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HIA REF: 52

Witness Name: HIA52

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA52

I, HIA52 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED].
2. I am an only child. My mother's name is [REDACTED]. I do not know anything about my father. My parents were not married and my mother did not want me so I was placed in Nazareth House, Belfast when I was fourteen months old. A priest called [REDACTED] put me in there. I do not know where I lived for the first fourteen months of my life. I think my mother lived at [REDACTED].

Nazareth House, Belfast 04/06/1951 – 10/05/1968

3. I was placed in Nazareth House in 1951 and remained there until I was eighteen in 1968.
4. My first memories of Nazareth House are the beatings. I have never really spoken about it. I was in SR116 group, we were known as Our Lady's group. The other nuns I remember are SR134, SR31, SR59 and SR189.

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5. They used to frighten me with the bogey man. As a punishment, you would be locked in a room and they would get a [REDACTED] man called [REDACTED] from the old people's home to bang on the door. I am claustrophobic now and suffer a lot from panic attacks because of this. You didn't have to do much to get punished. If the nuns could take your breath away, they would; they took everything else away.
6. We had to get up very early in the mornings – about 6am. If you didn't make your bed, you would get a clip round the ear. I was lucky that I didn't wet the bed, but it still affected me seeing the girls who did, being humiliated. They were made to stand with their wet sheets and then go down and wash the sheets themselves.
7. I remember working in the laundry from about nine or ten. There were big deep sinks. I think they were called Belfast sinks. Everything had to be washed by hand. I had to wash them, rinse them, ring them out and hang them. If the clothes weren't washed properly they would be thrown back in again. I remember washing lots of sheets and looking back now I think the nuns were taking laundry from outside and getting us children to wash it. We got three pence pocket money. We had to line up to get this but if you did something bad during the week you never got it. We had to wash our own clothes but we had nowhere to dry them so we would lay the wet clothes on our beds under the blanket and they would dry with our body heat. I remember it being very cold, the dormitories were freezing anyway.
8. Bath time in the home was degrading. We were all bathed in the one bath and as one got out the next girl got in. The water would be hot for the first girl but after that, they never added hot water. We were bathed in Jeyes fluid and it burned your skin and we had to use carbolic soap. There was only one sheet to dry us all and you were unlucky if you were the last girl because the sheet would be soaking wet. When you were changing your underwear you had to turn them inside out to show that they weren't soiled. If they were, you were humiliated and would have to wash them. You would probably get a hiding after that.

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9. I went to primary school in the grounds of Nazareth House. I remember being called a dunce and being made to stand in the corner with my hands on my head. You were always put down and told you were good for nothing. You were always told you were stupid, your mother never wanted you and you were left on the doorstep.
10. The food in Nazareth House was very basic. There had to be silence at mealtimes; we couldn't even talk to each other. We got lumpy porridge in the morning and a lot of the time it was inedible but you had to eat it. If you didn't eat your meal you were made to sit there until you ate it and if you didn't eat it, it would be put back in front of you for your next meal. You could be vomiting and retching but if you vomited the food up you had to pick it up and eat it. The nuns did not care.
11. If you misbehaved during meal times you had to stand in the passageway outside the door way to the dining room. I remember that happened to me many times if I shared my food or if I was talking. I was often hungry; I used to eat grass and it was actually quite nice. If you were bad they never told you what you had done wrong. We never got any luxuries like cake or sweets. I remember once when the nuns were on retreat one of the girls got the keys to the pantry and we raided it. We knew we would get in trouble but we didn't care; we hid apples and other food down our pants. We had fun times when we got into mischief.
12. I didn't really make friends in the home because you could never get too close to someone. You were not allowed to have friendships. We never knew anything about love or comfort. If you saw another child crying, your instinct would be to go put your arm around them but if the nuns saw that, you would get a hiding. We were never shown any love. You were completely on your own. There were no social connections at all; it was just work, work, work.
13. We were made to do hard work in the home. We had to start out chores from 6.00 every morning. I must have scrubbed the whole of that building. We used to have to scrub the big corridors on our hands and knees. They would

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have us all in a big line. We were only little kids; we were only about eight or nine. A nun would be standing there watching and if it wasn't shiny enough, you had to go back and start again. You were practically slipping on the floor it was so shiny. We scrubbed the floors every day. For the big hall downstairs, we had to throw tea leaves on it, sweep it, scrub it and then wax and polish it. I scrubbed the church as well.

14. We were never given a break; it was just constant work. If you were thirsty you couldn't ask for a glass of water. You would be beaten if you asked for anything. Even if you were sick, you still had to do the cleaning. If you had been beaten, your hands would be sore and blistering but you still had to put your hands in water and scrub when you were in pain.
15. I was often beaten by the nuns. They would tell you to hold your hands out and slap you on the knuckles with the side of a ruler. They would hold your hands so you couldn't pull away. Another thing they used to do was pull you up by the earlobe so you were on your tiptoes and your feet were practically off the ground. **SR134** used to dig into the soft flesh under your arms with her fingers. The nuns would hit you on the head as well either with their knuckles or these big sets of keys they carried around.
16. The beatings happened pretty often. If it wasn't you, you saw someone else being beaten. You didn't have to do anything to get a beating; if you so much as tutted you would be punished. You could not express yourself at all or you would get battered. **SR134** would have given you a box in the ears but I don't recall her using a weapon against you. **SR116** would have beaten me the most because I was in her group. She was a very wicked woman.
17. I always felt that the children who had parents or families were treated better than those of us with nobody. They got out for the weekend and their parents would come visit them. I remember saying to one of the nuns I was going to tell someone about the beatings and she said 'who are you going to tell, you've got no one to tell, you were left on the doorstep'. I think the nuns

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treated the girls with families better because they knew they could tell what was going on when they got outside at weekends. Nobody ever came to visit me; nobody even knew I existed.

18. I never saw anybody from Social Services visit the home. I remember the benefactors coming to visit. We had to work even harder cleaning then. The nuns would dress us all up in our Sunday best and have us all looking pretty for the benefactors so they would think we were being well looked after. It was all a show though. As soon as the benefactors left, we were told to get out of our good clothes and get back into our scrubbing clothes.

19. We were brought out to a Dentist, [REDACTED] He was a horrible man; I was petrified of him. I'm sure he ripped our teeth out just so he could get his money. There was a doctor called [REDACTED] who visited but I didn't see much of him. I remember there was an epidemic of flu or something in the late 60's and I was one of a handful of girls who didn't get it. The girls were dropping like flies. I remember having to do extra work because we had to do all the cleaning and look after the sick girls as well. The nuns never looked after us when we were ill. Even if you were ill, you were still expected to work unless you were really ill in which case you were just left up in the dormitory all day on your own.

20. When I first got my period I was about eleven and I was in so much pain I was doubled over. I remember being so embarrassed having to ask the nuns for a sanitary towel. It was so degrading. You wouldn't even be given a packet; you would be given one or two and they were expected to last you the whole day. I would often wash mine out because I was afraid of going to ask for more. I used to get terrible backache and all I wanted to do was crawl into bed but I still had to do all the floors and work.

21. I used to get bad bleeding from my left breast. I was really scared; I didn't know what it was. There used to be a lot of blood on my vest but I didn't want to tell anyone about it so I would hide my vest. Recently I found a lump in my left breast and when I went to the hospital the doctor asked me when I had an

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operation on my breast. I told him I had never had surgery on my breast but he said I definitely had and he showed me the scar. I don't recall ever being taken to hospital as a child or having any operation.

22. I went to secondary school in St. Monica's. We stuck out like a sore thumb; everyone knew we were from the home. SR218 was the headmistress. I often got slaps from her at school. Sometimes when the nuns in the home beat you they would really lose their temper. They would get the big bamboo cane and bring it down from above and you could really feel the force of it. SR218 beat me with a strap as well. I was a bit of a rebel in school and I got expelled from St Monica's when I was about thirteen for throwing a snowball at the house of the headmistress. I was put up on the stage in front of everyone and told I was the worst girl in the school. SR116 gave me a bad hiding for getting expelled.

23. You normally got beatings in the room upstairs but I remember once getting a bad beating from SR116 in a room downstairs beside the dining room. She really lost her temper and lashed out at me. I was trying to protect my body so my back ended up black and blue from the hiding. It was extremely painful. I remember one teacher at St Monica's called [REDACTED] who was nice to me. She was the only teacher who would take me back after I was expelled. She kept asking a lot of questions but at that time I wouldn't have told anybody about the abuse no matter how bad it got. I thought nobody cared so why would she care. That was my frame of mind. [REDACTED] was my [REDACTED] teacher and one time I was making a dress and I was supposed to try it on. I refused to try it on because I knew if I did she would see all the marks on my back from the beating.

24. When I was fourteen I ran away to Manchester with three other girls. I cannot remember how we got there. We had no money or anything and we were brought back. I can't really remember how we were brought back; it's all a blur to me. Girls often ran away but they were always brought back to the home. I cried for two weeks after I was brought back.

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25. I left school when I was fifteen and I worked full-time for the nuns until I was eighteen. I worked in the old people's home and in the kitchen. I never saw any wages; I didn't even know I should be getting paid. The nuns never gave us any encouragement. They just said we were good for nothing; we were only good for scrubbing. They used to threaten us with the Good Shepherd across the road. We were petrified of going there; we knew that was a terrible place. We were told that if we were sent there we would die there. They also threatened us with Muckamore and Purdysburn.

26. We never had birthdays. We were told if it was our birthday but we never received any presents. We never owned anything. At Christmas, some of us were picked to go to parties. We were given a present from Santa and then it was taken away from us. I think that the nuns then gave out these presents on Christmas morning. We were taken to Glenariff forest park on holidays but we had to wash and clean the beds. I remember being very hungry and freezing during these trips.

27. I left Nazareth House on 10th May 1968 when I was eighteen. A girl had come up to visit and she said she was going to London so I decided to go with her. I told the nuns I was going to London and they just gave me rosary beads, a mantilla and a Bible. I had a little case with a few pieces of clothing but I lost it at the train station my first day in London.

Life after care

28. I ended up homeless in [REDACTED] There was a very anti-Belfast feeling because the Troubles had just started and I couldn't get a place to live. I was homeless for six years, just roaming the streets. I became a professional shoplifter and I got in trouble with the police. I ended up in prison when I was nineteen. I was in [REDACTED] and it was just like being in the home again. I began drinking a lot and taking drugs. I was very low; my head was all over the place. I used to think if the ground was to open up and swallow me up nobody would even know I had been on this earth. I was so alone. I got lots of beatings from men trying to force me into prostitution but I never gave in.

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29. I ended up very ill in hospital. They thought I had TB. I only weighed six stone; I was like a skeleton. This man said I could have a room in his house when I got out and I ended up having children with him. I never married because I didn't want anyone telling me what to do but we had three children together. We lost one child so now I have two daughters and a grandson. I stayed with their dad for seventeen years but there was no love. I didn't know how to give or receive love. I just wanted my children to have a mother and father because I never did.

30. I worked three jobs as a cleaner to provide for my kids. I would have loved to have been a journalist or an archaeologist but you weren't allowed to have dreams in the home. I suffer badly with my back; I have arthritis of the spine. I also have asthma. I have retired now and I am bored out of my brains. I was referred to a psychiatrist a few years ago and that was the first time I ever told anybody about my background. I didn't go into detail; I just said I grew up with the nuns. The psychiatrist was Irish and I could tell he didn't judge me. I never told my GP about my background because I don't think he would understand. I am on anti-depressants and I smoke marijuana every day but I want to give it up as it's bad for my asthma.

31. About seven years ago I traced my mother through the Good Shepherd Convent. I always wanted to find out who I was and where I came from so when the children had grown up, I decided to do it. The woman in the Good Shepherd said in all the years she was doing that job, my mother stuck in her mind. She didn't want to give me my mother's address, she tried to stop me taking the next step but I insisted. I got the address and went to my mother's house in [REDACTED]. I knocked three times before she answered and when she did I asked to speak to [REDACTED]. She instantly knew who I was and she just slammed the door in my face.

32. I knocked the door again and said I just wanted to speak to her for five minutes; I didn't want any trouble. She told me to fuck off or she would get the police and not to come back again. I put my address and phone number

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through the door but she picked it up, crumbled it up and threw it in my face. I was gutted. I went back to the house and met a man walking towards it. I stopped him and asked if he knew who I was. He said he did so I asked if he would be interested in contacting me. He said he wouldn't give me the time of day. I think that my mum had told the rest of the family that I had called to her house and that is why he was there. I think that he was an uncle of mine as he resembled me. I was disgusted and I left.

33. My mother obviously kept my address because a few days later I got a letter from her. Her handwriting was the exact same as mine. The letter said 'To Whom It May Concern, how dare you come to my house and disturb my family, that is my family not your family, I never wanted you'. It was basically just telling me I wasn't wanted which I knew deep in my heart anyway.

34. Growing up in the home had a big impact on my life. We weren't prepared for the real world at all. We weren't taught how to communicate or socialise. We weren't shown any love or affection. I am not an affectionate person because of that and I feel my children missed out in that regard. My children missed out on a lot of things – having a family, aunts and uncles and cousins. I am a bit of a loner and even if I am in a room full of people, I feel alone. I never bothered getting into another relationship after I split with the children's father. When it comes to intimacy, I just freeze. We were not allowed to be individuals and now I am a bit of a rebel because of this.

35. I also tried to obtain my records from the Irish centre in [REDACTED] I instructed a Solicitor in [REDACTED] who also tried to obtain my records. He contacted the Crown Prosecution Service who said I did not have a leg to stand on. I applied to Sister of Nazareth, Hammersmith and they didn't give me any of my records. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to the police.

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Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA52

Dated

13/11/14