

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 20

Witness Name: HIA 20

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 20

I, HIA 20 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] nursing home on [REDACTED] Belfast.
2. I found out in later years that my mother was from [REDACTED]. She owned [REDACTED] and she was widowed with three children. After she was widowed she fell pregnant out of wedlock and the child was adopted. She then met another man and became pregnant with me. After the previous shame of having a child out of wedlock she did not want anyone to know about me. She signed herself into a private nursing home on [REDACTED] in Belfast to have me. She told people she was going to Belfast on business and no one ever knew I existed. After I was born I was placed for adoption from St Joseph's Orphanage, Belfast with a family called [REDACTED]. When I was about fourteen months old I was taken back to St Joseph's. I never knew why. On Easter Monday 2014 I found the son of [REDACTED] who had been thirteen years old when I came to live with his family and remembered me as a baby. He never knew why I had been taken back to St Joseph's. He just remembered the authorities coming and taking me.

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Nazareth House, Belfast ([REDACTED])

3. When I was two I was transferred to the nursery in Nazareth House and then I was transferred to the children's department when I was five.
4. I remember there were two dormitories; the senior dormitory and the junior dormitory. Shortly after I arrived the two dormitories were divided into three groups which were called Our Lady's, Saint Anne's and Sacred Hearts. There were about 30 children in each group ranging in age from 5 to 16. There was a nun in charge of each group and she slept in a cell at the end of the dormitory. I was in the Sacred Heart group and **SR 134** was in charge of my group.
5. We were all dressed in similar clothes. We all had to wear pinafores. We were given shoes to wear and if they did not fit we had to squeeze our feet in to them. The older girls were in charge of handing out the shoes and you were too afraid to say that they did not fit.
6. We went to Mass first thing most mornings and went to benediction in the evening. I tried to avoid sitting in front **SR 134** in chapel because if she thought you were doing anything wrong she would reach over and nip your neck or pull your hair. I was also made to pump the church organ which was hard work. Services lasted over an hour and I had to pump for the entire time. Sister **SR 134** also had a terrible habit of grabbing you by your wrists and making you hit yourself and then say "see I didn't touch you".
7. After Mass we had breakfast which consisted of porridge, bread and butter. Until I was about eleven, meals were eaten in complete silence. I do not know why. If you did not eat your dinner you were made to sit until it was finished or Sister **SR 116** would make you come up and get more. The food could have been better. We seemed to live on bread and butter and any meat was very grisly. It felt like we were always being given the butcher's scraps. I was always hungry. We had to say the Rosary before bed every night. The juniors went to bed between 6.30pm and 7pm and the seniors had to be in bed for 9pm.

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8. The children did all of the cleaning within the home. All we knew was scrubbing, waxing and polishing. On Friday evenings we scrubbed and polished the long corridor which ran the entire length of the home from the children's department to the kitchen. We cleaned it in pairs and **SR 31** would stand watching. If the work was not done to her satisfaction she would make you do it again. I remember her making me scrub the stairs up to the dormitories three times once. On another occasion the mop handle broke on me when I was standing beside her and she said "I know where you will be next madam, Muckamore Abbey". We were always being threatened with being sent to Muckamore Abbey. Saturdays were spent fine combing each other's hair, polishing shoes, darning socks and once a month changing the beds. Once a month the dormitories, classrooms, landings and toilets had to be scrubbed, waxed, polished and inspected. In the summertime we used to help the handyman, **NHB 102** to paint the enamel bed frames. .
9. On a Sunday we were taken for walks. The nuns always warned us not to speak to anyone from outside. We walked down Ormeau Road to Ormeau Park, played there for half an hour and then walked back up the Ravenhill Road. We walked in twos but we were not allowed to talk. I remember we used to pass a graveyard. The older girls used to say "if I hear you talking you'll be put in the grave with the dead ones". I remember one day when we were out walking I soiled myself. I must have had a tummy bug. I was so embarrassed. The nuns were so angry and shouted at me. I had to take a bath in cold water as there was only hot water on bath days. I also had to wash my clothes in the cold water and take them down to the laundry.
10. I had an ongoing problem with wetting the bed. I was called one of the "wet the beds". That was a phrase used by the children however when I was older Sister **SR 134** asked me to get the "wet the beds" up so the nuns even started using the phrase too. If you woke up during the night to discover you had wet the bed you had to lie in your wet sheets until the morning. I used to get out of bed, find a dry part of the sheet, roll my nightdress up and get back into bed. Because I wet the bed so much the nuns put a buzzer on my sheet and when I wet the bed an alarm sounded. The piercing alarm woke me and the other girls in the dormitory

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who shouted at me for waking them. I was hit and called names by the other children. I got up and turned the buzzer off. The nun never got up. I eventually learned to turn the buzzer off before I went to sleep so that it wouldn't make a noise if I wet the bed. The following morning I had to strip the bed and rinse the sheets in cold water in the bathroom. I then took them to the laundry. My bed was always made with fresh sheets the following evening but I have no recollection of doing that myself or how that was done. I was taken to see a doctor at the Ulster Hospital twice and I think it was about my bed wetting.

11. We were given a bath twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays. The baths were filled with water and Jeyes fluid. In the summertime we had our hair washed in tubs of water containing Jeyes fluid in the yard of Nazareth House. Before our bath the nuns inspected us and our underwear. I was given the number fifty one at some stage and I had to shout it out when I was showing the nun my clothes. If our underwear was not clean we got a slap across the face. I had quite swarthy skin and I have a clear memory of **SR 134** grabbing me by the scruff of the neck and scrubbing my neck over the sink until it bled. **SR 189** got an older girl called **██████████** to scrub my neck. She was told to do it again and again as I was still dirty. A couple of days later when **██████████** was cleaning Sister **SR 189** pointed to a pile of dust in the corner and said "I suppose you are going to tell me that can't be cleaned because it is swarthy".
12. I remember one day when we were playing in the hall, which was only permitted when there was very heavy rain, one of the nuns either **SR 59** or another nun called three girls to the front, told them to bend over the stage and punished them by pulling their pants down and smacking their bare bottoms in front of everyone.
13. I remember being beaten by **SR 116**. It was always for a trivial reason. She had a classroom that you were made to stand outside and wait for her to call you in to hit you. She used a bamboo cane and hit me again and again on the arm. It was extremely painful and left marks on my arm. She hit you until you cried so I learned to cry as quickly as possible. There was also a lady called **NHB 32** who worked in the sewing room who hit me. I was called in to

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iron the blouses in a room off the sewing room. I found an easier way of ironing the shirts but because I was not doing it the way **NHB 32** had told me to she slapped me across the face.

14. I remember when I was about nine years old there was a girl called **NHB 39** **NHB 39** who died. I heard that she had gone out to stay with a family but she wanted to go back to the nuns and on her way back she got lost in the snow and she was found dead. We were never told what happened to her. I remember seeing her in her coffin at the front of the chapel and thinking that she was sleeping. The nuns had not told us that she was dead.
15. I remember a night when some of the girls in my dormitory sneaked out to the fire escape to watch fireworks. **SR 134** caught them and brought all of us to the sitting room and made us kneel with our hands behind our heads all night. I heard the next day that some of the girls from the other dormitories were made to sleep on the fire escape steps.
16. I remember one occasion when I was about twelve or thirteen and we were clearing out an old storage building called "the loft". We were bringing the old heavy school benches down the fire escape and the rusted iron steps collapsed and I fell on my back. I saw stars. I went to the toilets because I was bleeding from my groin. A nun put a plaster on me. No sympathy was shown. I do not think we should have been moving those things as they were very heavy. It was a job for a strong man not a small child.
17. My education was very poor. We went to school in Nazareth House. There were classes for each year but I was placed in the class for the educationally subnormal children. The class had children from five to eleven years old. The younger ones were placed at one side of the room and the older ones at the other side. I seemed to spend my primary education drawing, knitting or sitting in silence.
18. When the girls reached secondary school age they were sent to St Monica's. I missed the first number of weeks as I had been ill with measles and another illness. When I was able to go back to school I attended St Monica's for less

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than half a term. I remember getting ready to go to St Monica's with the other girls when I was taken into the sewing room by **SR 122** and given a different uniform to the one I was wearing. That is how I was told that I was going to a different school. When I came out of the room I saw four other girls in that uniform and we were all sent to a school in **██████████** called **██████████** which was for educationally subnormal children. We were taken there every day by bus. I remember sitting looking out over Belfast Lough day after day thinking to myself if you are not going to educate me I am going to go into a world of my own. I ended up leaving there with no qualifications at all. I kept in touch with some of the teachers from that school. **NHB 140** who sadly passed away about five years ago, told me that the Mother Superior of the convent had contacted her before I started and told her that I was extremely backward and would not do well in life but to see what she could do with me.

19. I also remember one day **SR 134** took me and scrubbed me in from head to toe, put a green dress on me and took me to one of the classrooms where one of my teachers **NHB 141** was standing. She was a kind woman and wanted to see how I was. She gave me sweets. **SR 134** did not know who she was and when I came out and told her it was my teacher the dress was taken away from me and I never saw it again. I wrote to **SR 134** when I left the home as I was looking for answers. When I was in my forties I started to work out from her letters that the dress was from my mother. **SR 134** had thought that **NHB 141** **NHB 141** was my mother and had put me in the dress she knew she had sent. I understand from the letters that my mother had sent me clothes but they had been taken away because the other children were asking questions. My mother had been asked to send money instead. I do not know what was done with the money.
20. During the summer we were taken out in black taxis to a beach party at Tyrella beach. We called them black taxi parties. There were six to eight children in each taxi and we sung the whole way to Tyrella beach. I have fond memories of the taxi drivers taking us out and I am thankful for their generosity.

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21. When I was about twelve one of the other girls, called [REDACTED] convinced me to go up to the old men's place, as we used to call it. It was like a glasshouse. There were two men there. One was sitting in a chair and he said "come here, I'll give you some sweets". When I went over to him he gripped my wrist and he started putting his hand in my underwear. I managed to get free and I ran back to the children's part of Nazareth House and hid in the toilets. I thought he was going to tell the nuns and we would be in trouble for being somewhere we should not have been. As children we should have been protected by the nuns from such situations. That man is now dead.
22. I was teased by the other children because I wet the bed and went to a different school. I was called things like "fish" and "dunce". However I think that the cruelty from the nuns was worse. They did not care for us properly and were constantly degrading us. I remember we were told by the nuns, mainly Sister **SR 31** "nobody wants you, do you know why you are here, you were just dumped, nobody wants you". I remember some of the other children were encouraged to write letters to pen pals and I was told I did not need to as I would not be able to write a letter. All I seemed fit for was scrubbing the floors, working in the laundry or washing up in the kitchen.
23. I remember being sent to **SR 31** store room to be punished by her. You were locked in and you would have to wait until she came in and hit you. She must have forgotten about me that day and I was left in the store room all day. I remember there were boxes in that room and I climbed on top of them so I could see out the window onto the playground. I sat there all day watching the other children playing. I was brought no food all day. In the evening the door was opened by one of the older girls and she just told me to get out.
24. **SR 31** was always degrading me. She taught Primary 7 and I remember when I was sixteen she called me into her class and in front of the children she asked me what I was doing and I told her I was cleaning. She told me to go and find a girl called [REDACTED] who was her pet and whom she asked to do messages for her. When I came back with **SR 31** said to me "what are you standing there for, have you nothing else to do". I thought it was

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cruel to degrade me like that in front of a P7 class when I was sixteen. I remember after I left the home I saw the Nazareth House children down the town and I went over to speak to them but [REDACTED] SR 31 ushered the children away and would not let them speak to me.

25. I do not remember inspectors or social workers visiting the home. There was a doctor visited the home regularly to do check-ups on us all. I used to suffer badly with boils in my ears. I remember one of the nuns used to try to burst them. The boils led to me having a perforated ear drum. I suffered terrible earache and headaches from a young age. I used to cry under the bedclothes at night because I knew there was nobody to turn to for comfort or help.
26. I remember a girl called [REDACTED] who would complain of headaches and even walked into the wall on occasions. The nuns did not listen to her and even scolded her for acting silly. [REDACTED] was eventually hospitalised and it was discovered that she had a brain tumour. I remember being made to get out of bed to say the rosary while she was in hospital. Thankfully, she recovered but her mobility and eyesight were left permanently affected. She returned to the home but I never saw her as she was taken to another part.
27. I remember the day I left I was told to go to the sewing room. [REDACTED] SR 122 was there. She could never remember anyone's name so she called everyone "girly". There was a suitcase and she told me to take it to the parlour. I went to the parlour and there was a lady called [REDACTED] waiting for me. Mrs [REDACTED] used to do messages for the nuns.

Life After Care

28. [REDACTED] took me to a family who lived outside [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I was their "skivvy". I got up every morning at five o'clock and worked all day until I went to bed at ten o'clock. I was not prepared in any way for the outside world. No one ever came to see how I was. I was working so hard that my menstrual cycle stopped. I went to the doctor and he asked me if I was pregnant. I did not know what he was talking about.

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29. I left there after three months. I had no idea where I was going to go to. I knew some of the older girls who had left the orphanage lived on [REDACTED] so I walked there. I walked the whole way to Belfast from [REDACTED]. When I arrived at the girls' flat one of them asked me why I had not got the bus. I was so naive that I thought you had to book a bus. I stayed there for a couple of days. The lady who owned the guesthouse had contacted the nuns and they got in touch with me and told me I could come back to the orphanage. I returned to the orphanage for a couple of months.
30. I was then sent to live with another family called the [REDACTED] and I got a job in a factory. I remember one day when I was eighteen the manager brought me into the boardroom where a solicitor called Mrs Cunningham was waiting for me. She told me she was going to tell me about my mother. I said that I had no mother. When we were younger and some of the other girls' mothers were visiting them in Nazareth House I asked the nuns "where's my mummy" and they had replied "don't be silly HIA 20 you have no mummy". Mrs Cunningham told me I had a mother but not to write directly to her but to send the letters via her.
31. I was emotionally vulnerable at being sent out of Nazareth House, taken back, sent out again and sent to live with a woman who I thought was mad. She used to come to the factory every Thursday and collect my pay. I had no control over my money. I did not feel safe but I felt that I had no one to turn to. I developed an eating disorder. I had a nervous breakdown and ended up in hospital on and off for nine months. I was allocated a social worker while I was there. I think that because I was classed as educationally subnormal I should have been protected more by the nuns after I left.
32. I then got a job in the hospital and after a while the Matron, [REDACTED] said I should become a nurse. I initially said no I would not be able to do that. But after that I developed a determination to get an education. It took me eleven attempts to get my English "O" level. I got in to nursing when I was thirty.
33. [REDACTED] had had four other girls from Nazareth House live with them but they all left as they did not get on with them. I lived with [REDACTED]

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for twenty one years. I did not get on well with them either but I was afraid to leave in case the nuns would be angry with me. [REDACTED] was always very negative about my education and told me I would not be able to do it. I nursed in [REDACTED] and in orthopaedics in [REDACTED]. When I eventually left the [REDACTED] I lived with some of the girls I worked with. The Sister on the ward wrote to the Housing Executive for me and I got a flat of my own.

34. When I was nursing I developed a pain in my back which came and went. I thought I must have pulled a muscle. I ignored it until one night when I was working in orthopaedics I became paralysed. I was rushed to theatre. The pain was caused by prolapsed discs. I have had surgery to my spine six times. I have spinal damage and scarring. I have damage to my bowel and bladder. I can walk a bit but I am in a wheelchair now.
35. I have traced my family. When I was having respite in the Share Centre I met a man who knew someone from [REDACTED] and put me in touch with him. This man helped me to find out more about my family. He asked if I was the girl born in the forties. I had found out about my sister from another source and knew who he was talking about. Apparently everyone had known about that child. I think he was shocked to discover my mother had also had me. I found out that my mother owned the [REDACTED] and that my father was a man called [REDACTED]. I found out he lived in [REDACTED] and that he had worked for the [REDACTED] in Dublin. I never got to meet him as he had died in 1981. However I got to meet his family. He had married and had other children.
36. **SR 134** told me in one of her letters that my mother was in Letterkenny hospital. I was thirty seven. I went down to meet my mother and she was in the psychogeriatric ward. I used to phone the hospital to see how she was and one day I asked if she had had any visitors and they said [REDACTED] from [REDACTED] had been in. I wrote to him and found out he was her brother. I met him and two half sisters. In later years a cousin told me that my mother had been looked after by the Sisters of Nazareth for eleven years in their nursing home in Faughan before being admitted to Letterkenny Hospital. That is obviously how **SR 134** was able to tell me where she was. My mother died in 1991.

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37. When I was forty five I went to Nazareth House with my social worker looking for answers. **SR 189** was still there and came in to the parlour when we were there. She kept talking to the social worker and not to me. The social worker had to keep saying to her "speak to **HIA 20**". The social worker told her I had gone into nursing and the Sister replied "did she qualify?". When we came out I was in the car and **SR 189** was putting my wheelchair into the boot and I saw her talking to **SR 189** in the wing mirror. **SR 189** told me that Sister **SR 189** was saying "don't you know **HIA 20** a slow learner".
38. During my search for my family I also went to St Patrick's chapel where I had been baptised. I was fifty nine. The priest showed me the register and he showed me that my name on the register was **HIA 20**
39. The experiences of my childhood made me feel worthless. Having no parents, attending a special school, wetting the bed and having an alarm placed on my bed and being told I was going to be sent to a mental institution for breaking the handle of a mop. I have so many questions about how these nuns were allowed to bring us up. What did they know about the physical, emotional and educational well-being of children? What training did they have to work with children? We were all crying out for affection and I felt that all I received in return was punishment for the "sin" of my mother. I do not feel that we had done anything to deserve that kind of existence. I cannot forget about my childhood as it has shaped who I am and the memories will stay with me forever.
40. I do not think that all the nuns should be tarred with the same brush as I did meet good nuns. Unfortunately I also met some very bad ones. Perhaps if their employers had treated them better they would have treated us better. There were far too many children for the nuns to look after.
41. I am pursuing a civil case against the Sisters of Nazareth because I believe they neglected me, stole my childhood and withheld information from me. I would like an apology from the Order especially in respect of my education. My solicitors are Kevin R Winters & Co.

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42. I made a statement to the PSNI on 19th May 2010.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 20

Dated

30.6.14

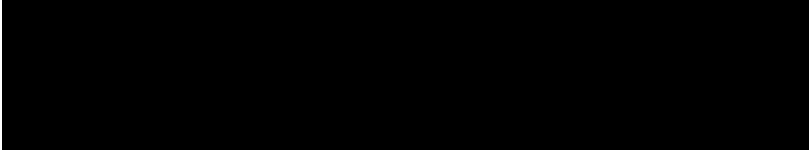
✠
J. M. J.

Phone:
Plymouth 660943

Nazareth House
Durnford Street
Plymouth
13 May 1996

dear HIA 20

I am not very sure whose turn it is to write but
the papers you sent me were not what I wanted
wasn't in a hurry to go through them Imagine
my surprise on examining them last week when



you never told me about your trip to Dublin
although I asked you if you were going. I
believe you received very VIP treatment and
lots of sympathy. How is the back lately?
you haven't mentioned the pain lately

When thinking about the harsh treatment I
don't think you ever received any. In fact
when you were in [redacted] for a short
time and SR 189 saw how unhappy you
were she asked SR 192 to take you
into St. Monica's which she did.

I never told you this before but I am sorry
DW [redacted]

When you were about to
leave school I wrote to your mother asking
what she would do anything for you. [redacted]

[redacted] She wrote back frantically
telling me never to write to her again as the
correspondence was shared between her son and

myself and it was only by chance she got my letter first. He knew nothing about you so when she contacted [REDACTED] She also wrote to [REDACTED] SR 226 in the same strain never told you this and I am now sorry as [REDACTED]

we did try to help you as much as we could

am sure I will soon hear from the [REDACTED] I am looking forward to their visit.

Write soon

Yours sincerely

SR 134

On reading your letter
noticed you appear very
tired.



Tel: 01752 660943
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Registered Charity 228906

Nazareth House
Durnford Street
Plymouth
PL1 3QR

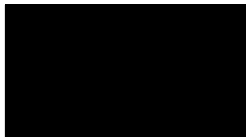
9/10/2002

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The accounts I read [redacted] of our treatment
amaze me. If they are true why did you
write to me so frequently from 1970-1995?
The friendly visits you used to pay Nazareth House
you went to work after leaving? I always
thought you were sincere. Obviously my mistake.

Yours sincerely,


SR 134






13 October 2000


Dear Sister



I was quite saddened by the letter I received from you last week. When I first left Nazareth House, where I had spent 17 years, I left behind the only friends and home I knew.

You would appear to be 'amazed' as you say in your letter. You have spent many years in the Nazareth Order and must be aware that 

 these events were commonplace in most if not all convents. Anything I may have said, either in writing or orally, is all my (and hundreds of other peoples) TRUTHFUL and SINCERE accounts of our memories and treatment.


 especially if they were not ashamed about any of their actions in the past. This surely would be doubly true of an organisation of a religious Christian group like the Nazareth Order and its Sisters who surely should take the Christian and Charitable view rather than take the path of condemnation, which surely belongs to a higher authority.

You asked the question why I returned? Surely, you would have been more than glad to see that the children who had gone through your establishment were able to keep in contact. The girls were my only link and for that I was grateful, because I knew nobody outside the convent walls. Yes, those visits were friendly ones, until I was unfortunately no longer able to visit because of the actions of 

Regarding our correspondence, you were the only person that I had any contact with for all those years I lived in  and later. That I appreciate, because I was not allowed to write to anybody else. And yes, I did enjoy our correspondence until 1997, but then I received a very nasty letter from a certain person  apparently, after she had been in contact with you.

In all my years, this is the first time I have been called insincere by any of my very many friends or even acquaintances. If your belief of what I am today is correct then surely this is a reflection of the people who were involved in my upbringing.

Yours sincerely