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HIA REF: 439

Witness Name: HIA 439

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 439

I, HIA 439 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born HIA 439 on the [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]
2. I was put into care when I was eight years of age or thereabouts and remained there until I was fourteen. My parents separated and care was the only option for us. There were five boys and two girls in my family. We were all put into care the boys went to Nazareth Lodge except for my oldest brother. [REDACTED] my younger sister was put into the baby home but not at the same time as us.

Nazareth House 1939-1948

3. The master of our school in [REDACTED] took us in to Nazareth House, neither my mother nor father were with us. I think I was about eight when I entered the home.
4. We were wild children in the sense that we lived in the country and were used to running around doing what we liked. I recall my first memory of Nazareth House was a dark dungeon passage and I cried my heart out.

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5. In my eyes the early stages in the home were not the worst but as we got older the head nun [REDACTED] SR 112 was very bad to us. She battered us stupid, she couldn't hit me hard enough so she would make me take my shoes off and she would hit me on the feet. [REDACTED] SR 112 used a cane and she would hold the sleeve of her habit so she could get a good whack at you. In the home we were only ever known as a number never called by our name.
6. In the morning we cleaned the dormitories they were massive they might have had fifty two beds. I was in Our Lady's Dormitory. We had to sleep with our hands crossed over our chests. The nuns would go around and check that our hands were neat beneath the covers fearing we were interfering with ourselves. They would hit us really hard if they discovered our hands were not where they should be.
7. The floors had to be shining and we cleaned them with a cloth under our feet going up and down until they were glittering. I remember us scrubbing a big passage that ran the length of the convent. We would have been on our knees.
8. On occasion we were sent to the laundry and there was a lady there called [REDACTED] who was in charge she had been reared in the convent. She was a cross old woman with a double chin. We had to scrub when washing the boards in the sink; we thought it was great because she would give us bread and jam.
9. I ran away from the home on one occasion with three or four others. We did not know Belfast and the police found us and brought us back. The nuns shaved our hair when we returned so that we could be identified and known as the runaways. We were hit and punished but the punishment was not too bad. I was made kneel in the Church with the old people. I liked doing it because the old people were nice and they would bring in biscuits and sweets. This didn't last too long as one of the nuns seen us and we hadn't eaten our sweets in time so she took us back.

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10. Our routine was school and prayer, we prayed all through the summer holidays. At one stage they shipped some children to Australia I remember **HIA 335** and [REDACTED] going. We had to pray that they would arrive safely even though the trip would take six weeks. At mass if we didn't go to communion we would be slapped.
11. Bath day was a Thursday and there were three baths all different sizes. Our hair was washed in the first bath and then we were dipped in jeyes fluid, the result of which would be that we would have two big red eyes the following day. We were not allowed to be seen and there would be two people standing with a sheet up. They put some sort of washing soda in the hand basin and we cleaned our teeth there. We never had toothpaste and cleaned our teeth with soap on our finger. It was only when there was a new Mother Superior that we got toothbrushes.
12. Every year we would be taken on a day out around Christmas, they gave us a couple of shillings and we went to Woolworths. I would always buy Gibson's toothpaste in a wee tin. It was dry toothpaste and lasted for quite a period of time. Prior to Christmas the Woolworths ladies would come into the home and put on a concert for us.
13. We were occasionally taken on walks and we had to go like soldiers in a line. We used to pick up the chewing gum on the street and put it in our mouths. We never had sweets and we never got visitors who would bring us any. Even the children that had been given stuff would get it taken off them by the nuns.
14. When the girls in the home took their period they were given sanitary pads that were made in the workhouse. They were big and thick with a wee tab on each of them and a wee belt that you put in. We had to wash them every night and you never got new ones. Our legs were rubbed off us and you had to wash them down the toilet to try and get the blood off. We dried them on our shoulders or we lay on them under our sheet to dry them out. It was

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- considered shameful to have your period. I am riddled with arthritis and I believe that this process is part of the cause.
15. The food in the convent was awful you couldn't eat it, it wasn't a bit healthy. The bread would be spread with dripping lard. I was used to good country food. Once a year on Easter Sunday we got an egg, most days it was porridge. **SR 185** was an old nun from [REDACTED] and if we dropped any porridge back onto our plates she would spoon it up and force it into us.
16. **SR 184** was in charge of the store and that's where all the good stuff stayed, she kept jam and other things. There was always a supply of apples and when we were out in the garden she came out and threw them at us but they were always half rotten.
17. A girl that worked in the old people's part of the Convent used to bring down the bread cuttings for us. We got to know what time this would be and we would run to get the bread crusts from her. There was an old nun called Sister **SR 185** who was [REDACTED] we used to run up and open the door for her with the intention of grabbing something from her plate. I know it was a terrible thing to do but we were very hungry.
18. There were bullies in the home as well. I am not sure that the nuns knew of them but they controlled us. In one instance we were outside and the Holy Rosary Chapel was next door to us [REDACTED] was in charge. After the last bell rang which was known as the Jesus, Mary and Joseph bell the nuns would go to their cells. The bullies would send me over the wall to get pears and apples because I was a great tom boy and good at climbing. We were caught by one of the nuns that night she shouted at us from her cell. I threw myself over the wall I was all cut with glass because the top of it was surrounded with glass but I never let on and hid it because I knew that they would punish me.
19. Part of my job included looking after the children who wet the beds. Those children were routinely slapped. I would have to ensure that the beds would be dry for the following night but the sheets never got cleaned. I had to get up

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during the night and make sure they hadn't wet the bed. We had to have their beds dry so we dried them wherever we could be that us lying on top of them at night. On occasion we had to check for dirty heads if the girls had nits. If that was the case we would have to clean some of their hairs.

20. The older girls bullied us when confessions were on. Once they told me that I had to say "Please father I confess, please father I stole a white dress, please father I gave it back, please father I let a big fart." NHB 34 was hearing confessions and he came out and slapped me, grabbed me by the back of the neck and brought me up the front of the aisle where benediction was being held. The nun's choir was nearly at the altar and they were shaking their fists at me. I knew what I was going to get when we got back to the class room.
21. The girls in the home often didn't have shoes either. I remember it snowing at times and they took our shoes off us and put us out in the snow. They were evil. They said that I would end up being a [REDACTED] like my mother. I knew then that they must have known something about my mother. In later life when I got out and met her I discovered that she didn't live that far from the Convent. She told me that she visited on one occasion and she told me the nuns told her not to come back. Whether or not it was true I don't know.
22. Part of my work in the home included caring for the old people in their part of the convent. I quite liked that work.
23. I don't recall inspectors ever visiting the home and the quality of education was very poor. If you were slow you were moved to the back of the class.
24. I only remember him visiting us in the home once that was when he was putting [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] into the home. I remember it because it was Holy Saturday and I must have looked desperately thin but I remember him saying I will never see her again. That was very hard as [REDACTED] was in the baby part of Nazareth House and there was a toilet that we could see out of and there was a big fence round it. [REDACTED] used to cry wanting me but there was nothing I

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could do I couldn't go near her. I got to see my brothers maybe once or twice a year in the summer. We would walk down to the Lodge the boys never wore shoes and kicked football with their bare feet.

25. Some of the priests were equally as bad as the nuns but there was an exception. There were two brothers [REDACTED] NHB 18 and his brother [REDACTED] NHB 18 was the only one that really cared about us. He always brought us in a present when he knew it was our birthday. He was always for the children and the nuns did not like that. If he thought one of the nuns was going to use a cane he would have grabbed their arm to stop them.

26. At the age of fourteen they sent me to St John of God in Newry I think it was a hospital, I never unpacked my case and when they were all at mass the next morning I lifted my case and headed for the train station, nobody ever looked for me. I headed back to Belfast and to [REDACTED] NHB 18 house because I knew he lived near the convent in [REDACTED]. He phoned another girl and said that I was with him and he got me a job.

27. I then started working for [REDACTED] who was the Presbyterian Minister on [REDACTED]. His wife was [REDACTED] and I answered the phone and tidied up for her. I couldn't have asked for nicer people. They treated me like their daughter the wife made me clothes and gave me money to get a pair of shoes from McIlroy's shop on the Ormeau Road. On a Holy day of obligation [REDACTED] would drive me to Holy Rosary and pick me up again. The Reverend then got moved to [REDACTED]. I had some friends in Belfast so I didn't want to move. That family were so good to me they were genuinely good people.

28. After the Reverend left I went down to [REDACTED] to my father but he was a drunk and when he got drunk he would have touched us, we were not daughters to him.

29. At that stage I discovered my mother was living in [REDACTED] and I made contact but she was never great. I met my husband in [REDACTED].

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30. Even after everything that happened we still kept our faith. My sister [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] she stopped going to chapel for a long time. [REDACTED] lives in [REDACTED] but he does not go near the chapel. He spent his whole childhood in care
31. SR 112 was so cruel. There was a wee girl called [REDACTED] and she wasn't well. If you weren't well you got sent down to the workshop or work where they had done the sewing, got a spoonful of medicine. That was all the treatment. The wee girl was collapsing and she died in the convent. They put her in a wee room and that was it. I often think of her still, the nuns were very hard people.
32. One day a NHB 18 was in coming down the stairs and I ran to meet him. I had been caned wildly and there were big wallops all over my legs. I showed him the wallops and he asked who did it, I told him it was SR 112. He sent me into the classroom to get the cane, I ran into the classroom and SR 112 was sitting there. I told her that NHB 18 wanted the cane that marked me. She always called me [REDACTED]. When she came out NHB 18 NHB 18 asked her what was the caning for and she couldn't answer him. He said he never wanted to see a child marked like that again. When she got me again she pushed her knuckle right into my head and said I will mark you where you can't show. The beatings continued and didn't stop until we got out.
33. My brother [REDACTED] was in Nazareth Lodge and he was sent to [REDACTED]. He was working for a nun but they were good to him. He was about fourteen or fifteen at that stage. [REDACTED] was in the Lodge until they got him a job about Belfast and [REDACTED] was taken out by a family from [REDACTED] but all they wanted was the money.

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Life after Care

34. I am married and I have five children four boys and a girl.

35. My surviving siblings and I have a very strong relationship despite our years in the care system.

36. I have one sister in [REDACTED] and one brother still in [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] came home after thirty years and died three months later. I have another brother [REDACTED] who still lives in [REDACTED].

37. Nobody knows what we went through but there is a part of me that forgives them for the treatment because my father and mother didn't want us so what else could then have done. We as children never knew love so as we started to build our own families we realised how vital a mother's love was and how much we had missed out on. My time in care has made me a tougher person.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 439

Dated

11 - 7 - 2014