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HIA REF: 9

Witness Name: HIA 9

## THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

## WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 9

I, HIA 9 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Belfast.
2. I was placed in St. Joseph's Baby Home, Belfast on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1955 when I was one month old.
3. My mother had me out of wedlock while she was living with her aunt and had to put me in the home as her aunt threatened to throw her out. I never met my father; my mother wouldn't tell me who he is.
4. I have one stepbrother but I do not have any contact with him. My mother did not put him into care.
5. I remained in St. Joseph's Baby Home until I was five years old when I was transferred to Nazareth House, Belfast.

Nazareth House, Belfast ( [REDACTED] )

6. I was moved to Nazareth House, Belfast on [REDACTED] when I was four and a half years old. I remained there for fourteen years and left when I was nineteen.

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7. Nazareth House was divided into three groups – Sacred Heart, Our Lady's and St. Anne's. I was in Our Lady's group and **SR 31** was in charge. **SR 116** and **SR 134** were in charge of the other two groups.
8. I have no good memories of my time in Nazareth House, only bad ones.
9. I went to primary school onsite in Nazareth House and I remember the beatings I got there. It was the same three nuns who taught there – **SR 31**, **SR 116** and **SR 134**. Then I went to St. Monica's secondary school on the Ravenhill Road which was ok. **SR 192** was the principal. I made some friends there but they used to have a party just for the girls from Nazareth House and all the other girls would look at us like we were different.
10. The food in Nazareth House wasn't very good but you didn't go hungry. We got fries but they were really greasy and the porridge was thick with a skin on top of it. If you didn't eat the food, the nuns would beat you.
11. The clothes were alright. They used to put aprons on us over our clothes to keep our clothes clean and if you ripped your apron you would have gotten smacked. **SR 122** did all the sewing in Nazareth House and every week you got your apron changed. If **SR 122** saw a rip in your apron, she would hit you over the head. We changed our vest and underwear once a week.
12. We slept in big dormitories in Nazareth House when we were little. There were about twenty or thirty girls in each dormitory. In the older girls' section there were smaller rooms with four beds in each room. The beds were iron framed and they were comfortable and warm enough.
13. A typical day in Nazareth House was you got up when the nuns rang the bell, you'd kneel down at the bed and say your morning prayers and then go down and get washed. The nuns made us strip off and they stood and watched us as we washed ourselves at the sinks in the bathroom. It made me feel

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uncomfortable. We washed with carbolic soap. We had to go to Mass every morning. If we didn't go [SR 31] would call us pagans. After our breakfast, we would wash the dishes and then go to school.

14. At Christmas we used to get a nice dinner and we went to parties in Mackies and other places. We got sweets and presents but we were never allowed to keep the presents; the nuns took them off us. The Nazareth House céilí band used to come from Derry and put on a show for us. We also put on plays like Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. A man called [NHB 127] came in to organise the plays.

15. [SR 31] used to beat me. I believe she has changed her name to [SR 31] now and is living in Nazareth House in Derry. I have terrible dreams about her. If I didn't do what I was told, she used to make me kneel outside her bedroom while she was doing the nightshift at the gate. Then when her shift was finished, she would hit me over the head with a mop or a bunch of keys.

16. A civilian woman called [NHB 24] worked in Nazareth House. She did all the washing and ironing and she used to look after us if [SR 31] was away on retreat. If I was misbehaving, she would tell [SR 31] when she came back and [SR 31] would beat me. [NHB 24] saw what was going on. Any time I didn't do what I was told [SR 31] would beat me with a mop or her bunch of keys. I was beaten with the shaft of a mop across the legs. She wouldn't hit me every day; these beatings would happen every week or every two weeks.

17. On one occasion when I was about eleven or twelve, [SR 31] locked me in the sitting room all night with a blackbird we had called Bobby. It was a punishment for disobedience. We girls used to get into fights a lot, as young girls do. I couldn't get up to go to the toilet so I wet the bed. I had never wet the bed before. The next morning, [SR 31] beat me for wetting the bed. I was terrified of [SR 31] She always picked on the same ones. She never called me by my first name; she always called me [HIA 9]

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18. There was an older girl in Nazareth House called **NHB 25** and all the girls were terrified of her. She used to wet the bed but she would put her wet sheets on another girl's bed and blame them. The other girl would have been beaten then. **NHB 25** used to get us to fight with other girls and she would sit there and laugh. She made us cover our faces with the blanket when we were in bed and if you showed your face she would hit you. She never actually hit me but I was really frightened of her.
19. Every weekend, **SR 31** made us scrub the floors on our hands and knees. They were wooden floors. First we scrubbed them and then when they were dry, we had to polish them with wax. If they weren't right, she would make us go over them again. We also had to clean the classrooms in Nazareth House and the dining room where we ate our food every Friday. At Easter, summer and Christmas we had to get up on ladders and wash all the walls. Once, **SR 31** got me up at 4am and made me scrub the floor of the big canteen in the school at Nazareth House as punishment for something or other. The nuns got up at 4am every day to go to the chapel.
20. **SR 134** used to hit me as well. On one occasion she put me and another girl called **NHB 26** into a freezing cold bath as punishment for taking too long in the toilets. When I tried to jump out, **SR 134** punched me in the nose and made my nose bleed. She didn't even try to stop it; she just let it bleed. I believe she's dead now. They used to bathe us in Jeyes fluid and it burned my skin. I remember as a child my skin coming out in spots from the Jeyes fluid.
21. **SR 116** used to mind our group when **SR 31** was away on retreat. She used to come into the dormitory at night, open the window and say 'Nick, get out from under the bed'. She was talking about the devil and we were terrified. We genuinely believed there was a devil under the bed.

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22. My friend **NHB 27** who has since passed away **[REDACTED]** witnessed **SR 31** beating me on a number of occasions. She was in the same group as me and she gave a statement to my solicitor before she died about the beatings.

23. When I was about fifteen, my mother got in contact with me. She phoned Nazareth House and **SR 31** told me my mother was on the phone. This was a huge shock to me because I thought my parents were dead, I thought I was an orphan. I didn't know what to say because she was like a stranger to me. I could never bring myself to call her 'Mother'. She came to visit me and took me out to her house where she lived with my aunt and my stepbrother. I told her I didn't want to go back there. I called her names for putting me in care. I blamed her for all the things that happened to me but I have since found out she only put me in the home because she had no other option. Maggie McSorley from the Diocese of Down and Connor told me that she didn't want to put me in care but her aunt made her.

24. I don't remember anybody from Welfare ever speaking to us children at Nazareth House. There was a social worker called **NHB 59** and she would come to see the nuns but she never spoke to me. I think she knew what was going on in Nazareth House. She knew what the nuns were doing to us but she never reported it to the police or anything. I never reported the abuse to anyone because I was too frightened. I was terrified of **SR 31**

25. I left secondary school when I was fifteen and I got a job **[REDACTED]** stitching nurses uniforms and doctors overcoats. I worked there for four years and every week **SR 31** took all my wages off me to pay for my keep in Nazareth House.

26. The beatings lasted up until I was nineteen when I ran away from Nazareth House. I got the train to Wexford because I knew **NHB 74** from Nazareth House was there. He was the only person I thought would help me but he said I would have to go back to Nazareth House and let the nuns know where I was. I told him about **SR 31** beating me but he didn't want to

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know because they all stuck together. **NHB 74** made me go back but I only went because [REDACTED] who was the priest in Nazareth House at the time met me and went in with me.

27. I was transferred to the Good Shepherd convent then. It was run by nuns and they were bad to me as well.

Good Shepherd Convent, Belfast (1974 – 1975/1976 approximately)

28. [REDACTED]

Life after care

29. I stayed in the Good Shepherd until I was about twenty or twenty-one and then I moved from hostel to hostel. [REDACTED] got me digs with an old couple in [REDACTED] but I only stayed there for one day because I wasn't happy. I went to a Legion of Mary hostel then on the [REDACTED] I was going from pillar to post and I was walking the streets and sleeping rough at night. I had lost my job at that stage because I couldn't cope with people saying anything to me.

30. I stayed in five different Simon Community hostels and they helped me a lot. They put a roof over my head and gave me a bed. It was the Simon Community who got me my own flat on the [REDACTED] I've been there twenty-four years now and I am really happy there. I have good neighbours and it's very close to the city centre. I like to sit and have peace and quiet. I don't know what I would have done without the Simon Community and am very grateful to them.

31. I never had any more contact with my mother. A couple of times I got really drunk and walked from the [REDACTED] to her house on the [REDACTED] I was very

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angry and I was shouting that I was going to put her windows in. Somebody called the police then. I think she's dead now, the neighbour next door said she is anyway.

32. I keep in touch with two boys from Nazareth Lodge – HIA 19 and HIA 110 HIA 110 They are the same age as me and they're like brothers to me.

33. I was very close to my friend NHB 27 and I miss her terribly since she died three years ago. I carry a photograph of her with me everywhere I go. Before she died NHB 27 went to visit SR 31 in Nazareth House in Derry. She said that SR 31 said she was sorry for what she had done to the girls but when she was interviewed by Gareth Brown from the PSNI she told lies.

34. The abuse I suffered in Nazareth House has affected my life a lot. I cannot hold down a job because when somebody says something to me, my nerves go and I can't cope. I haven't worked since 1995.

35. I have been in and out of psychiatric hospitals and I have tried to take my own life a couple of times. I have been diagnosed as having a personality disorder and chronic post traumatic anxiety. I am on medication for depression and anxiety as a result of all I went through in Nazareth House. I have terrible dreams about SR 31 and about being homeless. I went to counselling and I found it helpful. I have no faith at all anymore; I don't go to Mass and I never pray. I am doing well now and I have a good relationship with my GP. He is a great doctor and listens to everything you tell him.

36. I have reported the abuse I suffered to the police. I made a statement to Constable David McWilliams from Lisburn Road PSNI station in/around 2007.

37. I am also pursuing a civil claim against the Sisters of Nazareth through my solicitor Ciaran McAteer of McAteer & Co.

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**Statement of Truth**

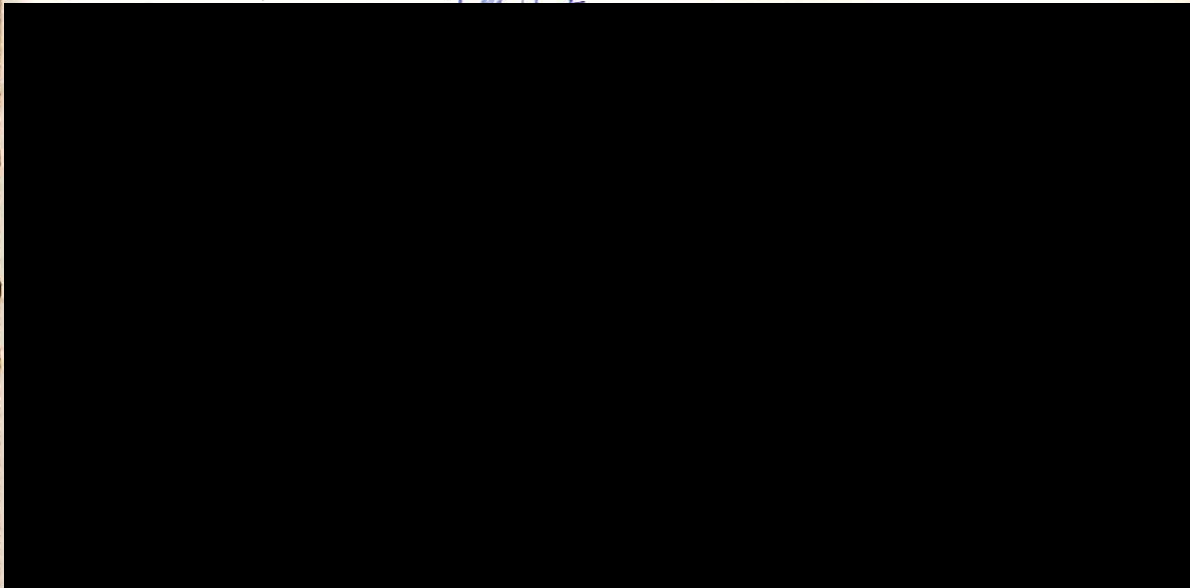
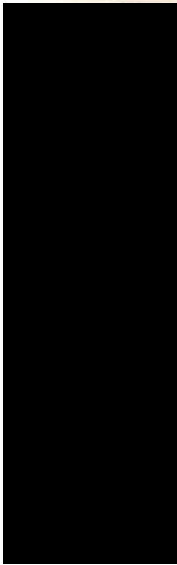
I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed **HIA 9**

Dated 10 / 6 / 2014



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**HIA 9**

*Admitt. 20. 1. 60. Mother's application*

