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HIA REF: 223

Witness Name: HIA 223

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 223

I, HIA 223 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Belfast. My mum was Protestant and my dad was Catholic. They weren't married at the time of my birth, but they did subsequently marry. From talking to my mother in later years, I believe that a priest was involved in having me removed from their care.

Nazareth House, Belfast, 6th July 1951 – 13th February 1965

2. I don't know what age I was when I was first taken into care. The records show that I was aged three years when I first went into Nazareth House. I found out in later years that my mother was paying fifteen shillings a week for my keep.
3. I don't remember anything until I was about six or seven years of age. I was in Our Lady's Group. SR 31 was in charge of our group. SR 134 and SR 116 were in charge of the other groups.
4. We were woken up by SR 31 each morning. We had to get up at 6.30am and go to Mass. I can't recall what we were given for breakfast. After breakfast we got ready for school. We all had chores to do. We had to clean

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everything, every room we went into. We had to scrub all the passageways. We were always on our hands and knees. I was in charge of cleaning the big hall before we went to school. We all had our jobs to do when we came back from school as well. At weekends we had to scrub the top kitchen and the top passage. When I was a bit older I was sent to work in the kitchen. I didn't mind it. There was one nun up there that we liked, **SR 187** I went up one day to help her fill the fires but I must have been too early. The kitchen was in darkness. The Mother Superior, **SR 176** was there and told me that if she saw me in the kitchen again, she would send me to the Good Shepherd, which was the home across the road for unmarried mothers. It terrified me and I never went up again. I didn't want to go over there and spend the rest of my life in another home. We were glorified slaves for the nuns. We were exhausted. We got nothing for all the work we did.

5. I went to the primary school in Nazareth House, but I didn't learn anything. I think I was taught by **SR 134** I couldn't read or write, or tell the time. I then went to St Monica's Secondary School on the Ravenhill Road. We were all dumped into one class because we were from Nazareth House. We were in the lowest stream and were given no education. There were some lucky girls who were picked to go into a different class because they had sponsors or family. We were easily picked out as the Nazareth House Girls because of the blouses we wore, which were made by the nuns.
6. I think we had to change our uniforms twice a week. We had to show our knickers to the nuns for them to inspect. It was very embarrassing. We got bathed in Jeyes fluid and the same water was used for everybody so by the time it came to the last few girls, the water was freezing. Bath time took place twice a week. As we got older and were taking more pride in our appearance, we used to wash our clothes ourselves at night so that we weren't going into school with dirty clothes. Our skirts were supposed to be pleated but they weren't. We used to soak our skirts in a bath of water and then put them under a mattress at night. We had to wash our own socks and put them on the radiators so that we weren't wearing dirty socks every day. Anybody who

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wet the bed had to take their bed sheets down to the laundry to be washed. It only happened to me twice but I remember feeling embarrassed by this.

7. The food was absolutely rotten. We were starving. We used to eat the grass in the garden. I recall one girl, **HIA 430** asking for more bread. It was the first time we had ever seen a full loaf of bread as we were only ever used to seeing it in slices. **SR 134** was very sarcastic. She grabbed a loaf of bread and set it down in front of **HIA 430** and said "there's your bread". We were all starving and staring at the bread, but **SR 134** took the bread back into the kitchen and we never saw bread again.

8. We spent a lot of time in the garden when the nuns wanted rid of us. We were freezing. We had climbing frames to play on. When children came in who weren't in the home since birth, they would teach us new games so we were able to make our own fun. We had our good times. We all supported each other. We were all innocent. We just made our own fun. The nuns didn't like to see us make friends and they couldn't handle it. They always tried to split us up.

9. I had one particular friend, **NHB 52** whom **SR 31** didn't like. Her family weren't that well off but we didn't know about things like that at that stage. **SR 31** noticed that had I became good friends with **NHB 52** **NHB 52** On one occasion whilst we were getting ready for bed, Sister **SR 31** told me to stand outside her cell. I didn't know what she meant so she came back, pulled me from my bed and made me wait outside the storeroom. She then brought me into the storeroom where she slapped me and told me that she wanted to me stay away from **NHB 52**. She slapped me a couple of times. **NHB 52** was my friend and I didn't know why **SR 31** wanted me to stay away from her. The next day we went to school together as normal. That night, I was pulled out of bed again and slapped and reminded not to go near **NHB 52** I took no heed of **SR 31** and I was beaten for a third night. I was told that I didn't need to go to school the next day and I believe this was because my hands were black and blue. I wanted to get out so I went anyway, and I think **SR 192** who was in charge of St

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Monica's, knew that there was something wrong with me. I was late to school, and instead of making me stand at the front of the assembly hall, as was normal when we were late, she told me to head on to my class.

10. The nuns were cruel. **SR 31** was called [REDACTED] because we could hear her trot along to our dormitory in the morning to wake us up. Sister **SR 116** was called [REDACTED] because she reminded us of an attacking dog. When she first came to the home we all loved her because she was young. She would walk with us around the garden. That changed after about a week, and as far as I was concerned, she ended up being the cruelest. **SR 116** was a nun who would make an example of us if we didn't do exactly as we were told. **SR 134** was called [REDACTED] I didn't have many dealings with her, but I don't think she was as bad as Sister **SR 116**

11. We were slapped for no reason at all, and we were never praised. Sister **SR 116** had bamboo canes that she would hit us with. We were hit on the front and back of our fingers. She would just keep on hitting us until we cried. If there was a child that **SR 31** didn't like, that child was in trouble. There was one particular girl, **NHB 40** who was a bit wild. We all liked her but **SR 31** hated her. She cut **NHB 40** hair and left her bald, and I remember **NHB 40** coming out of the room crying.

12. There was one girl in the home who had an illness which caused her to suffer from fits. I think she was called [REDACTED] I recall seeing her being dragged the whole way down the stairs by **SR 189** and **SR 134** one dragging her by the leg and the other dragging her by the hair. I was terrified by how the nuns were treating her. The nuns couldn't handle her fits. There was no harm in [REDACTED]

13. I remember that I was [REDACTED] at one stage because I was suffering from [REDACTED]

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14. On one occasion we heard the nuns singing and out of curiosity we all ran down to listen. **SR 116** caught us. That night she went into every one of the dormitories, got all of us out of the dormitories and slapped us. There was a particular cell that the nuns would bring us into if we were going to get beaten. **SR 116** took us into the cell one by one and beat us. Sister **SR 134** heard me screaming from downstairs. She came up and had to pull **SR 116** off me, and I was chased out of the cell.
15. One thing that has never left my mind was the way that **SR 116** treated the dog that we had. I recall seeing her whack the dog repeatedly but there was nothing we could do because if we had have stepped in, we would have received the same.
16. When we were at school we had to change from our shoes into our plimsolls. On one occasion someone stole my shoes and I put off going home because I was terrified that I was going to get murdered. Eventually one of the girls had to come and get me. I must have got slapped for it.
17. The nuns had a Retreat, during which time we were looked after by a woman named **NHB 32**. We had to sit in the hall in our groups and be quiet. If the woman heard us talking she would hit us on the back, head or on the back of the head with a stick. She didn't care where she hit us. I thought it was very unfair. They should have given us books to read. We just had to sit on the floor for hours, do nothing and keep quiet until they returned from the Church. I believe that **NHB 32** grew up in the home and knew nothing else other than the cruelty of the nuns.
18. Before **SR 31** came to the home, I used to go out with a family who lived on the **██████████**. There was a nun, **SR 189** who arranged for me to go out with them. They were very good to me and I thought I was going to be adopted. **SR 189** went to America and **SR 31** took over from her in Nazareth House. Suddenly my visits to this family stopped. I recall getting dressed and waiting for the family to arrive and **SR 31** told me that I wasn't going out with anybody. Nothing was explained to me and it was

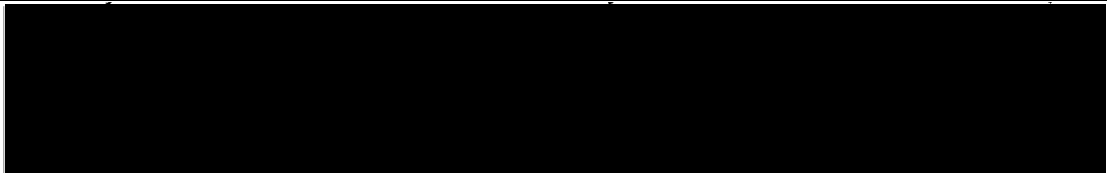
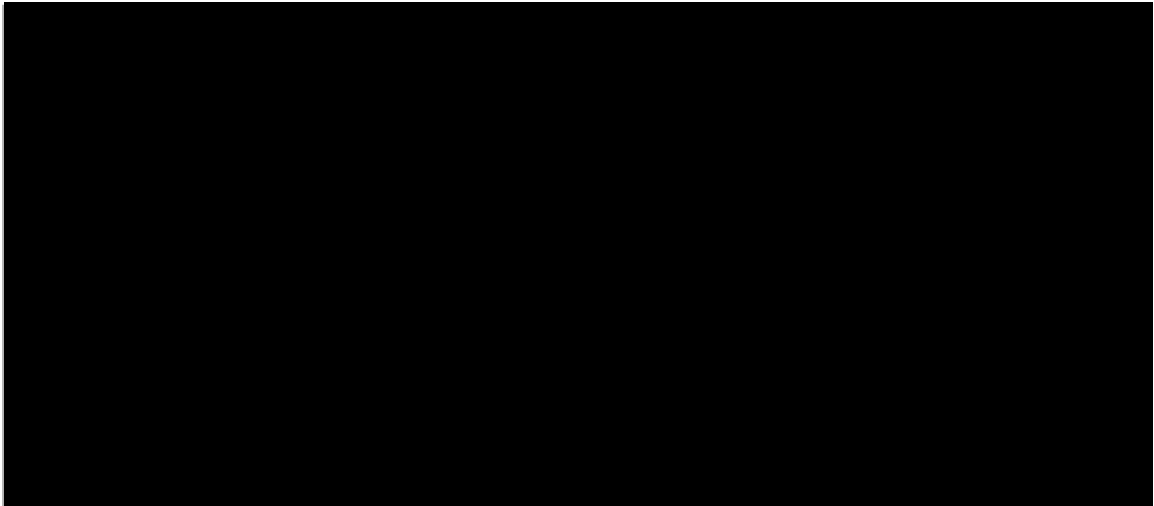
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very hurtful. There was another couple, [REDACTED] from [REDACTED] who would take me out from the home, however those visits were stopped by the same nun. I think she just did this out of badness.

19. Sometimes the other children would receive visits from their family members. [REDACTED] NHB 52 mum, would come up to the home and give us sweets but the nuns hated her because she wasn't well off. There was another girl, [REDACTED] whose mother would visit, but the nuns would send [REDACTED] away so that her mother couldn't see her. Her mother wore a headscarf and brought a little blue basket which had perfumes in it. Once in a while [REDACTED] would get to see her mother, and we would all crowd round her because we all wanted some perfume.
20. I never had any visitors the entire time I was at Nazareth House. The nuns didn't like male visitors. My father advised me when I met him years later that he tried to visit me in Nazareth House but the nuns told him I was adopted. I was annoyed when I heard that. I believe that he was intending on taking me to live with the rest of the family. I think that the nuns must have been in touch with my mother because she told me years later that she always knew when I was missing school.
21. There were never any Social Workers so the nuns could do what they wanted. I didn't even know what a Social Worker was. I think the nuns were frustrated because they didn't know how to handle all of the kids. They were young themselves. We were told that in the old days, one person from each family had to become a Priest or a nun, so they might not have been chosen to end up where they did.
22. I never got to know my birthday until I was about ten years of age. We had a [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] SR 31 asked who wanted to [REDACTED]. We all put our hands up. [REDACTED] SR 31 let me do it because it was my birthday, and that was the first time I found out when it was. None of the other girls knew their birthdays. I don't remember ever singing Happy Birthday or celebrating birthdays. I was never given any birthday treats but I didn't mind. At Christmas

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time we were often taken out of the home to attend parties in places like Mackey's. We would be given presents, but they were taken off us as soon as we got back to the home and they would never be seen again.



Life after care

24. There was a house in [REDACTED] Belfast, that some of the girls from Nazareth House would go into when they left the home so I stayed there for a while. I didn't want to stay long. The girls there had nothing. I met up with [REDACTED] **NHB 40** [REDACTED] We were living on the streets and we eventually made our way to London, but we lost contact. I was caught sleeping in a Church on one occasion by a Priest. He took me in and then I was brought down to the Irish Centre, where they got me a job. I stayed there for approximately two years. They were good to me. I stayed in London for about ten years.

25. I had a child, [REDACTED] when I was aged twenty-two years. I had been living in a rented flat with my friend [REDACTED] but as soon as the landlady found out I was pregnant, she put me out. A priest helped me get into a mothering care home. I was forced to give my son up for adoption because I couldn't

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support him. I didn't want him to have the life that I had. I had nobody to help me, and I wasn't given any other options, or any help with keeping him. I managed to trace him years later with the help of a Social Worker. I have never met him but he has written to me a couple of times. It has been very difficult to make an emotional connection with him. I don't want to push him. He knows very little about my background. I was told he has had a good life so I'm happy with that.

26. On one occasion, I went back to Nazareth House to find out about my roots. I met **SR 31** and told her that I wanted to find out about my family. She gave me a piece of paper and told me to take it down to the Belfast Telegraph. It was an advertisement for my mother, **██████████** I stayed in Nazareth House for a few days and somebody made contact to say that my family was in **██████████** My father had emigrated to **██████████** now **██████████** after being offered a job. I also discovered that I had one younger sister and two younger brothers, one of whom has passed away. I was twenty-six when I went to **██████████** to meet them. I didn't get on with my mother. I never asked her why I was put into Nazareth House because I didn't want to hurt her feelings. My father passed away in **██████████** and my mother has returned to Northern Ireland. She is living in a nursing home. I don't really have much contact with her.

27. My abiding memory from my time at Nazareth House was the physical cruelty, and my biggest complaint would be the lack of education. I love my life now but I would have liked to have been better educated. We never got any encouragement and we were never told how important it was to learn how to read and write. I constantly worry about losing my job and ending up on the streets again. I suffer from claustrophobia and panic attacks. I am quite insecure. I feel that I was deprived of a lot because of my upbringing.

28. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to police.

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Statement of Truth

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

Signed **HIA 223** _____

Dated 4/07/14 _____