

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 129

Witness Name: HIA 129

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 129

I, HIA 129 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] County [REDACTED]. I have one older half-brother, [REDACTED], two younger brothers, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and we also had a younger sister named [REDACTED] who passed away when she was only six months old.
2. I lived in [REDACTED] a village in [REDACTED], with my parents and three brothers. When I was aged approximately six or seven, my mother fell ill with tuberculosis, and was hospitalised in a sanatorium. My father was a farm labourer and had to take all the work he could get. At the start, I tried my best to look after my brothers, who would have been aged approximately eleven, five and four years at the time, but I recall one day the Parish Priest, Father [REDACTED] came to take me and my two younger brothers away. I'm not sure where [REDACTED] went at this stage, but he was older than us, so he might have gone to live with relatives. I presume that someone, maybe even my father, told Father [REDACTED] that I couldn't look after the kids by myself.

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Nazareth House, Belfast (1947 – 1949 approximately)

3. I recall being driven by Father [REDACTED] to a large grey building, where the door was opened by a nun. My brothers just seemed to disappear. I had no idea where they were taken to. I think that it was only girls who lived in the home that I was in. It was only after I asked my mother in later years about this home that she told me that I had been in Nazareth House in Belfast.

4. I have one persistent memory of being in the home. I recall that once a week we were made to go into a big room where there were little piles of clothes set out, arranged in semi-circular rows. We each had to kneel down behind one of the piles, and then change into the clothes that were lying in front of us. We were expected to change modestly. We then had to form a queue, and make our way up to one particular nun, who was standing in the corner. We had to hold our underwear tightly in our hands and present them to the nun to inspect. We then had to turn our underwear round so that she could see both sides. If your underwear was damp, then you would have received a couple of whacks on the palm of your hand, with a large cane that the nun had. If your underwear was stained, then you would have received even more strokes. I remember as we were queuing up to see the nun, we would have been rubbing our underwear in our hands to try and dry it so that we wouldn't get slapped. We didn't dare try to pull our hands away, because then the nun would have turned your hand over and hit the knuckles with the cane instead. I don't remember the name of this nun, but I do recall that she would have been quite young, maybe in her twenties or thirties. I also remember that her cane was really long and had a sharp point on it. I can still hear the sound of the cane coming down, and I can hear the children crying as they were leaving the room, rubbing the palm of their hands which were always red raw. I remember trying to figure out why I had to show the nun my underwear, when my mother had never made me do this. This memory has never left me, but my memory largely goes blank after that.

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5. I recall at bath time, the younger girls were washed by the older girls, who would have been maybe eleven years. We were all put in the same bath water, one after each other.
6. I have absolutely no recollection of going to school, of having any form of education, or even having any books to read.
7. I remember seeing my brothers a couple of times whilst I was in the home but not very often. I don't know where they came from but I remember seeing them in the yard, at a distance, but I was never able to go and speak to them. It was as if we were strangers. I don't remember having any visitors at all during my time in the home, and I don't remember ever hearing how my mother was doing.
8. I don't remember the names of any of the nuns who worked at Nazareth House. The only thing I remember about them is that they were all very stern and authoritative, and we didn't dare ask them anything. We were scared of them and always on our guard. We never stepped out of line. My mum told me after I left Nazareth House that the nuns didn't want me to go because I was always very obedient.
9. My mum was in the sanatorium for two years, and then returned to our family home, however she still had to live in a hut outside for a while, whilst she was contagious. She was very lucky to have survived. I returned home and my brothers also came home, but I'm not sure if this was at the same time as me. An older cousin came to stay with us to help look after us while mum was living outside. We didn't have much but my childhood was relatively happy, apart from my time in care.

Life After Care

10. I got married aged twenty-three, and went on to have three sons and one daughter, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I have ten grandchildren. Most of my family live near me, save for [REDACTED] who lives in [REDACTED] with his family. My

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husband [REDACTED] died in [REDACTED] 1999. Although I enjoy a good relationship with my family, I have only ever discussed my time in the home with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. None of the rest of my family know that I have approached this Inquiry. Even today, I feel ashamed of my experiences.

11. I started to develop mental health difficulties in my teenage years. I had anxiety problems, and suffered my first breakdown at the age of twenty one. At that time I was working as a child minder for a doctor in [REDACTED] and he referred me to a psychiatrist. I was seeing the psychiatrist several days a week, and I had electric shock treatment. I was also prescribed anti-depressants and have been taking them ever since. I have basically been seeing psychiatrists for the most part of my life, on and off, and have suffered several breakdowns. After my brother [REDACTED] passed away approximately eight years ago, I suffered another breakdown and was hospitalised in [REDACTED] Hospital for five weeks. My psychiatrist referred me to a psychologist. The psychologist was very helpful and made me write down all my experiences and thoughts. I realised that there was a pattern in my life, whereby every time I face a crisis, I run away. I have never understood why I find it so difficult to cope at times. I realised however that I have always felt guilty over not being able to look after my siblings. I felt that it was my fault that we ended up in the home, and since then I have never had belief in myself that I am able to cope with situations. When I realised why I kept running away, it was like something clicked inside me, and I was more content after that. I still get depressed, and sometimes find it hard to get out of bed in the morning. I have difficulties sleeping and take medication to help. I always feel dirty, even straight after a bath or a shower. I never feel clean enough. I think this is because of the way the nuns treated us in the home. I still see a psychiatrist approximately every six months or yearly.

12. I have never spoken to my brothers about their own experiences of being in care. I don't think they wanted to talk about it, but they both experienced mental health difficulties throughout their lives, and were hospitalised at various times. My brother [REDACTED] died approximately ten years ago from cancer.

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13. I have never spoken to anyone else about my memories of care, as it is still firmly ingrained in me that you are not supposed to speak badly of people such as nuns and priests.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed _____

HIA 129

Dated _____

24/3/2014

CHRISTIAN NAME	BIRTH PLACE	DATE OF BIRTH	WHERE BAPTISED	PARENT'S NAME	OCCUPATION
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HIA 129	Dungannon	[REDACTED]	Dungannon 9. 6. 1940	[REDACTED]	Servant
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WHEN RECEIVED	RECOMMENDED BY	DISMISSED	DECEASED	OBSERVATIONS	No.
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4 June -	Sisters of Mercy. Newry.				4174
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Name: Sister Brenda McCall

Date: 12 December 2014

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

Witness Statement of Sister Brenda McCall

I, Sister Brenda McCall, will say as follows: -

1. I have read through the statement of **HIA 129** and can find no record of **HIA 129** in our records.
2. With regard to paragraphs 3 & 7, the Congregation endeavoured to maintain sibling relationships and it was a common occurrence for the children to visit their siblings whenever possible.
3. With regard to paragraph 4, this is an allegation which the Congregation have not considered before in which the children, once a week, were made placed in semi-circular rows and made to change modestly. Further to this, many children have stated that their underwear was checked; however we do not understand why this would occur and find it difficult to accept as a common practice.
4. With regard to paragraph 5, many allegations have been brought to the attention of the Sisters regarding children's bath times. Children may have shared bath water as it would not have been practical or possible to change it for each child.
5. With regard to paragraph 6, the Congregation cannot find any record of **HIA 129** within our records therefore cannot comment on the education which she received. We would have ensured all children attended school.
6. With regard to paragraph 8, the Congregation endeavoured to provide a safe and loving home for children of various backgrounds and are devastated that **HIA 129** felt the children were always on their guard.