

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 124

Witness Name: HIA 124

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 124

I, HIA 124 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED]
2. I am one of eleven children. I have two older siblings [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and eight younger siblings [REDACTED], [REDACTED], HIA 163, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. My parents were both alcoholics and there was a lot of domestic violence growing up. My father was sexually abusing me and both of my parents would regularly beat us to a pulp. My mother flushed my head down the toilet when she found out about the sexual abuse. She told me it was my fault for letting him abuse me; she said I was leading him on. She seemed to hate me.
3. The records I received from the Sisters of Nazareth state that I was only there on one occasion but that is not my recollection. I remember my family being in and out of Nazareth House on several occasions when I was a young child. My parents used to ask us on a daily basis who wanted to go into a home and we would all put our hands up. I believe the records are wrong as the dates are wrong and they spell my name incorrectly. There is also no record of my younger brother [REDACTED] or my sister HIA 163.

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Nazareth House, Belfast (29th September 1965 – 3rd July 1966 and 3rd January 1969 – date unknown)

4. I remember being picked up off the streets by social workers and being brought to Nazareth House a number of times. Social Services were involved from a young age. The five girls, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were taken out of the home. The two boys and [REDACTED] HIA 163 went to Nazareth Lodge as [REDACTED] HIA 163 was only three so she was too young for Nazareth House. [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and I were taken to Nazareth House. My older brother [REDACTED] did not go into care – he either stayed with my paternal grandparents or [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] had not been born at that stage.
5. The nuns I remember from Nazareth House are [REDACTED] SR 31, [REDACTED] SR 134 and [REDACTED] SR 116. My sister [REDACTED] and I were in [REDACTED] SR 31 group and my sisters [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were in [REDACTED] SR 134 group. Each time we were brought in to the home, we were taken straight to the bathroom and some sort of insect repellent was poured over our hair because we were told we had nits. The nuns were really rough with us when they fine combed out hair. I didn't know whether I was better off going into Nazareth House or being at home.
6. [REDACTED] SR 31 was a very angry woman and you would see her face going red with rage. I wet the bed as a child and this infuriated [REDACTED] SR 31. First of all they gave me medicine which never worked. The bed wetters were all lined up separate from the others and told we were getting wet the bed medicine. [REDACTED] SR 31 would have checked your bed during the night and if it was wet she went mad. She would slap me about the head and legs while grabbing the sheets off the bed. Then she made you walk to her cell which was at the end of the dormitory. She would make you kneel there all night and call you dirty and smelly. She used to say you better pray to God you won't wet the bed again. I would pray because I thought she would know if I didn't as she was a nun. I would have to kneel there all night and I couldn't move because I was afraid to in case she came out. Every creak I heard I would think it was her coming.

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7. The nuns decided to put a buzzer on my bed then. I was about six at the time. There were two net sheets and you put one at the bottom, then you put an ordinary sheet on and then the top wired sheet with a draw sheet over that. The idea was that when the wet hit it the buzzer went off. SR 31 would grab me out of bed and beat me because I had woken everyone in the dormitory. This was a daily occurrence. I would be dragged into the bathroom then and thrown into the bath. I never knew what the smell was at the time but I know now it was Jeyes fluid. The smell was overpowering. I remember the water was white but I just thought that was the colour of bath water. I would be dipped in and out of the water by SR 31 very roughly. I would try not to fall asleep because I was so afraid of wetting the bed and I would pray I didn't fall asleep but I always did.
8. Every morning SR 31 and SR 134 would come in to the dormitory and tell everyone to hold the gusset of their knickers out for inspection. We all had to stand in a line and SR 31 and SR 134 would walk along examining our underwear. I never knew what this was about. It was humiliating. The bed wetters were told to stand to one side with our wet sheets and then you were brought out to the landing to put the sheets in a big linen basket. It was almost like a ceremony being paraded in front of everyone but thankfully none of the other girls laughed.
9. After you made your bed, you knelt down to say your prayers and then went down for breakfast. After breakfast we had jobs to do. I had to mop the floors with a big heavy polisher. One girl polished the bathroom and another one polished the dormitory. Everybody had jobs to do. The older girls looked after us younger ones. A girl called [REDACTED] looked after me and a girl called [REDACTED] looked after my sister [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] weren't bad to us but some of the other older girls would have hit the younger ones. Because they were getting hit themselves it just led on to them hitting the younger ones and bullying them.

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10. I was terrified of **SR 31**. No matter what you said or did you got hit so it got to the point where I was so subdued I never said anything. The only time I spoke up was when she hit my younger sister **SR 31**. On one occasion Sister **SR 31** was coming down the stairs and **SR 31** was in front of her. **SR 31** grabbed **SR 31** by the scruff of the neck and I said "don't hit my wee sister". She let **SR 31** go then and grabbed me. She grabbed me and slapped me on the head, telling me not to answer back. She dragged me to the dryer then and threw me in. The dryers had a line of big doors and when you pulled out the door there were racks inside with steel bars to hold sheets. There was a gap big enough for a child to fit. **SR 31** slid the door back and left me there. It was pitch black and I couldn't move. I don't know how long I was there but I was afraid to come out. I wet myself in there. When I eventually did come out I realised dinner was over. **SR 31** came over and started hitting me saying not to answer her back. She put me back into the dryer and the heat in there was unbearable.
11. Anything that you said or did was an excuse to hit you. If you talked about your family the nuns would say "sure nobody loves you". I loved my granny but I soon learned to stop talking about her. The nuns used to send us out with different people every Sunday. I went out with a policewoman and her husband and they were quite well-off. They would give me lots of stuff coming back like sweets or a teddy bear but as soon as they left everything was taken from you. It was never explained to you that you couldn't have something because the other children didn't have anything.
12. **SR 134** beat me as well. I remember one occasion I was playing in the leaves outside and **SR 134** shouted something down at me. I didn't realise she was shouting at me. She came down and started thumping me over the head with her keys. This was a big bunch of keys with about fifteen or twenty keys on it. One of the girls told me afterwards that **SR 134** didn't like the sound of leaves crunching but I had no idea. The nuns would always hit you in the temple with their keys or their knuckle; just whatever was handy. You don't bruise on the temple which is why they hit us there but it was very sensitive.

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13. My oldest sister [REDACTED] had [REDACTED] but at the time she was just called the [REDACTED] she was never diagnosed with anything. She probably had [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] had a [REDACTED] as well and I was very protective of her. The other girls in the home would have looked out for [REDACTED] as well. She was [REDACTED] for SR 31 movements. I think SR 31 took a dislike to me because I stood up for my sisters. I was never cheeky; I was too afraid to be but I was always quick to stand up for [REDACTED].

14. The food in Nazareth House was terrible. SR 31, SR 134 and SR 116 used to supervise mealtimes in the dining room. I hated the porridge – it was watery and salty but they forced me to eat it. I hated carrots as well and this infuriated the nuns. SR 31 used to come over and pull the back of my hair and say “you are going to eat that”. She would lift a fork and put it into my mouth and I would be trying to spit it out. Then SR 134 would come over and hold your nose while SR 31 held your head. SR 31 would be shoving carrots in my mouth and holding my chin until I swallowed them. This happened very regularly; if you weren’t getting force fed somebody else was. I believe this force feeding caused me to develop anorexia later on in life. Mealtimes were just a nightmare. The dining room would be packed with children but the silence was eerie – nobody dared to speak.

15. Contact with my sisters was not encouraged in the home. Although [REDACTED] was the oldest, because she had [REDACTED] I felt like I was the oldest. I wouldn’t have seen [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] very often; only out in the playground. It wasn’t like you could go over and say hello at mealtimes. I was just in survival mode every day. If you didn’t get hit, it was a good day.

16. My maternal aunt [REDACTED] would have come to visit us sometimes. She was a really funny woman but she soon learned not to laugh or tell jokes because SR 31 sat in the room with us during the visits. I think they were afraid of us telling people what was going on. [REDACTED] was a lovely woman but she

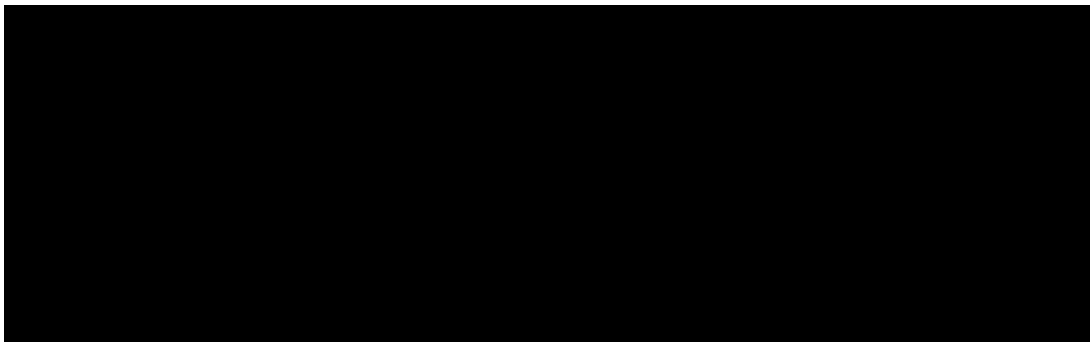
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had no power to take us out of the home. I made my First Communion in the home along with my sister [REDACTED]. That was a good day because [REDACTED] and I got out together with my aunt [REDACTED]. We were given money by a neighbour in the street and we had big plans to bring back something for the girls in the home but as soon as we walked through the door it was taken off us.

17. I was very close to [REDACTED]; we were Irish twins – we were the same age for a couple of days in the year. She died [REDACTED]. We weren't in Nazareth House at the time, we were back at home. It was actually me who brought [REDACTED] to the doctor. He told me to bring her to the hospital so I brought her up to the Royal. The doctor there came out and told me to go home and tell my mother and father to come up as soon as they could. I never saw [REDACTED] again after that – I wasn't allowed to visit her in hospital. I brought her to the hospital on 24th May and she died on 28th June. One day I was talking to her and the next nothing. I wasn't even allowed to go to her funeral. I didn't really accept that [REDACTED] was dead until 1993.

18. All the girls were taken from the family home after that and we were put into foster care with a family in [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] stayed at home as she was only a baby. I don't know how long we were there. I hated the foster home because they treated us so differently to their own children. We were brought home again and the sexual abuse continued. I couldn't take any more of it so I ran away. I tried to find the foster home but I couldn't. I ended up sleeping on the doorstep of my friend's house and her mother found me the next morning. She contacted Social Services and I was brought to the Good Shepherd.

Good Shepherd, Belfast (18th June 1971 – 14th March 1974)



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Purdsyburn Hospital (14th March 1974 – 13th May 1974 and 20th May 1974 – 31st May 1974)

23. I don't know how I got to Purdysburn. The nurses in there gave me some sort of injection. My records state that I was admitted after I took an overdose but I definitely didn't. The issue was my anorexia. I was eating one yoghurt a week – a spoonful a day. I wouldn't even have been able to get tablets in the Good Shepherd to take an overdose.

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24. I stayed in Purdysburn for two months and then I was discharged to live with my older brother [REDACTED] who was married. I didn't like this though as [REDACTED] lived round the corner from my parents and his wife was a clean freak. I ended up back in Purdysburn after a few days. I stayed there eleven days and then I went to [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] brought me to [REDACTED]. There was no explanation of where I was going or what was happening to me. I was just taken in the car from Belfast to Armagh. I don't even remember the journey; I don't know if I was still sedated.

St. Joseph's Training School, Middletown, Co. Armagh (31st May 1974 – 1977 approximately)

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Life after care

31. When I left [REDACTED] I went to work in a [REDACTED]. I think this job was set up by [REDACTED]. I was raped by a local businessman called NHB 105 [REDACTED]. I reported it to the police in [REDACTED] and he got a three year suspended sentence. I later heard he went on to rape another local girl.

32. I then moved to [REDACTED] in 1978 and I got a job housekeeping. That's where I met my husband [REDACTED]. I just married the first man who came along and he was abusive to me. He used to call me fat and smelly and tell me I was no good. He controlled my life and he didn't like me wearing jeans or trousers. I developed a drink problem during my marriage. We were married

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for twelve years and had three children together – [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

33. I had a breakdown in 1993 when my children were very young and my husband left me to rear the children on my own. I had another breakdown in 2000 and my husband decided he wanted the family home so he said I was a danger to the children. He stayed in the family home looking after [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who were 16 and 12 at the time. I fought tooth and nail to get custody of [REDACTED] but the judge only spoke to her for twelve minutes and decided she would be better off living with her father. I moved to Belfast then with my partner but I still had regular contact with [REDACTED] and I went to every school event. I am estranged from [REDACTED] now but I have a good relationship with my two older children.

34. I have been estranged from my family since I was ten years old. I lived in [REDACTED] for thirty years and I only came back to Belfast about fourteen years ago. I used to invite my family [REDACTED] for barbeques and parties but they would never come. Nobody came to my 40th birthday party and I tried to kill myself. It is only in the last nine years that my brother [REDACTED] has spoken to me. I came out as gay and my family didn't want to know me. [REDACTED] and I have never really gelled – we are not like brother and sister. I told [REDACTED] a lot of things he didn't know such as my mother's input into my father sexually abusing me. She knew it was going on and she blamed me. My family was fractured and I need to get to know them again. On [REDACTED] anniversary every year I try to get the whole family together at the graveyard. I have slowly built up a relationship with them.

35. My time in care has really affected my life. It has had a severe impact on my life and my children's lives. I'm 56 now and I still have serious issues. I have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and I still wet the bed. I have a partner and I'm still ashamed of wetting the bed so we sleep in separate beds. My mother and father died three years ago within one month of each other, as well as my [REDACTED]. I never had a relationship with my mother. I went to her funeral because she had destroyed me in life and I wasn't going to let her destroy me

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in death. I didn't go to my father's funeral. My parents dying brought up a lot of issues for me as I never got to confront my abusers. When my father died I thought I was having a nervous breakdown. I was afraid to go to the toilet or have a bath because I thought he would get me when he was dead. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] who was my role model died a year later. It was a difficult time for me.

36. I get on well with my grandchildren and I can spot a mile away if they are distressed in any way. I have struggled with anorexia throughout my adult life. My weight fell to 5 stone in 2000 and my organs were failing. Food has never been a friend to me and I can go days without eating especially if I'm upset. My mother always punished me with food and so did the nuns.

37. I hope this Inquiry will help in some way. It is an acknowledgment that these things happened and they were wrong. I am speaking for [REDACTED] as well because she can no longer speak for herself. I need somebody to acknowledge that they made the decision to return me and my siblings to the family home when they knew about my father sexually abusing me, the physical abuse and the neglect. We were sleeping in beds infected with maggots and I remember walking to school and feeling the maggots wriggling down my back.

38. There were so many social workers monitoring us and somebody made that decision. I'd like to know who that person was. There was plenty of evidence and I remember being brought to the police station once but nothing was ever done about it. The dogs on the street knew. That man was allowed to stay in the family home and go on to abuse another child – as soon as I left he turned to my younger [REDACTED] HIA 163

39. On one occasion when I was about seven I was in the City Hospital having an ear operation and I remember telling the nurses at the hospital what my daddy was doing. The next thing I knew my mother and father were walking down the corridor towards me. I was put into Nazareth House for the night but my parents collected me the next day and beat me to a pulp. I continued telling people what was happening and nothing was done. I reported what was happening to [REDACTED] HIA 163 to a social worker called [REDACTED] NHB 106

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40. I reported these matters to the police in Musgrave Street but a female police officer phoned me last year to tell me [REDACTED] SR 31 [REDACTED] was dead – she only died recently. I will never get any justice now.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed [REDACTED] HIA 124

Dated 18/11/2014

1965.

Req. No.

J. M. 9. +

HIA 124

*4721-24
HIA 124

Admitted 29. 9. 65. These children and
were deserted by their mother. Their
Father was later arrested in
for taking and driving
away a car. The application was
made by an Officer of the
Belfast Welfare Authority as there was
no fit person to look after the children.

I hereby Certify that I have Received my
HIA 124 HIA 163 HIA 124

from under the care of the Sisters of Nazareth, Nazareth
House, Ballynaseigh; in a Perfect State of Health and
Cleanliness.

Witness M. Hervey
18.4.1969.

Signed,

Maybri.

Belfast Welfare Officer

RESTRICTED (when complete)

Continuation of Statement of: **HIA 124**

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being in a huge dining room, it felt like it was in a basement, and being given bread and porridge. I remember being in the dining room again, it must have been for one of my first dinners and being given carrots. I hated carrots and I said to the older girl in charge that I didn't like them but she didn't take them away. The next thing **SR 134** came over to me and said something like, "Who are you to say you don't like carrots" and with that she stuffed the carrots into my mouth. As I tried to spit them out **SR 134** grabbed the back of my hair and held my chin to keep my mouth closed until I swallowed the carrots. I was told I would eat what I was given and hit on the back of the head with a bunch of keys. I had always a problem with wetting the bed from a very young child, I can't ever remember not wetting the bed and when I was still at home my father would have punished me for this. When I went to live in Nazareth House I continued to wet the bed every night. **SR 31** made me go and stand in a line with other girls who had the same problem. She told us we were going to be given medicine for bed wetting and I remember being given a purple liquid. This happened every night, in front of all the other girls in the dorm. **SR 31** came around every night to check the beds to see if I had wet myself and when it was wet she told me I was disgusting and told me to get out of bed. She used to make me kneel outside her door and told me to pray and ask God to help me not wet the bed. I would have to do this all night. This would happen on a regular basis. After a period of time a mesh was placed on my bed. It was metal and extremely uncomfortable to lie on. This mesh would trigger an alarm if it became wet. The first night I went to bed on this mesh the alarm was triggered which woke everybody up. **SR 31** came over to me in bed and struck me to my temple with her knuckle. I was made to get out of bed and again would have to kneel outside her room and pray. I remember one night I told **SR 31** that I wasn't getting out of bed but she physically and forcefully pulled me out of bed and made me

Certified a true copy of an original signed document

Signature of witness:	HIA 124
Signature witnessed by: (Appropriate Adult)	

5. With regard to paragraph 8, we are aware of allegations that the children's underwear would have been checked; however we do not accept that this was a common practice.
6. With regard to paragraph 9, the children would not have been given extensive chores to do before school but may have assisted in clearing and setting the table for the next meal. The Congregation has accepted that the children were given chores to do within the home; however these chores were not excessive. It is difficult to see that disputes would not arise in a setting where many children of different ages are together. We are pleased that Teresa was treated well by the older girls.
7. With regard to paragraphs 10 - 13, HIA 124 states that she was put in the drier however the Congregation refutes that any Sister would have done such a thing to a child. The physical chastisement discussed by HIA 124 is not accepted by the Congregation as a tolerable approach in dealing with children. With regret, the Sisters believe that, on occasion, the policy of 'no physical punishment' was not adhered to.
8. With regard to paragraph 14, the food was always the best standard we could provide. In the interests of the child, the Sisters would encourage them to eat the meals provided as there may not have been another option; however we cannot accept that the children would be force fed by the Sisters.
9. With regard to paragraph 16, the Sister in charge of the children would bring them to the visitor's room but would not have stayed with them during the visit. We are pleased that HIA 124 has such fond memories of her First Communion; however we do not accept that their communion money was taken from them except perhaps to keep it safe.
10. With regard to paragraph 17, the Congregation offer HIA 124 sincere condolences on the loss of her sister [REDACTED] and cannot understand why she was unable to attend her funeral.
11. With regard to paragraph 18, the same checks and balances were not in place as in today's society, the Sisters would try to ensure that foster families who were responsible for the children were pleasant and good-natured people. We apologise if HIA 124 believes she was not cared for correctly or treated the same as the other children.

KEVIN R. WINTERS & CO.
SOLICITORS

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26 April 2012

Our Ref: HC/42637/CMCK/PTM

Sisters of Nazareth
169/175 Hammersmith Road
Hammersmith
London
W6 8DB

Dear Sirs

Re: **HIA 124** -v- You.

We are instructed by the above named to claim damages in connection with serious and persistent abuse suffered by him at the hands of you, your servants and agents at or about Nazareth House, Ormeau Road, Belfast.

This abuse began on or around 1969 at a time when our client was approximately 10 years old and continued until our client left the institution in 1972. Our client was abused by various persons including either a **SR 34** or a **SR 71**. She is unable to precisely identify this individual at this temporal remove.

Our client has sustained severe psychiatric and physical injuries as a result of the abuse suffered by her at your premises in Nazareth House and expert medical evidence has been commissioned in this regard. We are further instructed that our client left your purported care in Nazareth House with an almost complete lack of any formal education and claims damages in this regard.

Please confirm the identity of your insurers. Please note that the insurers will need to see this letter as soon as possible and it may affect your insurance cover and/or conduct of any subsequent legal proceedings if you do not send this letter to them.

At this stage of our enquiries we would expect you to disclose any documentation you hold relevant and material to this action. We expect an acknowledgment of this letter within 21 days by yourself or your insurers otherwise proceedings claiming damages for negligence, assault, battery and trespass to the person may be issued against you without further notice and costs may be awarded against you.

Yours faithfully
KEVIN R. WINTERS & CO.

Kevin R. Winters Joseph D. McVeigh Gerard McNamara
Niall Murphy Peter Corrigan Michael Crawford Paul Pierce

Gareth Dillon Shane Moorehead Stephen McNamara
Lyndsay Crawley Marie Hans Aidan Carlin John Keown

Also at 11 English Street, Downpatrick, BT30 6AB, Telephone 028 44839111 Fax 028 44617904