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HIA REF: 32

Witness Name: HIA 32

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995**WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 32**

I, HIA 32 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Belfast. I am the eldest of five girls. I was followed by [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who passed away when she was very young. My three younger sisters are all deceased now.
2. My mother, [REDACTED] and my father, [REDACTED] were not married when we were born. My father was an alcoholic and my sisters and I were passed round from one house to the next when we were young. Apparently my mother had very little support from her family because my father was a Protestant; I have also heard that it was due to his alcohol problem.
3. My parents told myself, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] that we were going to Scotland and I remember walking up the Ormeau Road and asking if we were in Scotland yet. I will always remember the smell of the bread from the Ormeau Bakery. [REDACTED] had not been born at that stage. They took us to Nazareth House.

Nazareth House, Belfast (1st March 1935 – 25th September 1944)

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4. I was placed in Nazareth House on 1st March 1935 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] was three and [REDACTED] was only a baby. I remained there for nine years and seven months until I was fourteen.
5. The first day we went into Nazareth House, my parents brought us into this big room and just left us there. My sisters and I were separated shortly after entering. I was placed in the baby's section at first and then when I was five, I was moved up to the big girls' dormitory. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] remained in the babies section. For a while I didn't know they were my sisters.
6. My mind seemed to go blank when I went into Nazareth House. I felt numb for the first couple of years. It took me a while to get used to it, being surrounded by all the other children. There were 160 children altogether. We were always called by a number in Nazareth House, not our name. My number was 28. The odd time we would be called by our surname [REDACTED] and that's how I realised [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were my sisters. The nuns never bothered telling us.
7. The age range in the older girls group would have been from five to fourteen. There were four dormitories in Nazareth House. [REDACTED] SR 112 [REDACTED] was in charge of my dormitory and she had a cell in the dormitory.
8. A typical day in Nazareth House started at 5am when we were woken by the nuns with a whistle. My sister [REDACTED] used to wet the bed so I would run up and take the wet sheet off her bed and try to pinch a new one from the cupboard. [REDACTED] would have got a hiding if they found out she had wet the bed.
9. I and five other girls had to go down to the chapel. We only had our nightdresses on and we were in our bare feet. The six of us got into a line and polished the aisles and floors with cloths. I was only about seven or eight at this stage.
10. After we had polished the chapel, we went back up to make our beds, get washed and ready for school. We had to line up to be inspected by the nuns

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to make sure that we had got washed properly. We stretched out our hands and turned them over, then bent over so our ears and necks could be checked. If we weren't clean, we were sent back to get washed again. We then set the tables for breakfast. If we weren't in time for breakfast because we hadn't finished our chores, we got nothing and we were told it was our own fault.

11. I went to school onsite in Nazareth House. We wore a uniform to school – a little grey pinafore. I remember two teachers [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They were both nice women. I think they realised that we got a hard time from the nuns. We were also taught by [REDACTED] SR 112 and SR 114. SR 114 [REDACTED] SR 114 was a nice enough nun but [REDACTED] SR 112 hated her because she was [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We weren't really taught. I don't think they cared about our education. [REDACTED] SR 112 made me spend a lot of time in the corner with a sheet of paper pinned to my back with either 'dunce' or 'thief' written on. If I made I mistake I got a thump. I wasn't very good at drawing and on one occasion I copied [REDACTED] NHB 37 drawing of a leaf. When [REDACTED] SR 112 realised this, she caned me. On one occasion I was late finishing my chores and I wasn't able to get to the toilet before school. I put my hand up and asked permission to go to the toilet, but [REDACTED] SR 112 refused and told me I should have gone before school. I could not help but wet myself. [REDACTED] SR 112 made me walk through all of the other classrooms to get the mop and bucket, so all of the girls knew that I had wet myself. I believe that she did this on purpose to humiliate me.

12. After school we just played in the big recreation room but there were no toys or anything. We used to just throw ourselves up against the walls. There would be nobody minding us in the recreation room in the evenings after school. There were swings outside but we were never allowed out to play unless the nuns wanted rid of us.

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13. We were sent to bed at about 5pm but we used to sneak out at twelve o'clock to steal apples and pears from the Holy Rosary next door. If I was caught stealing fruit from the Holy Rosary, I would be made to kneel outside **SR 112** **SR 112** cell all night. One morning at about 6am, I was coming back across the wall from the Holy Rosary carrying loads of apples and pears to share with the other girls. The washer woman, **NHB 35** caught me and walloped me with a big stick with nails on it. I still have two scars on my thigh from when this happened. **NHB 35** was a cruel woman, and she kept an eye on everything. **NHB 36** was the other cook but she was a nice woman. She kept to herself and she would never have hit you. We called her fatty **NHB 36** which she thought was funny.

14. The food in Nazareth House wasn't great so we were hungry pretty often. If we were in time for breakfast, were given a cup of cocoa and one round of bread dipped in lard. For dinner, we got one potato and stewed onions. We didn't know what meat was. It was the same thing every day. For tea at 4pm, it was lumpy porridge which I could never eat so I got nothing. We were so hungry we used to stand in this small porch waiting on the woman, **SR 112** with the slops from the nursing home. It might have been stew or something similar. We used to lift up the slops with our hands, put it in our drawers and run off to the cellar to eat it, so we wouldn't be caught. We were like animals. We also used to hang out the toilet windows and ask a man we called **SR 112** for the turnip skins and we ate them raw. On one occasion I stole some tins to feed the girls. I put the tins up my dress. I didn't even think about how I was going to get them open. It turned out to be tins of baking powder which we couldn't eat anyway. I used to steal sweets for all the younger girls. There was a big jar of sweets in a cupboard in the classroom and I used to steal them and share them out amongst the girls. The sweets must have been for the nuns because we never received any. I only stole food because of starvation, not devilment.

15. The nuns made us wash our own socks and clothes. We had to dry them over our shoulders – one over each shoulder so they would dry with the heat of your body. There was no other way of drying them. If we washed our clothes

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at night, we had to put them under our sheets and then sleep between the sheet and the mattress so they would be dry in the morning. It's a wonder we survived at all. We only survived because we looked out for each other.

16. When it was bath time in Nazareth House, two girls would stand at the bath with a big sheet – one on either side. All the girls lined up and we took off our nightdresses. Jeyes fluid was put in the bath water and the same bath water was used for all of the girls. The girls who had their periods were kept separate. I can't remember if there were sanitary towels or anything. I didn't get my period until I was fourteen. We were too terrified to talk about things like that. One morning, I saw one of the older girls had hair under her arms and I didn't know what this was. I said to a few girls to come look at it and I got an awful hiding for saying that. One of the girls told **SR 112** what I said and she got hold of me and belted me round the legs with a cane. I didn't know what I had done wrong.

17. **SR 112** was very wicked. We called her **[REDACTED]**. On one occasion, when I was aged about ten years, I wrote **SR 112** is a witch" on the black board. None of the girls let on that it was me, but I owned up to it. I got hit.

18. We used to go down to visit the boys home, Nazareth Lodge, once a year. I had "a boyfriend" in Nazareth Lodge. His name was **NL 84** and when he knew we were coming he would stand and wait at the gates for me. He was lovely; he would push me on the swings. I loved **NL 84** and I often wonder about him now. I only saw him once a year for about an hour. I remember once when I was about ten or eleven I had just got new sandals from a benefactor. I took them off when I was climbing the trees in Nazareth Lodge and somebody must have stolen them. **SR 112** made me walk the whole way up the Ravenhill Road in my bare feet. The next day we were all supposed to go on a bus tour to Helen's Bay but I wasn't allowed to go as punishment. I was made to stay in the home on my own all day. I was locked in the recreation room all day and I got nothing to eat or drink that whole time.

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19. I never remember anyone visiting Nazareth House. If we got sick, Sister **SR 112** just sent us to bed. I don't remember ever seeing a doctor. One day I was running away from **SR 112** and I pushed my hand against the glass door but it broke and I got a big cut down my finger. It bled an awful lot but nobody bothered wrapping it up for me or anything. **SR 112** Once, after completing all my chores, I fainted at the altar at Mass and **SR 112** gave me a hammering for daring to faint in front of Our Lord. She caned me and was shouting at me 'how dare you faint in front of the altar and in front of **NHB 34** She told me I was worthless evil dirt.
20. When I was about nine or ten, I remember one of the girls, **NHB 37** was ill and was dying. **SR 112** brought us in to see her body in the dormitory. We were told that's what would happen if we were possessed by the devil. We were told the same thing about a girl who passed away. We were brought in to see her body.
21. I have had problems with my eyesight in my right eye and nobody ever noticed. I think this may have contributed to my lack of interest in school.
22. I never saw a dentist either, the entire time I was at Nazareth House. I lost all my teeth within a few years of leaving care, as did my sisters. I believe this was because we were malnourished. I have worn false teeth since the age of twenty-two years.
23. Religion was a very big part of the home. We had to go to Confession every week. **NHB 34** wasn't a nice man. He was really strict with the children and would hammer us for the slightest thing. He would use either a cane or the back of his hand. He thought nothing of giving us a crack across the ear. He would make me go to Confession for stealing apples or slops, but he was never satisfied with my Confession. He would not be satisfied until he beat me afterwards and would say "you'll not steal anymore now". I remember getting so flustered trying to practice my Confession whilst I was in the queue that I would mix my words up by the time I got in there. After **NHB 34** there was a priest called **NHB 18** He was a lovely man; he was very

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good to us. He could see we had nothing so he bought us stilts and taught us how to walk on them. Even after we left Nazareth House, he rented a place on [REDACTED] where we could all go for a chat and a cup of tea.

24. At the age of thirteen years, I was taken out of school, and I was put to work in the laundry, where I mostly had to clean nappies. I had to work on my own in a dark passageway. There were two tubs of water, one for washing and one for rinsing. I then wrung them out and hung them up to dry. I was also given the job of unblocking the toilets, along with the other girls who Sister **SR 112** didn't like. The toilets at Nazareth House used to get blocked up with faeces approximately once a fortnight, and the nuns could not afford plumbers so they made us lift out the faeces with our hands and put it in a bucket. Then we had to scrub out the toilets while **SR 112** stood watching over us. She called us demons.

25. My mother never came to visit us in the home. My father visited once but I think he had drink taken. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were brought to see him as well and I was put on his knee. He asked us what presents we wanted him to bring us the next time he visited and I said hairclips but he never visited again. The next day my socks were falling down and **SR 112** said 'your drunken father could come up yesterday but he couldn't bring any garters'. She said this out in front of all the whole class, to remind me that my father didn't care about me.

26. At Christmas, the nuns would bring all the benefactors in and we would put on a show for them. I had to work the organ – pulling the stoppers in and out. We got half an apple or half an orange set at the bottom of our bed at Christmas. Apart from that it wasn't really acknowledged by the nuns. I didn't know when my birthday was or what age I was. We never celebrated birthdays. I remember on 12th July we would try to see the parades over the wall, although we did not know what they meant. On one occasion a man called me a "Fenian Bastard" and told me to get down from the wall.

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27. In September 1944, when I was fourteen, my mother came to take me and my two sisters out of the home. My sisters ran to kiss her but I just walked away from her. I couldn't stand it, it just hit me what she had done to us. I never forgave her.

Life after care

28. I think my mother took us out of Nazareth House because people put pressure on her. She had nowhere to put us because she was living with another man and looking after his children. There were six of us in a bed. She expected me to go out and work, and she took all of my wages off me. I moved out then when I was about fifteen and lived in different lodgings in Belfast. The people in the lodging houses weren't very good to me. They used to make me scrub the house from top to bottom even though I was paying rent. One of the landladies pawned my clothes and stole my money. I had saved up and got a £3 Burke's club book so I could buy nice clothes and then she pawned them all on me. Another landlady used to make me go and stand outside in the rain. She wouldn't let me stay inside, she made me go out and walk or sit in the playground whether it was rain, hail or snow. I remember a group of boys saying that there must be something wrong with me because I was just sitting out on a swing in the pouring rain.

29. I got a job in the [REDACTED], it was murder. Then I learned stitching and I worked at that for thirty-five years making children's clothes. That came in handy when I had my two children. Then I worked for another twenty-five years as a home help. I only retired at 73 when I collapsed with pneumonia. My daughters made me give up work.

30. When I was sixteen, I met my now husband [REDACTED]. We have two grown daughters [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. My husband passed away last year, aged 88, so the last ten months have been difficult. I have a great relationship with my daughters. I always tried to do my best for them and they say I have done a great job. I never lifted a hand to them. My daughters both live close by and [REDACTED] comes in every day to care for me, as she did for my husband.

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31. I reunited with my mother and I looked after for her when she developed [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] loved her to pieces and says she was a different person with them. I grieved when she died. My mother said to [REDACTED] that I could never show affection. Apparently she put us in the home because my father was an alcoholic and she came home one day to find my sisters and I tied to the bed so he could get out for a drink. She thought she had no choice but she could have at least come to visit us.
32. The memories from Nazareth House have never left me. It was an awful place. There are nights I lie in bed and think about all the things that happened. We were starved. We were like animals stealing slops. I have no sight in my right eye and my optician said that I was either born like that or I had an infection in my childhood which was never treated.
33. I've always felt inferior because of my upbringing. [REDACTED] SR 112 used to always say I was worthless and evil. I've never been able to stand up for myself and people would take advantage of my soft nature by asking me to sew things for free.
34. Growing up in a regime of such strict obedience, conformity and punishment has impacted on my self-confidence and my ability to act freely and relax. I am constantly working around the house and I am always setting myself deadlines because at Nazareth House, everything was done by the clock. My husband came home from work for years at twenty to five and I was sure to have dinner on the table dinner by one minute past twenty to five. I found it very difficult to stop working.
35. I suffer from depression. I had a breakdown at the age of twenty-nine years. I had two further breakdowns in the last few years.
36. My sister [REDACTED] also suffered in later life because of her experiences in Nazareth House. It had an effect on her marriage, and she turned to alcohol. She just tried to block everything out. [REDACTED] died of a heart attack a few years ago and a girl from Nazareth House, [REDACTED] NHB 38 [REDACTED] came to the

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funeral. [REDACTED] had told my daughter [REDACTED] to contact [REDACTED] NHB 38 [REDACTED] if anything ever happened to her so she did and she came to the funeral. She told [REDACTED] that I was a lovely woman and I was always looking out for the younger ones.

37. I have reported the abuse I suffered to the police.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 32

Dated

9-7-2014

6. With regard to paragraph 11, the Sisters endeavoured to provide an adequate education for all children. The physical chastisement and use of punishments discussed by [HIA 32] is incomprehensible in today's society and is not accepted by the Congregation as a tolerable approach in dealing with children.
7. With regard to paragraph 13, we do not accept that the children were sent to bed at 5pm; bedtimes within the home would depend on the age of the child. We do not accept that children would sneak out at midnight and return at 6.00 am, without any Sister realising this. We also believe this allegation is inconsistent with paragraph 8.
8. With regard to paragraph 14, the food was always the best standard we could provide. In the interests of the child, the Sisters would encourage them to eat the meals provided as there may not have been another option. The Sisters sought to provide nutritious food for the children and regret that any child went hungry under their care. We do not accept that any child would lift scraps out of the bins due to hunger nor do we accept that they lift slops with their hands, put it in their drawers and run to the cellar to eat it. The cellar would have been locked at all times so therefore the children would not have access to it.
9. With regard to paragraph 15, the children's clothes would have been washed in the laundry by the Sisters. We do not accept this allegation.
10. With regard to paragraph 16, many allegations have been brought to the attention of the Sisters regarding children's bath times. The congregation accept that children would have shared bath water as it may not have been practical or possible to change it for each child. We believe Jeyes Fluid may have been used on the girl's hair in order to prevent head lice within the home. The children were provided with sanitary towels; however we do accept that it may have been difficult to discuss puberty with the Sisters at this time.
11. With regard to paragraph 18, we do not accept that [HIA 32] would have been made to walk the whole way up the Ravenhill Road in her bare feet because someone had stolen her shoes. We also do not accept that she was locked in the recreation room with nothing to eat or drink all day as a punishment for this.
12. With regard to paragraphs 19 & 22, the children would have been seen by the doctor for any illnesses or vaccinations. Many of the sisters were trained nurses therefore it was appropriate for these sisters to assist a sick child if necessary. We do not accept

that ^{HIA 32} would not have received any medical attention when her finger was cut through a glass door and we do not accept that she never saw a dentist during her time in Nazareth House.

13. With regard to paragraph 20, the congregation would treat the passing of a child very seriously and do not accept this allegation.
14. With regard to paragraph 23, religion did play a large role in the life of a Sister. The inclusion of religion may have been incorporated into the children's time in the home however we do not accept that the children had to go to confession every week.
15. With regard to paragraph 24, no child would have been taken out of school to work in the laundry in Nazareth House. The girls may have helped in the laundry but this would have been assisting the sister in her duties. We have checked the records for any reference to the blocked toilets once a fortnight and cannot seem to find any material regarding this. We cannot accept that the children were expected to lift out faeces with their hands and put it into a bucket.
16. With regard to paragraph 26, we tried to give the children as normal a Christmas as possible within the constraints placed on us by the number of children and the financial restrictions, which were inevitable. The children would have organised a play for benefactors and visitors to the home and everyone enjoyed these festivities. We do believe that children's birthdays were celebrated however these may not have been to a grand scale.
17. The Congregation offers ^{HIA 32} an unreserved and most sincere apology for anything which happened during her time with us which fell below the acceptable standard.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed Se Brenda Yball

Dated 19 December 2014.