

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 43

Witness Name: HIA 43

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 43

I, HIA 43 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED]
2. I am the youngest of four children. I have two older brothers HIA 128 and NL 25 and one older sister HIA 103
3. When I was three years old, my mother ran away with another man. My father tried to get her to come back which she did for a little while but then she left again. My father had to work and left us children in the house alone. A neighbour called the Welfare and we were taken into care.
4. My sister HIA 103 and I were placed in Nazareth House and my two brothers were taken to Nazareth Lodge. I can't remember who took us there.

Nazareth House, Belfast (22nd January 1960 – 18th October 1967)

5. I went into the nursery section of Nazareth House when I had just turned four. My sister HIA 103 was in the girls' section and we never got to see each other. If we saw each other in the segregated playground and tried to touch each other, the nuns would pull us apart. Looking back, this was cruel and

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inhumane as we only had each other in there and they should have let us comfort each other.

6. My first memory of Nazareth House was the sheer loneliness which hit you as soon as you walked in the door. We were just left in beds and cots crying. The nuns never showed any warmth or affection; they never touched you. To this day I cannot stand being touched as a result of this. Things didn't improve when I was moved over to the older girls' wing. The older girls bossed me about, pulled my hair, called me names and kicked me repeatedly. As I learned how to make them leave you alone, I would try to curry favour with the older girls by giving them sweets at Christmas.
7. The nuns I remember are [SR 31] and [SR 134] [SR 31] was in charge of the school and I was put in her class. [SR 134] was in charge of my group and she taught in the school as well. She was nicknamed [REDACTED] because of her loud, thunderous steps. [SR 31] was nicknamed [REDACTED] Both of these nuns beat me on numerous occasions. I also remember a nun called [SR 122] but she never beat me.
8. The nuns always seemed to be away praying. They used to leave the older girls in charge of us but they could hardly look after themselves. During the winter, the older girls would lock us out on the forecourt under the nuns' orders. We were only in our short dresses and we would be crying to get back in. They wouldn't let us in and would force us back out if we tried to get inside.
9. The nuns didn't care about us children at all. They were more concerned with praying and collecting money. They were always asking for money. My older sister remembers my daddy giving her money to give to the nuns and I remember giving them a ten shilling note on numerous occasions. My daddy didn't have much money because he had a breakdown and couldn't work. He was quite fearful and intimidated by the nuns asking for money all the time. He was a countryman and the nuns took advantage of him.

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10. I recall as a very young child in the infant wing being singled out and humiliated for having soiled underwear. I came back to the infants' wing late one evening after being out with my father and realised my pants were soiled. Out of sheer fear and panic, I hid my pants under another child's bed but I didn't realise my number was sewn into the pants so the next morning it all began again. I was trailed out in front of all the other children and made a laugh of and degraded. It was so humiliating.
11. My father tried to come visit us when he could but he lost his house and had a breakdown. There was a big gap in his visits because he had nowhere to take us as he was in lodgings himself. Even when he did visit and he'd try to give me an orange or a sweet, [SR 31] deliberately wouldn't let me out to see him. He would hang over the wall at the Holy Rosary Church to try to get my attention and [SR 31] would stand there and laugh at me. During some holiday periods, my father would take my siblings and me down to my granny's cottage in the country. She hadn't much but they were the happiest times of my life. It was heartbreaking having to go back to Nazareth House; we would all be screaming, wailing and crying. It was worse for me mentally having to go back.
12. When I came back into the home the nuns never checked that everything was alright while you were out. They should have checked where children were going and who was going to be there. They never gave you a once over or asked if you were ok. They should have detected from my behaviour that something was wrong. I couldn't have talked to the nuns anyway because you were constantly being shunned and shushed in there.
13. I remember my father buying me a yellow jumper with a teddy bear on it when I was a little girl but it was taken off me and I never saw it again. This was incredibly cruel as it was the only reminder I had that somebody cared for me. This happened on numerous occasions. Personal items were taken away from me and I wasn't allowed to look at photos of my sister and brothers. At Christmas we would go to parties but any toys or presents we got were whisked away. The only thing we would be allowed to keep was the odd

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packet of sweets or bath cubes. I only went to one or two of these parties because the nuns always excluded me from them on purpose. They would come into the classroom and pick children out in front of you to go to the parties. It was rare that I got chosen to go. The nuns made differences and gave certain children preferential treatment and that is something that has always stuck with me.

14. The food in Nazareth House was awful; it wasn't fit for a pig. On a Saturday we used to get boiled eggs which were black and sausages full of gristle. The worst thing was the fried bread which was covered in dark brown, thick grease. It was sickening. I used to be so hungry I would be out in the gutter looking for something to eat. I would wait under the windows of the kitchen in the hope of finding some scraps of food. I even ate used chewing gum off the ground. One time I ate a rotten apple with a worm in it and it made me sick. I later found out that the nuns were getting lots of food donations from places like Marks & Spencer but we never saw any of it; they obviously kept it to feed themselves.
15. The clothing wasn't much better. In the older girls' section, we wore a bib over our dresses. The dresses were raggy old things and it didn't matter what size you were or whether they fit you or not. The same applied to shoes – you just put them on, it didn't matter what size they were. I still have a bunion from years of wearing ill-fitting shoes.
16. The front of the house was where they took the visitors like priests and benefactors. It was beautifully decorated with flowers and smelled fantastic but if you walked to the back part you'd see where we were kept – it was like a dungeon. There was an old people's part in the convent and the nuns used the girls to look after the old people. The nuns also used the girls to look after the babies and the youngsters, as well as doing all the cleaning, scrubbing, maintenance and upkeep of the convent. I remember having to wash the high walls in the dormitory with Flash in the later years. I had to stand on beds and chairs; the nuns didn't care about our safety.

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17. We children were treated like slaves. We were forced to scrub and polish the floors in Nazareth House. We were constantly down on our hands and knees scrubbing with deck brushes and orange wax. I remember the wax getting embedded under my fingernails, in my eyes, hair and mouth. My arms would be aching and my back was in agony from being bent over scrubbing.

18. Bath time in Nazareth House was a nightmare. The older girls used to wash the younger ones and I remember them towering over me. There were two older girls in particular I was terrified of – NHB 46 and NHB 47. NHB 47 They were in charge of me and they were bullies. We were bathed in Jeyes fluid – our bodies and our hair. It would get in your eyes and any cuts you had and it stung really badly.

19. I was beaten all the time in Nazareth House by both SR 31 and SR 134. SR 134 They would beat me for no reason; it just seemed like a way for them to vent their anger. They loved their weapons whether it was their straps or sticks. SR 31 would beat me with a bamboo cane in the classroom and SR 134 would hit me on the head with her keys. I was terrified of SR 134. She always said never to tell lies but when you told the truth she would whack you over the head with her keys or whatever was in her hand. The nuns used to lock me up in a dark cupboard and leave me lying there the whole day or even overnight. It was cold and dark and there were cleaning materials in there. SR 31 would quite often leave me out on the fire escape for hours as a punishment. I was freezing in my short dress and I would just play with the mucky pools on the ground.

20. I would be covered in bruises and welts from SR 31 especially at the top of my thighs where she hit me with a bamboo cane. One time my father saw bad bruising on my arm from where SR 31 had trailed me along the corridor digging her nails into my arm. He asked me what happened and I told him the truth. When he brought me back to the home he asked to see one of the nuns. As punishment for telling my father SR 31 beat me the whole way to the cleaning cupboard. When she got me in the cupboard, she beat me with a stick on my hands and the top of my legs under my dress. She

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called me evil and said I was a liar. I started to cry then thinking it would make her stop but she just battered me harder and told me to stop crying.

21. I lived in absolute terror. Every morning I woke up I didn't know what lay in front of me. Sometimes you'd be told to look at the nuns and then they'd say "don't be looking at me". You were told to tell the truth but when you did you were beaten. You were damned if you did and damned if you didn't.

22. The nuns would emotionally abuse me too. **SR 31** despised me and she let me know it. She was constantly putting me down, degrading me and making me feel stupid and worthless. This feeling of worthlessness has stayed with me my entire life. The nuns had their favourites and I wasn't one of them. They would give sweets to certain children and leave me out. I always seemed to be excluded. Other children got to go to the cinema and out with families but I never did. Looking back now I had it worse because I wasn't an orphan and I had a father. I was always on the outside looking in.

23. Those nuns should never have been involved in the care of children. They seemed to hate children; you could see it in their eyes. Although they had a veil on that didn't make them any way holy. They were supposed to be our role models and they instilled a terrible attitude in me. When they accused me, I accused others. It was survival of the fittest in there. I didn't realise how nasty I was and I didn't realise that's why I had no friends growing up. There was a **SR 134** girl in the home called **NHB 48** and I think she was traumatised. She used to rock back and forth all the time – in bed and on chairs. **SR 134** started to call her **SR 134** and the children followed suit. The nuns allowed the children to call her that.

24. To get attention and to get out to the dentist, I had one good tooth pulled out that I recall. That's how badly I wanted to get out of there. Afterwards, I was just left to suffer on my own in a room. Nobody ever checked on me. There were never any doctors in Nazareth House unless it was an emergency or we were getting injections. Dr Hunter from the Newtownards Road used to come and give us injections. I remember **SR 122** would put this brown stuff

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on you that stung to death; I think it was iodine. That was their answer to everything.

25. Whenever benefactors used to visit the home the nuns would warn us to be on our best behaviour. We had to do silly dances for them and act like poor little orphans with our smiles painted on. I'd like to know where the money went. [REDACTED] the amount of people who told me they had donated money, clothes and toys to the home was shocking. We never saw any of it. There is a photograph of us children standing in front of a slide with a benefactor but that was just a performance for him. That was a slide that was donated and we never saw it again. All we had to play with was small navy dusty beanbags.

26. One day out of the blue when I was almost eleven I was told I had to leave Nazareth House. At that stage my father had a house in [REDACTED] and my sister [REDACTED] HIA 103 was out living with him. I was told to go just the way I stood – no suitcase, no belongings, no money, and no goodbyes. I was just left to walk [REDACTED] there by myself. To me this was a further form of rejection after believing I had been disowned by my mother. Years later when I met my mother she told me she had come to the home numerous times to try to get me out but the nuns wouldn't let her. They closed the door on her. It meant more to the nuns to have beds filled. I often wonder if things would be different if they had let me go with my mother. Before I walked out the back wooden gate, I dared to go into the sewing room and ask if I could have a dress. They looked at me in disbelief and grudgingly gave me an old dress I used to wear on outings – it was pink and white check. I left Nazareth House on 18th October 1967 and went to live with my father.

Life after care

27. When I landed on my father's doorstep I could tell from his expression that I was the last person he wanted to see. My brothers and sister had been out with him a couple of years at that stage. The last thing he needed was another mouth to feed. He was too proud to ask for assistance.

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28. When I came out of the home, I went back into mainstream school and the shame and humiliation I suffered was awful. I tried to fit in with the other children but it was hard. People kept asking me questions about where I had come from. I was so ashamed of having been in the home I never told anybody about it. For years after if I met anybody from Nazareth House I would cross the street to avoid them. It's only in the last four years I've started to face it. I didn't realise why I was so angry all my life and why I didn't have a life.
29. There was no aftercare at all when I left the home. I was just left to look after myself and I ended up running the streets. My father wasn't really able to look after me. We were like strangers; there was nothing there. He blamed himself for his wife leaving. It was our next door neighbour [REDACTED] who organised my school for me and who ensured I made my Confirmation. There were no social workers involved. I got in with a bad crowd and started shoplifting. I just did it to fit in; I hated doing it. I was always the one who got caught because I wasn't that streetwise and I ended up in jail.
30. Growing up in Nazareth House has had a profound impact on me. I have struggled to form close relationships because of the lack of love I was shown in the home. I am not that close to my siblings. Because we were separated as children, we never got the opportunity to bond and we have grown apart as a result. We are like strangers now. I always find it hard to let people touch me and I'm not in relationships at all.
31. The relationships I did have I subconsciously chose people who I thought nobody else would want so there was no danger of them running off and leaving me. I put myself down all the time thinking I was a monster because that's what the nuns told me. They told me I was horrible and I believed that. I had no faith in myself. Even in terms of my job prospects, I would be offered second interviews but I wouldn't go because I didn't believe in myself. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] It was in a red brick building and it brought all the memories back. I was paranoid the nuns were spying on

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me and I heard them talking and laughing at other people behind their backs. It was about the time the Ryan Report was published in the South and it brought it all back to me. I had too much time to think by myself when everyone was in their rooms and one night I just burst into tears at my desk. I was worried I was going to be fired so at my six month review I asked to leave.

32. When my children were born the doctor asked me if I wanted to hold them and I couldn't even take my children. I had to learn how to be emotional. There are two sides to me. I know I can be very loving but then there's the other side that drags me back. Sometimes it's hard to know who you really are.

33. The nuns made me feel worthless and that feeling stayed with me my entire life. The only way to cover it up was with alcohol. I used alcohol to block out the memories of my childhood and I developed a drink problem. When the Troubles started I was always at the front of the riots. I was a real tomboy; I wanted to be more male than female. I feared nobody and I got the nickname [REDACTED]

34. I then tried to break away from that lifestyle. I got a flat, met a man and had a child but I couldn't allow myself to be tied down. He was good to me but I ruined it all because I mistrusted him. I couldn't believe he cared for me let alone loved me and wanted to marry me. I was always waiting for him to reject me like everyone else. The same happened with another two relationships – they fell apart because of my mental state. I have three children who I raised on my own but I am still good friends with their fathers. I have one grandchild [REDACTED] Since having my first child, I've moved house [REDACTED] I can't settle anywhere; I keep wanting to run away and keep moving.

35. Because of the bullying I went through in the home, when I got out I swore nobody would ever bully me again. When an innocent question is asked I instinctively think "here we go, I'll get the blame". I immediately go on the

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defensive and this led to me leading an incredibly volatile lifestyle when I was younger. I don't have many friends because of my behaviour patterns.

36. People might think I've got it all together now but I don't. I go out with my make up on and pretend I'm something else but underneath I still feel worthless because that was drummed into me all those years. I feel inferior to others no matter where I am. I won't leave the house without make up and I won't let anybody into the house before I have my make up on. There's nothing I would love more than to be married and in a happy relationship but I still can't believe that anybody would want me so I don't even bother going out.

37. I suffered a breakdown in 2009. I hated using the word depression because of the stigma. I had been prescribed Prozac a number of times but I didn't want to turn into a zombie so I bought herbal antidepressants but they didn't really help. I couldn't sleep, eat or talk and I cried constantly. My doctor put me on medication for depression and to help me sleep and I attended counselling. I was always trying to get something to help me. I didn't realise my childhood was the problem; I always blamed myself.

38. It was only when I found God or he found me that I started to turn my life around. I know God the past fifteen years and I know what his love is like. Those nuns did not have the love of God in them. If they did, they wouldn't have done what they did to the children in their care. I believe God is using me as a mouthpiece for other people because I understand their pain and suffering. My own brother couldn't talk about the abuse he suffered in children's homes until this past year.

39. [REDACTED]
after the Ryan report was published in the Republic. Through my [REDACTED] [REDACTED] many survivors of the homes and they are all still wee children waiting to grow up. Their growth was stunted and they're still waiting to have a life. They weren't cared for as children, they weren't put on the right road. They are all very damaged and institutionalised.

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40. [REDACTED]
and I get great comfort from helping people. The people I've met through [REDACTED] really look up to me and it's a joy to see what I can do for them. I've been to counselling but I find it more therapeutic to help other people.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed [REDACTED] **HIA 43**

Dated 2/10/14.

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HIA REF: HIA 43

Witness Name: HIA 43

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

ADDENDUM TO WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 43

I, HIA 43 will say as follows:-

1. This is an addendum to my witness statement dated 2nd October 2014.
2. I need to stress how living in that environment was the ruination of my teenage and adult life and still, up to this very day.
3. I was not an orphan. More should have been done to keep families together, rather than to cruelly separate them like we all were.
4. Provision should have been given to the single parent who would have done a much kinder, loving and caring job of looking after the family than nuns, who had no experience in childcare. Then my father could have managed the home without thinking.
5. We were neither prisoners nor criminals so why were we allowed to be treated as such? We had no freedom, continuously being locked up behind four red brick walls with barbed wire on top. It was just like a prisoners' yard or forecourt and was totally unsuitable.
6. Indoors, we had to remain inside one room at a time, herded in like cattle to be either fed pig swill in the dining room, taught in the classroom or scrubbed and

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hosed down in the bathroom. At bedtime, we were locked up – we were not allowed out of bed.

7. The Church, State and Orders oversaw what conditions we were in and governed by – why did they continue to allow it to happen?
8. I was made to sing 'Nobody's Child' – how insensitive was that? I was never hugged or touched. I won't let people hug or touch me now. I am very unused to it, I flinch and feel very awkward.
9. I always had to fight for anything. After leaving 'home' I thought I had to continue fighting for everything so I was often brash, aggressive and confrontational. It was a way of life I learned in the 'home'.
10. I always cried myself to sleep but no-one heard nor wanted to hear, nor cared. I can't bear to hear the sounds of babies crying, never being consoled. It reminds me of a very sad, lonely place, lifeless and loveless. Children cried that much in the home, I cannot bear to hear them now or else I want to help or lift them. Because the trauma of my childhood comes back – the pain is too much.
11. I was terrified of being shouted at loudly. Sometimes that was worse than being beaten. The nuns allowed everyone to laugh and snigger as one stood or lay in tears. It was so damaging.
12. Many years have been lost within me – they are too painful to want to recall. I have lost years of memories of much of my early years in Nazareth House. I am not a psychiatrist or a psychologist but I'm sure and as I bear witness to daily the wounds of the past manifest themselves daily in my interactions with the public and those around me.
13. A sudden reaction or a stern look, or a sharp retort or tone of voice can bring these childhood hurts and trauma back to the fore, thus making me feel very emotional or very angry.

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14. The sound of footsteps, the swish of garments, the smell of churches, the sight of a nun or priest in uniform makes me very anxious.
15. I have literally shut down my emotions, not knowing what is right or wrong – i.e. peace or violence, love or hate, happiness or sorrow. I have had mixed emotions for most of my life - because of this confusion I have led a very troublesome life.
16. Because of being locked up as a criminal in a prison-like environment, I always blamed myself for being placed in there (Nazareth House) and went on to believe this because the ever so holy nuns kept telling me I was bad and never smiled at me, even when I was good in class or elsewhere.
17. Because of always being bullied into doing chores or manual work and being terrified that it was never done well enough I have always held a belief that anything I do now is never going to be "good enough". I wait to be laughed at and expect to be humiliated or sniggered at.
18. I watch people's faces to see if I can detect if they are genuine or not or I watch as they walk away to catch them whisper and criticise me. This brings back so much hurt and pain of my 'lost' years in care – is it any wonder I don't want to remember?
19. Maybe, in many case people are not talking about me or criticising me but this is the childhood memory that I still hold on to unfortunately.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 43

Dated

19/2/15

HIA 49

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NAZARETH HOUSE
CARE VILLAGE

NCBA13/10

516 Ravenhill Road
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COPY

23rd November 2009

Dear Sister Patricia

Thank you for your phone call this morning. Below is the only information about
HIA 43 in the general register.

Name: **HIA 43**

Date of Birth:

Admitted to Nazareth House, Ormeau Road, Belfast: 21st January 1960

Reason for admission: Parents separated

Taken by her father: 18th October 1967

There are no details about her education or medical reports on record.

Love and prayers

SR 52



Name	Born	Admitted	Left	Taken	Remarks.
HIA 103		22.1.60	8. 5. 65	Father	Parents separated.
⁴⁵⁴⁸ HIA 43		22.1.60			

J.M.G. +

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HIA 43 HIA 103 HIA 43

Admitted 22.1.60.

Mother has deserted family. Father's application.

HIA 43 recalled having her hair cut with black scissors, "it made a mess, they deliberately cut the girls with nice hair, they tried to sell the hair, it was a business. Our clothes and toys were taken sold at jamborees to raise money for the poor sisters of Nazareth".