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HIA REF: 29

Witness Name: HIA 29

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 29

I, HIA 29 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] I had four older sisters called NHB 66, NHB 67, HIA 28 and NHB 65. My younger siblings are called NHB 68 and NHB 69. I also have another brother called NHB 70 who went to live with an Aunt in England when he was a baby. I never knew him.

2. My mother and father were not getting on well together. I think they were having money problems so they placed HIA 28 and me with my Aunt on the [REDACTED] Road. NHB 65 went to live with a family friend. NHB 68 stayed with my father and NHB 66 stayed with my mother. NHB 67 went to live with another Aunt on [REDACTED]. I am unsure of circumstances of how I ended up in care but HIA 28, NHB 65 and I were placed in Nazareth House.

Nazareth House, Belfast (18/07/1960 – 19/12/1965)

3. I was placed in Nazareth House, Belfast on 18th July 1960, when I was seven years old. HIA 28 was ten and NHB 65 was almost nine. I did not know I was going there. I remember I had just taken my first Holy Communion. My mother, NHB 66 and my granny took us to Nazareth House. My granny turned back on the way there as she could not bear to see us go in. When we arrived we were

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taken in to a big room with a big shiny table where we were met by **SR 176**
SR 176 the Mother Superior.

4. **SR 31** then took us to another room where she put white stuff on our heads that burnt, then she cut our hair in a bowl cut and then I think we were stripped and bathed. We were then taken to our dormitory. We were in the Our Lady's dormitory. It was a big dormitory with thirty or forty girls. **SR 31** was in charge of our group. I think she would have been in her forties. **SR 134** was in charge of the Sacred Heart group and **SR 116** was in charge of the St Anne's group. The three of them also taught at the school. They were all wicked.
5. I think my sister **NHB 69** who was five years younger than me, was placed in the nursery part of Nazareth House when she was a baby. I did not know her or anything about her. I did not know that she was in Nazareth House until one day, shortly after I went in, when I was out playing. There was a gate that separated us from the infants and I was standing beside it when a girl came over to stand on the other side of it. I asked her what her name was and she said **NHB 69** was an unusual name so I knew she was my sister.
6. The three groups had a morning routine which rotated. Our group went to morning Mass one day, another group the next, and the other group the day after that and then it was back to our group. On Mass mornings we got up at about 6am to go to chapel. The other mornings we got up about 6.30am. If we wet the bed we were beaten. I remember being beaten for wetting the bed once by **SR 31** with her keys. Watching other girls being punished for wetting the bed was a common occurrence. They were beaten and on Mass mornings they were made to stand with the wet sheet over their heads until everyone came back from Mass. On non Mass mornings they could have been made to stand there for over an hour. The bed wetter's were made to put their dirty sheets in the laundry and make their beds again with fresh sheets. We then went for breakfast. On our way out from breakfast **SR 116** gave us cod liver oil by grabbing us by the hair pulling our heads back and forcing it into our mouths with a big massive spoon. We then went to school. We had to wash

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our uniform. We used to put our skirts under our mattress to keep the pleats in them. After school and on Saturdays we had chores and played for a while. My chores included cleaning, laundry and shovelling coal into the furnace which heated the home. We said the Angelus outside at 6 o'clock. We were then brought in for our dinner. If you did not eat your dinner **SR 116** would clip you round the ear and then spoon fed you. Our lips would have swollen from the force of her digging the spoon in. Sometimes we did not get to go to bed until 10pm so we were always tired. We were late going to bed if we were cleaning somewhere.

7. We were always hungry. The food was not of good quality and there was not very much of it. There was a dog that lived at the home and the outside toilet was near where he stayed. I was so hungry that I used to hide in the toilet until **SR 116** had fed him and then I would eat his food.
8. One day we were cleaning the floors in the dining room and I looked in to the big cupboard in the dining room and saw a big block of cheese. Another girl and I were so hungry that we ate some of the paper which was covering the cheese. When we chewed it it turned into chewing gum. We knew we could not eat the cheese as the nuns would have known if any of it was gone.
9. We were bathed every Saturday. Jeyes fluid was put in the bath which burned really badly. The three nuns took it in turns to be on bath duty on a Saturday. **SR 116** was the worst. She used to use a scrubbing brush. She used it on our private parts to make sure we were clean. When we got out we were brown all over but we were not allowed to use clean water to clean it off. We just had a big sheet to dry ourselves with which we had to share and it was soaking by the time I would get it so I was not able to dry myself properly. The nun on bath duty used to check our necks to make sure they were spotless and if they weren't we had to go back in and clean them again. We had a rag that we used to clean our necks. We also had to use carbolic soap, we even used it to clean our teeth.

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10. We had to work in the laundry. We washed all the clothes and bed sheets on washboards. When I came out I was soaking and in the winter I was also freezing. We did not get a change of clothes and we were expected to spend the rest of the day in wet clothes. We also had to scrub the floors in the laundry. We had to scrub the halls, the dormitory, the church and polish the pews in the church. There was a rota of what each group had to clean each week. We also had to clean the nun's room which was at the corner of our dormitory. I was cleaning in **SR 31** room one day and I saw a framed photograph on her windowsill of a girl in her communion dress. I was shocked when I saw it was a photograph of me. I have no idea how she got it or why she had it.

11. I had to shovel coal into the furnace which heated the home along with another girl called **SR 31**. It was frightening in there. People sent in boxes of sweets but the nuns said they were poisoned and made us burn them in the furnace. **SR 31** and I would eat the sweets before we threw the boxes in to the furnace. One day **SR 31** came down and saw the colours from the sweets on our face. She took us to a room upstairs and caned us on the hands.

12. I remember sitting in the dining room with my sisters one day and **SR 31** who had been in a terrible mood that day, came in and said that our parents had not paid for us so why should they feed us. I do not think we were fed that day. That has stuck in my head.

13. One day when I was playing in the yard with my sister **NHB 65** I was standing on a bench which toppled over and I fell and hurt my back. **SR 134** came over and I tried to tell her that I was hurt but I had been winded so badly I was unable to speak. She did nothing to help me, in fact she hit me on the side of the head with her knuckles for falling. **NHB 65** had to look after me and lift me up and try to get me to walk.

14. I was never taken to hospital. I only saw a doctor once when I got my BCG. I remember another girl was taken to hospital once and when she returned she told us she had got beautiful food. So I swallowed a screw to see if I could be brought to the hospital but I was not taken. I was put in a room with just a bed

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and had to wait until I went to the toilet and the screw came out. **SR 134** came to ask if I had got the screw so I had to wash it to show it to her. She gave me a clip round the ear.

15. I went to primary school in Nazareth Lodge and then to St Monica's Secondary School on the Ravenhill Road. The other girls at school would call us names because we lived in the home. I remember walking back from school one day with another girl, whose name I cannot remember, and we went into a wee orchard and took some apples. We brought them back and shared them with the other girls. The owner of the orchard phoned the home and said that one of us had taken apples. The nuns told us that if the culprits did not own up that everyone would be punished so we owned up. **SR 31** put me in a big room and hit me on the hands so hard with the cane that I thought she was going to take my hands off. I remember my hands were swollen afterwards.
16. I remember one night when one of the younger children died and we all had to go down to the chapel to pay our last respects. I will never forget seeing her in her coffin. I think she had been out for the weekend with a family and had drowned **[REDACTED]**.
17. I remember another occasion when I was cleaning somewhere and had to walk up the stone steps to the dormitory. I fell and chipped my tooth. **SR 116** was walking behind me. She was crying because one of the older nuns had died. She pulled me up the rest of the steps by my hair. The blood was pouring out of my mouth. She did not care at all.
18. **SR 31** was wicked. She used to hit us over the head with the keys she carried. I remember one day at school when I got my sums wrong she hit me on the hands with a big bamboo cane. She used to carry a cane on her person every day. Sometimes she used a black leather strap. I remember going in to the toilet one day and I had to run out immediately because **SR 31** was beating a girl. She was squealing but I could not do anything to help her as I was just a child myself.

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19. I think I was beaten nearly every day for doing something wrong. It was not always with the cane but it could have been a clip round the ear or being hit with the keys.
20. My mother visited us in the home most Sundays with NHB 66 I only remember my father visiting once or twice.
21. My mother and father got back together and got a house on the [REDACTED] Road. They brought us back home. I understand that the registers show that I left Nazareth House on 19th December 1965 however I distinctly remember watching the World Cup final in 1966 in Nazareth House and SR 116 jumping for joy when England scored. I do not know the exact date we left the home.
22. I do not remember any inspections of the home.

Life After Care

23. When we returned home NHB 65 HIA2 8 and I lived with my mother and father, NHB 69 and NHB 68 NHB 67 still lived with our Aunt and NHB 70 remained in England. NHB 66 had left to live in America.
24. I went to [REDACTED] on the [REDACTED] Life was great and I got on well with my mother and father. However, just as I thought life was getting better the "Troubles" started and life became difficult again. The nuns used to come round collecting money. I remember that any time we saw them we ran into the house and hid in the coal hole in case they were coming to take us back to the home.
25. When I left school I worked in [REDACTED] as a stitcher. I loved that job and I had friends. I continued to live with my mother and father. I then moved to Boston because I got a job as a nanny for a Jewish family who lived there. I stayed there for two years and I really enjoyed my time there. I returned to Belfast as the parents in that family separated and I was no longer needed. I

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then worked in [REDACTED] Residential Home. I went back to work in America for the same family for a while but returned home to Belfast. I lived with my parents. I had various jobs after that. I believe that the lack of education I received while I was in care prevented me from obtaining a sustainable career. I stopped working when I had my son, [REDACTED]. I can no longer work for health reasons. I have suffered an aneurism which resulted in me having to have six coils and a shunt put in my brain. I have diabetes and take tablets and insulin injections. I have high blood pressure and suffer from excruciating headaches. I am on medication for depression. I also have IBS and chronic back pain. I attribute the IBS to the trauma of being in the home and of swallowing the screw. I also attribute my chronic back pain to the bad fall I had in Nazareth House.

26. I no longer have any friends. I just have my son [REDACTED] and my sisters. My sister **NHB 65** lives across the street from me and we look after each other. I do not go out. I am close to my brothers and sisters.
27. The way we were treated and brought up was terrible. I believe it is the reason I cannot show affection. I am worried that I did not show enough love to my son [REDACTED]. It is difficult to love when you were never shown any affection as a child.
28. My mother died when she was 56. She was a drinker and my sister found her dead on the sofa one day. My father died when he was 53 of a heart attack.
29. I have reported the incidents which happened in Nazareth House to the police and they are currently investigating my case.
30. I believe that the victims, such as myself, should receive an apology from the Sisters of Nazareth and the State, compensation and there should be a memorial for those who have died before they were given an opportunity to tell their story.

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Statement of Truth

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

Signed **HIA 29**

Dated 10 6 14.

Tape Number and
Tape Times:

you know whenever people contact us we just do a follow up.

Solicitor: Yeah that makes sense, that's what I'm trying to establish.

Q It obviously, it sort of all surrounding Brendan Smith as well, I'm sure you've heard of him.

Solicitor: Who is he?

Q Brendan Smith, Father Brendan Smith, it kind of sort of coming off the back of that he was convicted for...

Solicitor: Oh the one that's been in recent news, I hadn't followed it but I yeah, yeah.

Q Okay.

Solicitor: I'm just trying to get my head round as to why all this was suddenly, I get the picture now, thank you, sorry to interject there.

Q You're all right. Okay **HIA 29** again one of the sister to **HIA 39** there, you obviously, you've answered before that you don't recall the family name. Now she would again say that she was bathed in Jeyes Fluid, again we've covered that, it would have just been the hair. Do you know who would have been, which one of the nuns would have been named **██████████**?

A No.

Q Have you heard that term before now?

A No, no.

Q Okay well they would have termed **SR 134** as **██████████** basically they're saying because of her appearance. Okay, "The other nun was Sister **SR 116**, she was taller than the other two, about 5'4" tall, medium build, in her early thirties. **██** and she had a **██████████** **██████████** as well. I lived in a dormitory with about 20 girls".

Q Did you have a **██████████**?

Tape Number and
Tape Times:

A

I did, I had two actually, they were taken off in America.

Q

She would say that, "I remember that I was fed poorly from day to day, I was given a piece", sorry 'piece' in inverted comma's, "Which consisted of a slice of bread with a slice of butter in the morning and very little for the rest of the day. On a regular basis I used to hide out near the toilets at about 1630 hrs", 4 30 for you and I Sister, "Close to where the dog was fed each day. I would sneak out and eat the dog food from the dog's dish because I was so hungry. I did this up until I was about 11 years of age", or sorry, "11 years old when I started secondary school at St Moncia's on the Ravenhill Road. I was able to get the food at the school then so I did not have to take food from the dog any more". That's obviously quite shocking to hear that myself, do you ever recall that at all?

A

No, don't even remember a dog.

Q

You don't remember a dog being kept at Nazareth at all?

A

No.

Q

Okay, and do you ever recall there being a lack of food for the children at all?

A

No.

Q

Would you...

A

They were well fed.

Q

You would say there was an ample, an ample supply of food?

A

Ample supply.

Q

Okay, she would say on another occasion whenever she was either 9 or 10 years old she would say about 1962 this would be, "I had fallen on the concrete steps in the house. I badly chipped my front tooth. **SR 116** physically grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and trailed me up to the top of