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HIA REF: 99

Witness Name: HIA 99

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 99

I, HIA 99 will say as follows:

Personal Details

1. I was born on the [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. My mother was called [REDACTED] but I do not know who my father was. I believe that I was born out of wedlock. I do not have any brothers or sisters. I believe that my mother worked as a domestic in a house in Belfast around the time that I was born. My mother had health problems including epilepsy and she was unable to care for me.
2. I have since learned that my mother spent 25 years in a mental hospital. I visited my mother at the hospital a few times when I was an adult. The first time I visited her, I was not allowed in to see her. When I saw her the next time I visited, she was very shocked, as her family had told her that I was dead.

Nazareth Lodge, Belfast (18/4/37 – 4/10/41)

3. I was sent to Nazareth Lodge in April 1937. I remember walking up the drive to Nazareth Lodge with my mother when I was about 7 years old. My mother left me there and I questioned why she never came back to collect me. I asked people in the home when my mother would be coming back for me and

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I was told that she would come tomorrow. This went on and on but tomorrow never came.

4. We bathed every Saturday evening and there would usually have been three boys in the bath at the same time. I wet the bed when I was at Nazareth Lodge. I remember an occasion when I had wet the bed and was taken to a bathroom where the bath had been filled up with cold water. **SR 118** was the nun in charge and she was a bulky woman who was in her 30s or 40s. She told me to get into the bath, but the water was so cold that it took my breath away. Two bigger and older boys held me down in the bath until the water was nearly up to my chin. **SR 118** was standing in the middle of the bathroom watching the boys push me down. Another boy filled a bucket with cold water and repeatedly threw it over my head, to the point of making me feel like I was drowning. **SR 118** told me to get out of the bath and made me lie on the bathroom floor on my stomach. She had a big thick leather belt and repeatedly hit me on my backside with it. She could have hit me a hundred times but I never felt it because my bottom was numb after the cold bath water. This happened to me frequently, and we had to endure the same punishment each time. I assumed that this was also happening to other boys, because when the boys were getting punished for whatever reason a crowd of us were made to stand in the corridor outside the bathroom door to hear what they were going through. I cannot remember the names of the boys who would have assisted **SR 118** in this way.
5. When I first started wetting the bed the bigger boys came along and woke us up out of our beds to go to the toilet in the middle of the night. I was annoyed about that and there was one occasion when I wet the bed and a boy said to me that he would not tell **SR 118** if I did something for him. The boy put his penis into my mouth and he was laughing. I cannot remember any other occasions that this happened, nor can I remember the name of the boy who did this to me. I was fearful during my time at Nazareth Lodge, and I was terrified of what was going to happen to me at night.

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6. I can remember seeing a boy with the surname **NL 138** in the toilets at the home. He had his trousers down, and what looked like his insides were coming out of his back passage. He was in a lot of pain and I felt very sorry for him. I saw this again when the boy was in the bath. When I think back on my time at the Lodge, this incident really stands. I believe that this boy must have suffered terrible sexual abuse, and that his injuries were a result of this abuse. Thinking back over these things has brought back troubling memories for me.

7. From time to time boys would have ran away from Nazareth Lodge. I remember a boy running away but I am not sure what age he was. When the boy came back they made us all stand out in the corridor outside the bathroom. I didn't see what was happening but two of the bigger boys came out and their clothes were soaking, so I think that they were pushing him into a bath in the same way that they did to me. **SR 118** came out of the bathroom and her face was red, the way it was when she was hitting you with the strap. I never thought about running away because it never entered my mind and I would not have known where to run to.

8. The food in Nazareth Lodge was not good. One time I was having dinner in the dining room and I had eaten all of my meal except for a rotten potato. **SR 118** told me to eat the potato and I ate it because I was frightened. I didn't know what was going to happen to me if I refused. This was an isolated incident, and we generally had enough to eat in the Lodge, as I do not remember being hungry.

9. The older boys also dined with the nuns and I used to see them eating meat, which we never got. We were given dripping for bread rather than butter or margarine, but I did not mind this as I had no knowledge of what butter was until I left the Lodge. I looked forward to the pudding we got at Christmas, and when we went to the beach we were given toffees and ice cream.

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10. Some of the boys would have put on plays at Christmas. I looked forward to Christmas because it was a time when I felt comfortable in the Lodge. We were given toys to play with on Christmas Day, but we did not get to keep them. We did not celebrate our birthdays in the Lodge. I did not know what birthdays were until I was older.
11. The older boys were responsible for combing our hair. They lined us up and combed our hair in turn. One day I was given the comb to look after, but I lost it when I was out playing in the field. I spent the whole day praying to St Anthony to help me find the comb, so I missed out on playing with the other children. I am not sure what would have happened to me if I did not find the comb, but I remember feeling frightened.
12. We attended the school that was within the building at Nazareth Lodge. I was not top of the class, but I did learn to read and write. I was really good at writing, and I still fill in a diary to this day. My granddaughter has asked for my diaries to be passed to her when I die. I do not think that we were taught by the nuns, as I remember a civilian man teaching us. The teachers were well looked after and the older boys or the favourites in the class acted as servants for the teachers, bringing them anything that they needed. The teachers concentrated on the children who were the brightest, but I have no complaints about the teachers. They were good people, and I felt safe and secure in their classrooms.
13. We had to go to mass every morning and I remember being in the chapel all the time. We were always saying prayers; there were prayers before meals and prayers after meals, but praying was not a big burden for me.
14. **SR 118** was very much in charge in Nazareth Lodge. There was another nun in the home, **SR 100** **SR 100** never inflicted punishment on me herself but she condoned what was going on around her. She witnessed what **SR 118** was doing to us and was acting in a supporting role to **SR 118**. There were other nuns as well but I did not really have much contact with them as they were not directly looking after us.

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15. SR 186 was a nun who stands out for different reasons. She was like a motherly figure to the boys. I do not know if she was aware what was going on in Nazareth Lodge in the dormitories or the bathroom. SR 186 gave me the only comfort in that place. Whenever she was there I felt protected, and she showed us affection. SR 186 was often unwell, and if she had to go away because of her ill health I would pray that she would get better so that she could come back and look after me again. When SR 186 was away, SR 118 was in charge of me, and the abuse would have happened again. It was like this until I left Nazareth Lodge. SR 186 has since passed away, and I have visited her grave.
16. We were taken out in minibuses to the beach at Tyrella in Newcastle for a day every summer. The nuns and the older boys organised these trips and looked after us when we were out. I looked forward to this day trip, which was a welcome break away from Nazareth Lodge. All of the boys would be lined up and given ice-cream and sweets.
17. We wore sandals most of the time. I remember being at the nun's cemetery and being made to wear shoes that were so tight that I could barely fit my feet into them. I could not walk in the shoes and I was crippled. The bigger boys escorted the younger boys and hit us with sticks to move us on. They seemed to be in a privileged position and were much older and bigger than me.
18. I do not remember much about the clothes that we were given to wear, other than the underwear. The underwear that I was made to wear was so tight that I struggled to take it off if I needed to go to the bathroom. I often wet myself as a result. I think that I was given the tight underwear by the older boys on purpose, to draw attention to me. Other than the underwear, I have no complaints about the clothes we were given, and I remember being warm enough.

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19. Nazareth Lodge itself was also kept adequately warm. Our bedding was scrupulously clean. I slept in a large dormitory with about 50 other boys. The beds had to be lined up neatly in rows. **SR 118** would check the dormitory, and if the beds were not perfectly in line, we were made to fix them. The boys I shared the dormitory with would have been around my age at the time, but it was the older boys that I would have been concerned about.
20. We had a regime of polishing the floors, but I didn't consider this as punishment as it was part of our normal routine. I actually enjoyed this work, and I did not feel threatened when I was carrying out my chores. We all had to swing together in a row, back and forward with the polishing cloth while a nun stood over us.
21. During the war we were taken from the main dormitory into the attic. I remember that there were musical instruments piled up in there. At night when we were lying in bed bigger boys came up to us with a hurley or a baseball bat and came down on our bodies with them. They were shouting at us to keep our head under the blankets. If we dared to put our head out from under the blanket the bigger boys would have come down on us with the bats. I cannot remember how often this happened, but I was scared and thought that they might smother us. This did not happen every night, but it happened more times than I felt comfortable with. Looking back on it now, I understand that we were made to keep our heads under the blankets so that we could not witness any of the sexual abuse by the older boys on the younger boys.
22. I remember staying in the attic during the war, and looking out the window and seeing the docks area lit up with flames during the air raids. We were moved again from the attic down to the bottom floor, where we had to sit on the floor with blankets over us because it was so cold. Workmen built stone blast walls around the bottom of the home to protect us against broken glass. Sister **SR 118** was walking around the room with her large rosary beads, repeating the Decades and asking us to pray that the Germans would beat the Russians because the Russians did not believe in God. I got in trouble during this time because as **SR 118** was approaching me, I passed

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wind. The next morning I was taken to the bathroom for the usual punishment as **SR 118** said that I had disrespected her.

23. I went to confession one day and confessed to the Priest all that had happened to me in the home. A week or two later Mr and **NL 141** a farming couple from [REDACTED] came to the home to meet me. Sister **SR 118** told me that they were going to adopt me, and that I would live with them until they died and that the farm would be passed on to me. I did not know anything about farming but I thought that if it meant getting out of Nazareth Lodge I would gladly go. I am not sure if this was organised by the Priest who had heard my confession, but it does seem like a coincidence that it should happen so quickly after I told him what was happening to me. I was given no preparation for leaving Nazareth Lodge, and it just happened out of the blue.

Life After Care

24. Initially I found farm life to be very exciting, but I soon discovered that I was living under another regime. At night **NL 141** gave me a harness that I had to polish with black polish and Brasso. Every morning I had to wash a big basket of potatoes in the nearby river before I went to school. I was sent out to other people's farms as well, such as the [REDACTED] farm, where I had to pull flax. If I was not working to **NL 141** satisfaction, he would have scolded me until I was crying. I often visited with neighbours called the [REDACTED]. The families who lived in the neighbouring farms looked after me, and I think that they may have looked on me as orphans. Eventually I stopped working for **NL 141** and I think that he recognised that I had more in common with the neighbouring farmers.

25. **NL 141** could be a cruel man. I was very interested in playing sports like hurley and cricket. If I was late back from a match he would get very angry, and would break my hurley. The sticks cost half a crown each, so if **NL 141** broke my stick I would have to work for the [REDACTED] to save for a new one

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or make one myself. Although **NL 141** could be cruel, he never hit me. I was more like an unpaid servant.

26. No one from Nazareth Lodge came to check on me. I have since discovered that I was not legally adopted. One day I was on my way to Mass and I started to walk towards [REDACTED]. A man called [REDACTED] pulled up alongside me and offered to take me back to **NL 141** farm. [REDACTED] asked me about my experiences with **NL 141** and I showed him the bruises that I had received from **SR 118** that were still on my backside. I remember that [REDACTED] was shocked. I was embarrassed by the marks left on my body, and tried to avoid wearing shorts when I was playing sports.

27. I decided to leave farming and get a job that would provide me with a sense of shelter. When I was 18 I looked into joining the Irish Army. I was told that I needed references from someone who lived in Northern Ireland and someone from the South. I asked **SR 118** for a reference because I did not know who else to ask. I couldn't get a reference from the South, so I did not join the Army. I travelled to [REDACTED] in England to find work digging a tunnel. I moved around after a while and went to [REDACTED] and worked in a factory.

28. I met my wife [REDACTED] when I was 21 at a dance in [REDACTED] and we were married in 1953. I had 11 children with my wife, but one of my daughters committed suicide [REDACTED]. I feel that my childhood was taken from me. I have 28 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren. I see my grandchildren living a life of comfort, full of love from their grandparents.

29. I contacted the Sisters in 2005 to ask for compensation for the treatment that I received during my time at Nazareth Lodge, but I was denied compensation and offered counselling instead. My solicitor contacted the Sisters again in 2009 following the publication of the Ryan report. I have suffered from flashbacks of my time at Nazareth Lodge. These started when my grandchildren were born, and when I started to spend time with them. I have never reported what happened to me to the PSNI.

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30. I read a story in a newspaper about **SR 118** and another nun being taken to court for the abuse of children living in an orphanage in Scotland. I understand that **SR 118** was not convicted, but that the other nun was.

31. The abuse I suffered at the hands of the nuns in Nazareth Lodge has not affected my religious beliefs. I believe that you cannot judge all the nuns just by one bad apple. Priests have been given a hard time in the media but I still attend mass every Sunday.

32. I believe that apologies are easily given, and I don't believe that an apology would go far enough. I am glad now that someone is taking notice of what happened to us children in the homes, and I am glad that what I am saying will be told to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 99Dated 9 . 7 . 14

J. M. J. +
Margaret Hodge,
Ravenhill Road
Welford

3.3.49

This is to certify that I have
known [redacted] since
1937.

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He is sober, honest and
industrious and I feel sure
he will endeavour to give
every satisfaction if accepted,
as a recruit, in the Army of
Ireland to which, I understand, he
has made application.

SR 118

Sister of Margaret