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HIA REF: 183

Witness Name: HIA 183

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 183

I, HIA 183 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] I think I remained with my mother for the first six months of my life. I do not know anything about my father or mother. I do not know any details about why I was placed in care. I was placed in Fox Lodge on 8th January 1946 when I was six months old.

Nazareth Lodge Children's Home, Belfast (01/09/1951 – 12/08/1957)

2. I was transferred to Nazareth Lodge on 1st September 1951.
3. I remember SR 47 SR 71 SR 152 SR 118 and SR 34 When I first arrived in Nazareth Lodge there were no groups and SR 118 was in charge. After a number of years the children were separated in to groups. I was in SR 34 group. It was called the St Joseph's group. She was helped by NL 5
4. I was never called HIA 183 I was known by my surname. My clothes had the number sixty six sown in them and that number was called when laundry was returned instead of my name. I remember feeling isolated. I remember there

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were a lot of older boys and I found that intimidating. I do not remember any love or any stimulation.

5. I remember being punished a couple of times when I was about five or six years old for something trivial by being put in a freezing cold bath by **SR 118**. I was placed in the cold water and then the cold water was poured over my head about half a dozen times. I remember one occasion I was punished in this manner along with another boy called **HIA 427** who was my age. He had special needs and was not always in control of his bowels. I was punished first. **SR 118** then ordered me out of the bath and told **HIA 427** to get undressed. I realised **HIA 427** had soiled his underpants. **SR 118** took his soiled underpants and violently and cruelly rubbed them in his face. Until my dying day I will never forget what happened or what **SR 118** was capable of. **HIA 427** and I were only about seven years old and the experience has had a profound effect on me. I visited **HIA 427** when he was dying of cancer. Sadly he passed away on 25th February 2014 and I am glad to have had the opportunity to see him before he died. He was a lovely man and an old friend.
6. I also remember a night when **SR 34** made everyone in our dormitory get out of bed and kneel in the corridor for an hour. It was very cold. I do not know why we had to do this but I think it was because someone had done something wrong. **SR 34** must have realised how unfair she had been to us as she gave us all a chocolate sweet before we went to bed that night.
7. There was a lay staff member called **NL 4**. One day we were going in to the refectory for our dinner. There was a new kitchen being built and I was fascinated to see what had been built. I was looking in through the half door. I could hear **NL 4** saying to hurry up and the next minute she slapped me across the face from behind and knocked me off balance. It stung for several hours afterwards. There was no warning and it was a terrible experience. She was not suitable for that job because of her vile temper.

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8. I remember one day at school before we were allowed in to the classroom **SR 34** **SR 34** was checking that our hands were clean and our hair was brushed. She told me I was looking very pale and to go to bed. I went to bed and slept most of the day. No one checked on me or brought me anything. I told one of the lay members of staff that I had not had anything to eat all day and she told me to go back to bed as I was supposed to be unwell. I was a placid child who never put up a fight so I went back to bed. I was glad to get breakfast the next morning.
9. The food was not great, it was mainly porridge and stew. I remember at times being so hungry I would have sneaked into the kitchen after school and stuffed myself with bread. I was very lucky not to have been caught.
10. The routine was very regimental. We would have been up early, at about 6.30am, and been sent to bed early at about 6.30pm. Every day seemed to be the same. Religion played a big role in our daily routine. We had to go to mass every morning and after tea there was the rosary and benediction. We had chores to do like cleaning and polishing the floors. The education was poor. When I left Nazareth Lodge I could not read or write.
11. A lady named **██████████** came to Nazareth Lodge once a month and took me out for the day. This was usually a Sunday and I greatly looked forward to this day every month. During the summer another family called the **██████████** took me to Waringstown for two or three weeks. I thank God for those short breaks away as they are the only happy times I remember from my childhood. On returning to Nazareth Lodge the Sister would take away the sweets or money **██████████** or **██████████** **██████████** would have given me. I always just assumed the money went towards the upkeep of Nazareth Lodge. We would have nowhere to spend it anyway as we did not go out.
12. I vaguely remember when I was six or seven **██████████ SR 34** came to tell me there was a young couple asking to speak to me. **██████████ SR 34** just told me to keep smiling. I think the couple only stayed for around ten minutes and gave me sweets. I have no recollection of the conversation. In hindsight I believe the

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woman was my mother. In all my time at Nazareth Lodge I had no other visitors other than [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED]. I had no social worker and I do not remember any inspections.

De La Salle Boys' Home, Rubane House, Kircubbin (12/08/1957 – 13/07/1960)

13. I was transferred to Rubane House on 12th August 1957. Nazareth Lodge was horrendous and going to Rubane was like stepping out of the frying pan into the fire. Brother [REDACTED] **BR 17** was in charge. He came to collect about twelve of us from Nazareth Lodge in a minivan. I was in a dormitory in the big house for a year or two. There were two or three dormitories in the big house with eight or nine boys in each one. After a while I was transferred to the smaller house near the farm. There were two dormitories in the smaller house.
14. I found Rubane very intimidating. We did not receive a good education. I think everyone was educationally slow. There was no competition and there was no extra help. I was in the choir and I could only read The Lord's Prayer in Latin because I was taught it.
15. There was a [REDACTED] **BR 66** who was in Rubane for a couple of months when I first arrived. He had a lot of compassion. He was the only person who took time with us and realised the importance of education and made you feel important. He was the first person who taught me how to tell the time and he taught me how to write my name. I remember crying when he left. He was the only one who made me feel important and he made me realise how important it was to get an education. No one else seemed to care about our education. I think they thought we were damaged goods and were beyond teaching.
16. I also remember an occasion in school when [REDACTED] **BR 17** called me to the front of the classroom and asked me what we were learning. I replied we were learning the hymn. He threw me over the table and beat me black and blue with his fists. This was because I said "hymn" instead of "Latin". One of the boys in the class eventually shouted out "it's Latin you're learning". So I said "it's Latin". He only stopped when I said that. I was sobbing really hard. I was not right for

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about two or three days. I was traumatised by this incident and I have never forgotten it.

17. After about three months **BR 17** took some of us into his office and questioned us about our family. I think he was trying to find out if the boys had anyone outside that they could talk to. He was covering his back so he knew who could be touched and who couldn't.
18. After about four or five months **BR 17** called me out of class along with **DL 396** **DL 397** and **HIA 427**. We went to his office at the end of the corridor. He made the four of us strip naked. He sat at his desk pretending to write. He made us turn round to face the wall and then turn back again. He then told us to get dressed and go back to our class. It was demoralising and inhumane.
19. We would say the Rosary at 4.30 in the afternoon and then have Benediction. About half a dozen times **BR 17** told me to go up to his room afterward as he wanted to talk to me. He would make me take down my pants and lie on the bed. He would pretend to be examining me until I got aroused. He would then tell me to get dressed and leave. This happened about six times. I knew that it wasn't right but I had nobody to tell and I was afraid of telling anyone in case it got back to him.
20. There was one occasion when I was in bed in the smaller house. It was about midnight or one o'clock in the morning. A man came into the dormitory in a white sheet. He went round every bed, put his hands down the sheet and groped every boy in turn. There were about eight or nine boys in the dormitory. The last boy he groped let out a scream and the man in the white sheet ran into **BR 15** room. We therefore came to the conclusion it was **BR 15** **BR 15**. He was the only Brother who lived in the smaller house.
21. **BR 15** was also in charge of the clothes. I had buttons missing on my shorts once and I asked him if he could fix them. He brought me in to the dormitory and told me to keep the shorts on while he fixed the buttons. He fiddled with the shorts until I got aroused. The abuse went no further than that.

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22. There was another occasion when we were watching television. We were carrying on a bit and **BR 15** put all the boys in to the basement for two hours. This happened two or three times. There were about fifty or sixty boys. There was no heating and there was condensation on the walls. While we were down there some of the boys were still carrying on. **BR 15** came down to see who was carrying on. He picked out a boy called **DL 398** and hit him across the face with a bamboo cane. The blood was pouring out of him. **BR 15** then hit him across the legs and back. He could not sit down for a couple of days afterwards. **BR 15** had a vicious temper and I actually thought he got a kick out of it. I have never been able to forget that incident.
23. **DL 398** and I remained friends after we left care. We cycled together. His work colleagues called him **DL 398** because he could always fix things. I have always thought that if **DL 398** had had a proper upbringing he would have been a great engineer as he could have fixed anything. He was also a great photographer and he took my wedding photographs.
24. I received no stimulation at Rubane House. I was never picked for the football team and I could never get near the snooker table. I think I involved myself in so many activities when I was older like cycling, walking and golf to try to make up for not having much recreation when I was a child.

Life After Care

25. I left Rubane House in 1960 when I was fifteen years old. I remember leaving Rubane and walking down the road to get the bus to go to my first job. I had a suitcase with two of everything, two pairs of pants, two pairs of socks and one suit. It was the loneliest day of my life. I had no-one. I had no education and I was worried about how I was going to cope with the outside world.
26. I recall when I settled in to my lodgings after leaving Kircubbin I would wake up after having a nightmare thinking that I was still in Kircubbin. It was such a relief

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to then realise I was only dreaming and would never be going back to that awful place again.

27. The Nazareth Lodge Welfare Committee organised for me to stay in digs with a man called [REDACTED]. He owned a cafe where I worked as a chef. I stayed with him for over a year and then he organised digs for me in [REDACTED]. I knew that being a chef was not for me. I worked as a labourer and then I applied for an apprenticeship in [REDACTED] and trained as a hairdresser. I had my own business for 27 years and I retired three years ago. I got married in 1980 and I have three daughters and two grandchildren.
28. In the late 1970's, with the help of friends, I found my older, half-brother [REDACTED]. He had been adopted and had grown up in Dublin. He moved to London and now lives in Fulham. He works as an [REDACTED]. I telephone him about once a year. I have relations in Dublin and I met my Aunt once. I do not keep in contact with any of them because I think they knew where I was and they did not come to get me. I do not know my mother or father.
29. I went to English classes and computer classes but I always dropped out as I could never keep up. I tried to teach myself instead. I still struggle in my writing and my maths but I can read. When I left care I was very sheltered and unable to relate to people. My best education was from my job as a hairdresser where I learned to relate to people.
30. I organise a reunion once a year and about 14 of us ex-residents meet up. I visit another ex-resident from the home who is now a recluse. He said to me once do you ever regret being born? That question really hit me and made me realise how much he is still suffering like so many other ex-residents.
31. I came forward to the Inquiry because I think there should be accountability. I do not think any child should have to suffer the miserable childhood I had. No parents, no love, no stability, no education. All I wanted was love and I never received it in either home. It took me a long time after I left care to learn how to love. I always mistrusted people. I was on tranquilisers for twenty five years but

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I have been off them now for about twenty years. Despite everything that has happened to me I feel I have been blessed since I left care as I have a good family and good health.

32. I believe the State should be held accountable for abandoning us and we should receive an explanation why this abandonment was ever allowed to happen. There was no help for us and no support given to the Brothers or Sisters to enable them to help us. I hope lessons are learned from this Inquiry and future generations never have to have the upbringing we endured.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed **HIA 183**

Dated 11/3/14

Welfare Officer's Report for week ending Friday 30th September, 1960

26/9/'60

[REDACTED]

When I called at the Lodge SR 34 informed me that there is a good chance that [REDACTED] may eventually adopt HIA 183 and in her view this would be most desirable as [REDACTED] is well known at the Lodge and regarded as a very suitable person to undertake the care of this boy.

26/9/'60

09/10/60

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09/10/60

Welfare Officer's Report (continued)

11/10/60

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Formerly employed at the

SR 34

Is now with sack Merchants. reports " he is only in this job till I can arrange that he will take up work with Belfast. I have a good chance of getting him steady employment with the firm when he is 16 years old."

11/10/60

12/10/60

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