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HIA REF: 375

Witness Name: HIA 375

**THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 375**

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I, **HIA 375** will say as follows:-**Personal details**

1. I was born **HIA 375** on the [REDACTED] in Belfast. I had two older sisters, an older brother and a younger brother.
2. My mother had mental health problems and my father struggled to cope. I later learned that **SR 207** Head Teacher of my primary school St. Vincent's, reported my family to Social Services. Our attendance was not good and we would be sent without breakfast. Eventually we were all sent into care.

**Nazareth Lodge [REDACTED] (readmitted [REDACTED])**

3. I remember the day we went into the home. I was very excited because I had been told that we were all going to a big, big house. We all got a bus from the City Hall in Belfast and arrived at a big dark building. When we went in to the building it smelled of mould, there were two big benches sitting in the hall where we were told to sit. Mummy and daddy left us on those benches and we were never told why they were going without us.

PRIVATE

4. On the first night in the home the elastic in my knickers broke and I remember being upset because I couldn't hold them up.
5. I remember we were given some hot milk and put into a horrible dormitory. A nun slept in the corner in a box like structure. We weren't allowed to have a pillow and they locked the door to the dormitory at night. I realised then that I was staying there but no one ever told us why we were there. This was a very frightening experience for me.
6. There was never a feeling of love from the nuns. The only feeling I ever remember was that of being petrified.
7. I was a much neglected child and this would have been obvious from my appearance. I was thrown to the sidelines by the Home. The teachers at my Primary School, St. Joseph's, should have noticed this and reported to Nazareth Lodge that I had not settled. I was small for my age, although I was aged four I might only have looked three. I was forced to eat and I remember feeling sick because I was made to eat porridge and drink hot milk. To this day I can't have either. Sometimes my sister would eat my food for me because the rule was that we had to clear our plates. She didn't want me to get into trouble so she tried to help whatever way she could.
8. I went to St Joseph's Primary School beside Nazareth Lodge. In school I was very timid and I didn't speak. I remember being put in a classroom with lots of kids and I couldn't stop crying. I cried so much that they eventually put me in a corner with a big divide so I was behind it. Nobody ever came near me because the teacher shouted at them to stay away. They never asked if I was alright. I remember the teacher shouting for me to stop but I couldn't. The only way they pacified me was to put me in the bigger class with my sister. This settled me because I felt so alone in P1 class. I still get flashbacks from time to time sitting behind the divide in the book corner.

## PRIVATE

9. My sister was in Primary Five and I just sat and cuddled her all the time. She didn't learn and I didn't learn. I don't recall ever lifting a pencil. I always felt a sense of rejection be it in the home or in the school.
10. On the way to and from school we had to pass the Nursery. My wee brother was in the Nursery and I pined for him. I wanted to see him but we were never allowed to be together. I could see him playing outside and wanted to be near him. I would have done anything to get out of P1.
11. The nuns did not have any child care skills or understanding of children. They did not know how to show us love or comfort us. I found out in later years that they were being paid to care for us. I am still angry with Social Services as it was their duty to make sure our physical, emotional and educational needs were being met by the Sisters of Nazareth but they didn't do this.
12. The care worker in charge of my group in Nazareth Lodge was called NL 155 I don't know how she ever came to work with children. I can only describe her as an animal who should never have been allowed to work with children. We were petrified of her. I don't recall playing very much in the home. We just sat and watched TV afraid to move from our chairs. I always felt frightened and to this day I am still frightened of authority.
13. NL 155 was a very lazy woman. I recall an occasion when a fruit man came into the home. He had a big box of fruit and we all jumped up to greet him. She was ever so nice to him and when he left she made us get down and polish the floors before we would get any of the fruit. She said to us, "You are not getting any fruit until you polish that floor."
14. The routine in the home was very strict. We were like robots. We were afraid to speak and we were told where to sit and what to do. We had to make our beds and stand until they were inspected. I remember being sick all the time and nobody comforting me. I always felt nervous and anxious and as a result I soiled myself a lot. I have suffered with IBS all of my life and I believe it is as a result of the conditions in the home.

PRIVATE

15. I remember one night I woke up and needed to go to the toilet. The door to the bedroom was locked so I could not get out. I soiled myself and sat on the bed all night. I must have found some clean pants somewhere because I left my soiled pants on the bathroom floor. I remember being afraid of [NL 155] in case she found out what I had done. I had nobody to turn to. Later, I was watching TV with some other children when [NL 155] came in yelling my name. She said "What did I see up in them toilets? What did I see? What did you do? Did you go and poo yourself again?" She made me get up and go clean my pants. I was so small I could not even reach the sink I remember crying and feeling distressed as I could not get them cleaned. My big sister looked after me that day, she pretended she needed to go to the toilet and came in after me. She came into the bathroom and I was crying my eyes out. She washed me, my pants and gave me a hug telling me not to tell [NL 155] what she had done.

16. As a result of this I stopped going to the toilet and left myself constipated. I constantly had stomach upsets. To this day I cannot use anybody else's toilet. I believe this is because of the way I was treated by [NL 155] in Nazareth House. I don't remember ever seeing a doctor for my tummy problems. All I got told to do was put my head between my knees and to be quiet. We never got any comfort. I relied on my sister who was a mother figure I never wanted to be away from her she was my only contact of feeling belonged.

17. In the last six months I have been having nightmares. I wake up saying "Stop stop, get off me, leave me alone" and "Mummy! Mummy!" It is so loud that I nearly take the roof off the house. My two sons have been staying with me and have witnessed this as have some of my friends when we have been on a night away together. I am unsure what it is but the last few months have been very stressful and I feel difficult, unresolved issues may be coming to the surface.

18. The dormitories were always dark and you weren't allowed to share with anyone. I really needed to be close beside my big sister as I shared a bed at

## PRIVATE

home with her. I was always frightened and missed my parents. My bed was not beside any of my sisters so I just lay and cried on my own quietly. I still have a fear of the dark because we were never allowed any lights on.

19. My parents would have sent wee presents up to us. It was their way of showing love, but we didn't get to keep them. On one occasion we were told to put them in our lockers but they disappeared. The other children did not take them or we would have known.

20. Mummy and Daddy were allowed to come up and see us. It was bitter sweet as it was great to see them but also very painful. We would sit at a big mahogany table similar to a board table and my sisters and brothers would be there as well but nothing was ever explained to us. We didn't understand why we were there.

21. My mummy was very bad with her nerves and depression although she loved her boys she found it very hard to love her girls. One day Mummy found out that **NL 155** had cut my sister's curly hair. Mummy attacked **NL 155** so Mummy was put out of the home. Due to her nerves we had witnessed a lot of violence at home and became very nervous children. The Sisters would have been informed about this and should have known we came from that environment.

22. On one visit my parents were taking my brother home and leaving us in the home. We were there when they were leaving and I started screaming out for my mummy and daddy to take me with them. I was so disturbed I had to be restrained by two nuns and I kicked out at them really hard. **NL 155** lifted me and said your mummy and daddy don't want you anymore because you cry all the time. In later years my sister told me that I had to be sedated that day. It turned out that my brother was not part of the Court Order and was allowed home but as a small child I was told nothing and nothing was explained to me. I thought that my parents didn't want me and I remember feeling very scared being left behind in that horrible place.

23. Bath time was very stressful. We were lined up naked, like robots. Clothes were trailed off us and we stepped into a shower like basin where we were

## PRIVATE

washed very roughly. There was no concern for our dignity. The nuns were involved in washing us. It was bedlam.

24. During my time in Nazareth Lodge there were refugees brought into the home because it was the time of the Troubles. The children lived at one side and the refugees at another. They may have been travellers but we were not allowed near them.

25. I believe we were in the home on many separate occasions but according to the records we were there on two separate occasions. I don't think this is correct because of confusion over our ages at the different times we were in and out of the home. We were sent home at Christmas time and although sometimes it was no better, there was a sense of belonging. I am still frightened of authority due to the regime in the home and being in Court.

26. When at home I was sent to St Vincent's School where I had a lovely teacher called Miss [REDACTED]. She was so gentle and there was a complete difference between her and the way I was treated in St. Joseph's. Each time I went to Nazareth Lodge I was put back into Primary One again and this impacted on my education. The children in my street at home knew this and they kept calling me stupid. I left school in Primary Five so I missed out on my education in Primary Six and Seven. I was made to sit the 11 Plus Exam knowing that I was going to fail. The same Order ran my High School and Primary School yet I never received any extra help or support despite them knowing I needed extra help and alerting the authorities regarding our home life.

27. I have no memory of social workers coming to Nazareth Lodge but I do recall them coming to the family home a number of times. I have no recollection of any Inspectors ever visiting the home. I do recall being dressed up on occasions when there may have been visitors.

28. I don't recall being hit in the home but I know that the bigger girls did get hit. They may have taken the beatings for the younger girls. I recall the rejection and emotional trauma. I was always made to feel stupid and it's only now that

PRIVATE

I realise I am not. I wore glasses and was always falling over. I have scars on my forehead and to this day I have no recollection of how I got them. When I asked my parents they said I must have fallen.

### Life after Care

29. I have forgiven my mother. She was very ill and did not have the support she needed.

30. I am still very vulnerable and have only recently started to assert myself. It has taken a lot of hard work to do so. I had a job interview six months ago and there were three panel members conducting the interview. I had to sit opposite them around this big mahogany table and it brought back all the terrible memories of the home. That day I was a child back in the home. I was so frightened I was shaking and could not speak. I left the interview that day and all the frightening memories from the home tormented me for days after that, especially the memory of the visiting room, and the big table.

31. My sisters and I have since visited Nazareth Lodge but it had been demolished. I spoke to a **SR 2** to try and get some information about our time in care and to know how long we were there.

32. I went back to college and completed GCSE's and I have two foundation degrees. However, it was very difficult for me as I struggled and I found all the work very challenging. I always felt that I was not good enough or smart enough and that I would fail everything. I suffered with panic attacks and anxiety every time I had to sit an exam. Weeks before an exam I couldn't sleep or eat and was always on edge worrying about sitting the exam. I felt at times it was too overwhelming for me and I was thinking of giving it all up as I felt that I would never be able to get through it all. To get through the exams I had a ritual that I would do before every exam. I would find out where the exam was being held, I would then go to the room or hall and familiarise myself with everything around me, for example, the floor, the ceiling, pictures, doors and smells. I would then pick a seat and sit down and look at everything again.

## PRIVATE

This process would take ages as I would keep trying seats until I would find a seat somewhere in the room that I would feel safe in to sit my exam. In the end I always sat in the front seat beside the nearest door and the fact that I couldn't see anyone while sitting the exam, helped to alleviate my fears of the room. I had a real sense of fear of buildings and especially courts, schools or anything that was associated with education. I did this for every exam and my studies lasted for seven years.

33. I was accepted into Queens University to do a Social Work degree but I deferred entry for one year due to the fear of going to a university. When the year was up and I was to start Queens I was unable to do so as I knew I would struggle to cope with the environment. In addition, because of my low confidence and lack of self belief, I lost my chance of experiencing a full honours degree from Queens. This saddens me very much and I put it down to my experience in Nazareth Lodge.

34. My tutors over the years have believed in me and brought the best out in me. I achieved high grades in each module but I still did not believe that I was good enough or capable of doing a full degree. I have low confidence and a constant feeling that I am inferior to my class mates. This all stems from my experience in Primary One.

35. Educationally I have always tried to ensure that my children attend school and achieve the best they can. I was always over the top concerning their education and attendance at school and this stems from my fear of them being taken away if they did not attend. I did not want them to feel stupid like I did. This has caused me immense trauma and stress. I became over protective and this had consequences for my children. I never let any other person even their father care for my kids and I know that is not healthy.

36. I was married for fourteen years and I have three children. My marriage ended and we got an annulment. My husband and I had come together because of our own emotional stuff. I have always carried guilt and shame with me of being in the home. I never told my ex husband anything about it until at least



## PRIVATE

10 years into my marriage. I never talked about my time there as it was hell to me and who wants to talk about hell. I believe all my stuff had a big part to play in the breaking up of my marriage. My children say they love me but that I push them away because I won't let love in. I believe that I did the same with my husband because I never had a sense of self worth and always felt everyone was better than me. I find to this day, seventeen years after my marriage broke down, that it's still difficult to let love in.

37. The family bond between siblings has been broken. My youngest brother was killed, my other brother suffers with his nerves and anxiety, and my sisters are unstable.

38. My life has been shaped by the stress we have had to live with, the lack of love, the coldness, the ridicule, the negative behaviour and the rejection of not being cared for or feeling like I belonged.

39. I have a very strong faith and believe I have a guardian angel that has guided me through my life. However my life has been very tough and at times I still struggle with different issues.

40. We were already broken stressed and nervous children. They should have known this and given us love, care, security and a feeling of being wanted. All the negative experiences we went through at home were all just reinforced in the Nazareth lodge and in the school environment. I know that I was not wanted and I felt it. I still carry these feelings in my head and they pop up every now and again. I know that I have done a lot of work on my personal development through the years; however, I know I will never feel 100% equal to others. I know I tell myself that I am equal, but deep down inside me, I hear a little voice saying "no you're not" and I feel it every time.

41. I have thought long and hard about coming forward to the Inquiry process. My decision was made due to the struggle and hardship I have had to endure. Now more so than ever my decision has been made because of the recurring nightmares I am having that may be indicating repressed feelings have been pushed down and have not yet come to the surface. I now finally want to put

PRIVATE

this little child within me to bed and at rest by standing up for her, giving her a voice, letting her know that she is important and equal to everyone.

42. I don't remember any happy bright days while in Nazareth Lodge. All I remember is being frightened and unhappy.

43. The world mistakenly thinks that intimacy occurs in the dark but God says it happens in the light. Darkness hides our issues but when we are able to bring them out into the light, they lose their power, we find forgiveness, our wounded areas are healed and we begin to make progress. We're afraid of transparency, yet it's the only way to become spiritually and emotionally whole.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

**HIA 375**

Dated

10/10/14.