

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 39

Witness Name: HIA 39

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 39

I, HIA 39 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] I had three older sisters called NHB66, NHB67 and HIA 28 and a younger sister called HIA 29
2. We lived in [REDACTED] with our parents. I do not know the details of why I was placed in care. I understand that my parents separated and my mother placed HIA 28, HIA 29 and myself in Nazareth House.

Nazareth House, Belfast ([REDACTED] - [REDACTED])

3. I was placed in Nazareth House on [REDACTED] when I was almost nine. HIA 28 was ten and HIA 29 was seven. I remember my mother, my sisters and I being taken into a room with a big oval table and the Mother Superior was there. We had no idea why we were there. A nun came in and took the three of us away from our mother and took us to the children's part of Nazareth House. We all started crying. The clothes we were wearing were taken off us and we were given the home's clothes. We were put in a bath with Jeyes fluid and scrubbed with scrubbing brushes. They cut our hair and brushed it with a fine tooth comb. We were then taken downstairs and given something to eat.

PRIVATE

4. We were placed in the Our Lady's group. In the dormitory we each had metal beds and a small locker. **SR 31** was in charge of our group. **SR 31** **SR 31** should not have been a nun. She was very wicked and she showed no emotion or affection. She slept in a cell at the end of the dormitory. Her cell had a door and a small window so she could see into the dormitory. The other groups were called the St Anne's group which **SR 59** was in charge of and the Sacred Heart group which **SR 134** was in charge of.
5. Some of the girls in my dormitory wet the bed. The bed wetters had a sheet attached to their bed which had a buzzer that sounded if they wet the bed. If the buzzer sounded during the night **SR 31** would go mad. The girl who wet the bed was made to kneel beside their bed for the rest of the night in the freezing cold with just their night dress on. Sometimes **SR 31** would not get up when the buzzer sounded and she would shout to one of the other girls to get up instead. I remember **HIA 28** having to get up to kneel beside the girl a couple of times. In the morning the girl who wet the bed was responsible for taking her sheets to the laundry and getting herself fresh sheets.
6. In the morning we were woken by a bell or **SR 31** clapping. . If we were going to mass we would be woken at 6am, for mass at 7am. We went to mass two or three times a week as well as Sundays and Holy days. If we did not have to go to Mass we got up about 6.30 / 7am. We got out of bed and knelt down to say our prayers We were taken to the bathroom to brush our teeth. We had toothbrushes but no toothpaste so we rubbed our toothbrush into carbolic soap instead. We then got dressed, went to mass and had breakfast. The food was not good and we were always hungry. I remember my sister **HIA 29** ate the dog's food nearly every day as she was so hungry. When we had the opportunity we used to take the paper off the cheese and eat it like chewing gum.
7. We went to primary school in Nazareth House. We were taught by Sister **SR 31** and **SR 134** **SR 59** taught the younger children. When Sister **SR 31** was in bad form she would take it out on us. When we turned eleven we were sent to St Monica's. We wore a uniform at St Monica's. I remember

PRIVATE

having willies to wear to school if it was raining which were both left feet and were different sizes.

8. Once a week after school I went to an Irish dancing class in the home which I really enjoyed as it was an escape from the routine of the home. The costumes were beautiful and we won cups and medals.
9. We always had chores to do. We had to clean the convent, the dormitories and the big corridor. We had to polish the floors on our knees and we would get splinters in our knees from the wooden floorboards. One day when I was putting the wax on the floor **SR 31** fell. I unintentionally laughed. She came straight over to me and hit me over the head with a bunch of keys. My nose bled and I started crying. When I got a bit older we had to work in the laundry. I worked in the laundry with **HIA 29**. Our clothes would get soaking wet but we were never given a change of clothes.
10. We used to play leapfrog in the playground. When **SR 122** saw us playing leapfrog she would come out and grab us by the hair. One day when I was playing in the yard with **HIA 28** and **HIA 29** **SR 31** called us over and took us to the fence that separated our part from the nursery. There was a girl with glasses coming down from the nursery holding a nun's hand. **SR 31** told us "that's your sister". We did not know we had a sister. She was called **██████████**. As she was in the nursery she was kept separate from us. We were taken over to the nursery once or twice to see her but I only got to know her properly when we left the home.
11. The three of us were in the choir. **HIA 28** also had to pump the organ at mass in the morning. I used to sit beside her. There was one morning she fell asleep as it was very early in the morning and she was still tired. **SR 31** was playing the organ and the music stopped. **SR 31** came over and whacked **HIA 28** on the face. **HIA 28** started crying. I asked **SR 31** "why did you do that?". She grabbed me by the hair and said "don't you dare talk back to me" and hit me.

PRIVATE

12. I was always very wary of **SR 31**. I never knew when she was going to hit me next and was always on my guard. One day **SR 31** sent me to the pantry once to get my dancing shoes. She followed me and asked me to go and get **SR 187** who worked in the kitchen. She came with me and then sent me to my dormitory. I remember being afraid the whole time that **SR 31** was going to do something to me. Nothing happened that time but I was always afraid of her. I saw **SR 31** grabbing a girl once and hitting her repeatedly with a stick. For some reason she always had a dislike for this girl. I saw them having an argument on the way back from mass and **SR 31** hitting her with the stick really badly.
13. I remember getting my period and going to ask **SR 31** for a sanitary towel. I knocked on her door and when I asked her for a sanitary towel she hit me across the face and told me to go downstairs. I never got one and ended up having to use toilet roll instead.
14. I got a rash on my back like ringworm and **SR 122** treated it by putting cream on it. I was not taken to the doctor. I never remember being taken to the doctor or the dentist. I remember a health visitor coming in to give us injections.
15. I remember a girl called **NHB 39** died when she was staying with a family. She was about nine years old. She had fallen into a swamp and a dog had found her. She must have been going to the shops on her own or something when she died. I remember having to go and pay our last respects. I remember seeing her lying in her coffin and she had cuts and bruises all over her. I will never forget seeing her. It was very sad.
16. I went to stay with a couple in **██████████** a couple of times in the summer. I have good memories of those trips but they stopped suddenly. I have wondered whether we were stopped from going out with families after **NHB 39** died.
17. I left Nazareth House on 19th December 1965 when I was fourteen years old. My mother and father had re-commenced their relationship and **HIA 29** **HIA 28** **██████████** and I went back home to live with them. My mother and father had also

PRIVATE

had a son called [REDACTED] who had lived with my father during their separation. My mother had another son called [REDACTED] who was in Nazareth Lodge for a couple of weeks and then he was taken to England by one of my maternal aunts. I think my mother had an affair and had [REDACTED] with another man and that is why my parents separated. [REDACTED] had moved out and [REDACTED] remained living with our Aunt.

Life After Care

18. When I returned home I went to [REDACTED] school for about nine months. The education was of a far higher than the education I had received when I was in Nazareth House. I found it difficult to keep up. I have often thought that my life would have turned out differently if I had had a better education and been taught to have more confidence.
19. When I left school I worked in a mill in [REDACTED] I met a man and I fell pregnant and we got married when I was seventeen. We had three daughters. We did not have a happy marriage as he was an alcoholic and he beat me. When I was nine months pregnant with my second child, [REDACTED] my husband pushed me down the stairs. I hit my head on the door, broke my nose, and my teeth and I had two black eyes. I went into labour the next day and [REDACTED] was born with two broken fingers. When my third child, [REDACTED] was born he did not even come to the hospital. I was scared to leave him and only stayed for the children. However, shortly after [REDACTED] was born he came home one night drunk. He hit me and knocked me unconscious. When I came round he had passed out on the sofa. I took the children and left that night and never went back. I heard a few years later that he had drowned. My eldest sister [REDACTED] was married to his brother and he beat her up also.
20. I met another man who was great with my girls and we had two boys. However he started drinking and beating me as well. He had an affair and we separated about sixteen years ago. I have not had a relationship since.

PRIVATE

21. I have tried to commit suicide twice. Once I took an overdose and woke up in hospital. The other time I cut my throat and my wrists. I was in a psychiatric ward for ten months. I am still under psychiatric care and I take anti-depressants. I also attend counselling.
22. I had a stroke last year through stress and I had a mini stroke this year. I have heart problems and high blood pressure. I have COPD which I think was caused by my time working in the mill.
23. I believe that the Sisters of Nazareth should apologise for the upbringing we received in their care. I also think there should be a memorial for those who suffered and whose voices were never heard.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA39

Dated

25/6/14

RESTRICTED (when complete)

Continuation of Statement of:

Page 2 of 2

She would strike me on the head with a knuckle. On one occasion when I was about 9 years old she struck me on the head and made my nose bleed. This is when I was polishing the floor and she slipped and she hit me with a bunch of keys. It really hurt me but I was not given any medical attention for my injury. I remember that when I was 11 years old I got my first period and was bleeding as a result. I went upstairs to speak to **SR 116** who I would describe as follows: 25-30 years old, 5 feet 7 inches in height, slim build. I remember that she was quite pretty but I can't remember any other details. When I spoke with **SR 116** in the laundry room at the home she dismissed me by saying "What do you want me to do?" and slapped me across the left side of my face with her right hand. I begun crying and did not know what to do and I had to use paper toilet rolls I found in a toilet downstairs. I was really frightened by what had happened as I was only 11 years old. On a daily basis I would see **SR 31** and **SR 116** physically beating other children in the home often very badly. I remember once seeing another girl called **HIA 37**, I was about 12 at the time. **HIA 37** was grabbed by her hair by **SR 31** and dragged physically up a flight of stairs and into the top room. She was screaming and crying but none of us could do anything about it. It was terrible. I was finally able to leave the home when I was 14 years old. I think it was around 1965. I feel very traumatised by the treatment that I suffered at Nazareth House in the years I was there and I cannot put it all into words. **HIA 39**

Certified a true copy of an original signed document

Signature of witness:	
Signature witnessed by: (Appropriate Adult)	