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HIA REF: 423

Witness Name: HIA 423

**THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 423**

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I, HIA 423 will say as follows:-

**Personal details**

1. I was born on [REDACTED] My mother's name was [REDACTED] I don't know anything about my father. I have one brother [REDACTED] who was a year older than me. I was put into Nazareth Lodge at two or three weeks old and [REDACTED] was put into care at the same time.
2. My christening name was HIA 355 but when I met my foster family, who went on to adopt me, they already had a daughter called [REDACTED] so I was named HIA 355

**Nazareth Lodge, 1964 – 27<sup>th</sup> November 1970**

3. I was taken to Nazareth Lodge when I was two weeks old and I remember there was a nun called SR 28 who was in charge. She wore white robes, and the rest of the nuns wore black. There were two groups, and I was put into the same group as [REDACTED] but all the girls were in one dormitory and all the boys were in the other.

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4. As a baby in Nazareth Lodge I remember very little but as I got older I was more aware of the things that were happening but I just took it in my stride. We just knew when we got up in the morning that we were going to be hit. One of my memories of Nazareth Lodge was that there was a lot of physical and mental abuse. The nuns told us that we would go to hell or that we would burn in hell because we didn't have a mummy or a daddy and that they did not want us. We were constantly told that nobody wanted us and that we were dirty. I was always terrified of dying. I remember crying one night, whilst out with my foster family, and telling my foster mother's sister that I didn't want to die because I didn't want to burn in hell.
5. I don't remember the whole daily routine. We got up in the morning and had to stand beside our bed. The nuns would walk around every morning and rub their hands up and down our bed sheets, under the covers, to check if they were wet. We got washed and had breakfast. We had to pray all the time. At night, we had to kneel and say our prayers at the bed.
6. On one occasion I remember wetting the bed. The nuns beat me and called me dirty. They made me get back into the bed and lie in it until somebody came and told me to get up. For the next week, when I was in bed, the nuns would tie my feet, at the ankles, to the bottom of the bed. It was an iron bed with poles and they used bits of rag to tie me to it. My feet would be freezing and the nuns would come back to check that I hadn't covered them over. One night I got up in the middle of the night to go to the toilet because I was so afraid of wetting the bed. I went into the toilet and could hear the nuns outside talking. I had to sit on top of the toilet for hours, with my feet up, waiting on the nuns to go away so that I could run and get back into bed. I would have been punished for being caught out of bed, and I would have been punished if I had have wet the bed, so I couldn't do anything right. Even now I'm petrified and have to go to the toilet before I go to bed.
7. At bath time, we were stripped and made to stand in a line. We had to walk up and down the wooden steps, and then we were put in a big tub. The nuns used scrubbers, like those used to scrub a floor, to bath us, and we all had to

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share the same bath water. There would be one nun on each side of us. They would grab us by the back of the hair and pull us down under the water to get the carbolic soap out of our hair. There was always an institutional smell that we couldn't get rid of. We would be really red when we got out because of the scrubbing brush. All the children wanted to be the last to get bathed because whenever we got out of the bath we were made to stand, still naked and without any towel, until everyone was bathed. We could be left standing naked for up to an hour, before we were allowed to get dressed.

8. I don't really remember playing much but I do recall being outside, and trying to help the grounds man by lifting his wheel barrow. He had told me not to touch it and warned me that it would fall, which it did, but he was very nice to me even after I had done wrong. I don't really remember there being TV or books.
9. I remember one occasion when a nun asked me to get off a chair and because I didn't get off quick enough she pushed me and I cut my eye. I remember putting my hands to my head and feeling blood. I still have a scar on my right eye from that incident. When I went out to my foster home that weekend, my mummy couldn't believe that the nuns did not get me treated for the injury. I don't recall ever seeing a doctor or a dentist during my time in Nazareth Lodge.
10. There were black children in the home. My older sister [REDACTED] called them [REDACTED] but we called them [REDACTED]. I felt that they were treated differently in the home, and [REDACTED] said it might have been because their parents were paying the nuns to look after them. There was also a black baby in the home who shared the dormitory with us and she would have cried at night. On one occasion I took the baby into my bed to try to keep her quiet.
11. On one occasion I ran over to my brother's dormitory and get into the bed beside him. He had the first bed in the dormitory. I begged him to run away with me but he kept telling me to go back to bed as I would get into trouble.

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He let me sleep in his bed that night but I got back into my own bed in the early hours.

12. I remember one Saturday night, the nuns were walking around the dormitory with clothes on a hanger, trying to decide who to bring to chapel. If we woke the next day, and there was an outfit hanging at the end of the bed it meant we were privileged. They would wash us and make sure our hair was done and we looked lovely. In the chapel the other children used to look round and say there's an orphan. The nuns would tell us not to look around because God was watching us.
13. I remember Father Brendan Smith visiting the home on one occasion. I remember standing outside a big wooden door with pigtails and a dress on. The nuns would stand behind us and poke us, telling us to sit on his knee and be nice to him. They told us to do what he said and to tell him that we were happy. He asked me questions about my name and my age. I don't remember being sexually abused at any time in the home.
14. I was fostered out from Nazareth Lodge since I was a baby. There were two girls, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who went to St Monica's Secondary School and would come into the home after school to help with the children in the orphanage. The [REDACTED] started to take me out every weekend to stay with the family, at their home in [REDACTED] I would go from a Friday until a Sunday. I never wanted to go back to the home on Sunday nights, because I knew what I was going back to. I used to beg them to let me stay but they said if I didn't go back they would never be allowed to have me again. On a Sunday my mummy used to make me up a bag of sweets as a bribe to get me to go back to Nazareth Lodge. I remember being brought back and the nuns trailing me out of the back of the car. They pulled me by the hair and said nobody wants you, we don't even want you. When I got back to the home, the piggy's used to steal my sweets. They would hit me and often they pulled and trailed me, but nothing was ever done about it. My mummy was a dressmaker and she used to make me lovely clothes and dresses but as soon as I went back to the home, the nuns took them off me and they were never seen again.

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At the weekends if I was not taken out by the [REDACTED] I would hide under the sheets to keep my head covered. I could hear the nuns walking around, and the swish of their rosary beads.

15. On one occasion I was fostered out to another family, along with [REDACTED] I think the nuns were trying to get us a foster placement together. The [REDACTED] came to collect me on the Friday afternoon, and were devastated when I wasn't there, and they found out I had been sent to another family. The nuns hadn't even warned them that they were thinking of sending me to another family. My daddy said to the family that if this was the upset that would be caused, then I wouldn't be coming back to them. The other foster placement didn't work out because the family didn't want a girl so [REDACTED] and I were put back into Nazareth Lodge.

16. One day the [REDACTED] said that I didn't have to go back to the home. I think I was about six at that stage. I was fostered out to them full time from November 1970, and then I was legally adopted by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1976. I asked them once how I was picked and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] told me that when they went into the home I was always left sitting in the cot and they used to come over and lift me.

17. I don't remember going to primary school in Nazareth Lodge. I only remember attending primary school when I was living with the [REDACTED] I went to St Anthony's Primary School and I was known as [REDACTED] HIA 423 and then when I went to St **Monica's** on the Ravenhill Road I was known as [REDACTED] HIA 423 I remember the girls in school realised that my surname had changed and they would tease me, but I would put on a front.

18. I don't have any recollection of social services involvement in my care. I was never spoken to about being fostered or adopted by the [REDACTED] but I do remember being brought to Court on the day of my adoption. The Judge asked me did I want to go to live with the [REDACTED] My biological mother was in Court that day, and the Judge commented that I looked a lot like her.

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Life After Care

19. When I was twelve I got a job working in [REDACTED] as a silver service waitress. I was a bit of a rebel and failed all my O'Levels. I then went to [REDACTED] and completed a secretarial course which I passed with flying colours. At seventeen I got a job as a book-keeper in a builder's yard and stayed there for two years. I then moved to [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] and worked as a wages clerk. I went on to work in [REDACTED]
20. I fell pregnant at twenty and had my daughter [REDACTED] when I was twenty one. I went on to have a son, [REDACTED]. Both my parents are dead but we are a very close family and I am probably the rock for the family. I have always felt accepted, and a proper part of the [REDACTED] family. They are a very loving family.
21. The nuns handed children out willy nilly and to this day I carry that with me. One day, at the age of thirty six, I was approached in the school car park by a girl who told me that I was nearly her sister. She told me that I used to come to her house, and that they wanted to keep me but they couldn't. I had no recollection of this at all. My son [REDACTED] came home from school one day and said that [REDACTED] had told him they were nearly related. I didn't want people knowing as I thought it was dirty and nasty. In my eyes my life did not start until after I had been adopted. When my twinkle magazine fell out of my school bag in P3, I realised that there was an outside world.
22. Even in my later life, my time in the home has constantly affected me in everyday life. As a result of my time in care I am very vulnerable and worry about what people think. I tend not to talk about my time in care because I have always been embarrassed by my background. It can be difficult when I am asked about the medical history of my family and I don't have that information. I have never had counselling. I am a strong person and I believe that my experiences have made me the person I am. I'm not a bitter person but I don't like nuns. I think I made myself into a bubbly person because of

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what I had been through. We had to be happy so that the nuns wouldn't hurt us.

23. [REDACTED] and I didn't really have any contact with each other after being put in to Nazareth Lodge. He was adopted by another family by the name of [REDACTED] but his adoptive family brought him to see me in [REDACTED] on the day of my Holy Communion. We didn't have any more contact after that. I have never had any contact with my birth mother and I don't want to have. I blame her for what happened to me, although my adoptive family would never have found me if my mother had not put me in Nazareth House. I feel like I was made to be a part of the [REDACTED] family.

**Statement of Truth**

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

HIA 423

Signed

Dated

01.10.14.

46031

**DOWN & CONNOR CATHOLIC FAMILY WELFARE SOCIETY.**

Tel; 27657/8.

107A, Falls Road,  
Belfast BT12 4PE.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

This is to state that **HIA 423** (D.O.B. [REDACTED]) has been taken from Nazareth Lodge, Ravenhill Road, Belfast, on a nursing and maintenance basis by Mr. & Mrs. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] Belfast, since December, 1970. The latter are looking after the child voluntarily and get no financial assistance from any source.

This arrangement has been approved by Down County Welfare Committee.

**NHB 148**

*Social Worker.*