same year, when I was twenty-eight years of age. She was a nervous wreck, as was I, when we met each other. She had another daughter after me, and then after she got married, she had more kids, eleven in total including me. I understand that a few of them went into care. I met a few of my half-siblings but we don't really keep in touch. They have their own lives and kids.

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21. My mother passed away about six years ago. We didn't really manage to develop a close relationship. She asked me once did I want to know about my father, but I didn't want to go any further. I felt that it was enough trying to find my mother. I didn't want to pressure her and cause her any awkwardness so I don't know anything about him.
22. I believe that my time in the home has affected me in later life. There is quite a lot that I have blocked out from my mind because I don't want to remember. There wasn't much love in the home. We only had each other. It has made it difficult for me to show affection and get close to people. I was too frightened to have children because I didn't want history to repeat itself. I would have loved to have had a better education.
23. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to police.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed **HIA 224** _____

Dated 4 . 7 . 14 _____

5. With regard to paragraph 8, the food was always the best standard we could provide. In the interests of the child, the Sisters would encourage them to eat the meals provided as there may not have been another option. The Sisters deeply regret that any child went hungry under their care.
6. With regard to paragraphs 9 & 11, the physical chastisement discussed by **HIA 224** is not accepted by the Congregation as a tolerable approach in dealing with children. However, corporal punishment did exist and was widely used in society. With regret, the Sisters believe that the policy of 'no physical punishment' was not adhered to.
7. With regard to paragraphs 12 & 14, the congregation are pleased that **HIA 224** recalls the fun times the children had playing together and remembered the outings with the Sisters. The Sisters tried to provide fun and happiness within the home, although parties and outings have not always been remembered by former residents.
8. With regard to paragraph 13, the children would have been seen by the doctor for any illnesses or vaccinations. Many of the sisters were trained nurses therefore it was appropriate for these sisters to assist a sick child if necessary.
9. With regard to paragraph 17, the Sisters apologise if they hold the wrong date of birth for **HIA 224**. We would have completed records based on the information we were given and we may have made an error in the recording of this information.
10. The Congregation have always endeavoured to provide a safe and loving home for children and we offer **HIA 224** an unreserved and sincere apology for any treatment she received by any Sister which fell below the acceptable standard.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed *Sr Brenda McBall*

Dated *23 December 2014*