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HIA REF: 140

Witness Name: HIA 140

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 140

I, HIA 140 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] I was named HIA 140
HIA 140 My father's name was [REDACTED] and my mother's maiden name was [REDACTED]
2. I discovered in later years that my mother suffered from depression and was hospitalised at St Brendan's Hospital (Grangegorman) in the north of Dublin just prior to my being taken to Nazareth House. My mother died in 1940. My father was not able to cope alone and my sister and I were taken into care. My sister, [REDACTED] was taken to a home in Dublin so we were separated.
3. My brother [REDACTED] was sent to live with my father's sister in Belfast. I tried to trace him following my release from Nazareth House but I have not seen him since he was fifteen years old. My aunt would not take care of me because I reminded her of my mother and she never liked my mother. She always used to say to me "you're ugly like your mother". I recall an incident where my aunt beat me and two policemen then came and asked for my clothes, they dressed me and took me to Nazareth House.

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Nazareth House, Belfast (27/7/1940- 12/4/1946)

4. According to records provided by the Sisters of Nazareth I was placed in Nazareth House, Belfast on 27 July 1940 when I was ten years old. I had two elderly aunts who were the only relatives that could tell me anything about my past and they had always said I had been in care from when I was four years old. For this reason I had always thought that I had been put in care much earlier in 1934 but I have no way of checking these dates now.
5. Our normal routine in the home was that we got up at 5.30am every day and went to bed at 6.00pm. We rarely got a full night's sleep. We scrubbed floors after school every day. The most consistent memory I have about meal times and food at Nazareth House was that I was always desperately hungry. We had thick lumpy porridge for breakfast and it tasted disgusting. When I refused to eat it one of the nuns, usually **SR 112** would pull my head back by the hair and force it into my mouth. She would smear it over my face and lips and hurt my gums with the edge of the spoon. Sometimes if I struggled against them they gripped my hair so tightly that clumps of hair would be pulled out of my scalp.
6. I recall being so hungry at times that some of the other girls and I were driven to steal food or beg the kitchen assistants for scraps from the rubbish bins. I recall stealing vegetable peelings and other scraps to stay alive. Lunch was usually bread and dripping, dinner was usually some type of stew and there were no extras like dessert, fruit, butter or jam.
7. There were three dormitories in the home and I slept in St Mary's with about fifty other girls. I slept in a small single bed with a hard mattress and we were given one sheet and one thin blanket whether it was summer or winter. I remember it was often freezing cold.
8. I recall each week we were lined up and had to hold out our underpants to be inspected by the sisters. If there was any soiling then we were called "dirty" and "disgusting" by the Sisters and required to wash our own garment. The older girls

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would help out and they would make sure my pants had been washed the day before these inspections. We were given one pair of shoes and when the soles were worn out we made cardboard soles ourselves that we tied on to our feet with string. We were given no special clothing and no Sunday best.

9. We bathed once a week only, every Thursday, regardless of how dirty we were. One bath of water was used for fifty girls and the water was not changed. When I was one of the younger girls I remember by the time my turn came the water was brown and freezing cold. I recall as I stepped out of the bath the nuns would comment that I was a dirty filthy little girl. Two Sisters would hold a sheet around the bath. As we got in and out of the bath the Sisters told us we were dirty and evil and that we should be ashamed of our bodies. Certain Sisters would check to see if I had pubic hair. She told me I was dirty and evil and that the only part of my body I should reveal was my ankles. I still feel ashamed to this day of my body. It had enormous implications for the physical side of my marriage. When my husband and I separated he told me that I was the coldest woman he had ever known.
10. I do not recall receiving any advice or explanation from the nuns about puberty or the changes we should expect with our developing bodies. I was horrified and distressed when I got my first period. I thought I was going to bleed to death. An older girl explained that what was happening to me was normal but she said I would have to tell the Sisters which left me feeling anxious. When I spoke to one of the nuns she called me filthy and dirty and slapped me across the face telling me I was disgusting and should be ashamed. She handed me a rag that looked like a ripped up sheet and a belt and without any further discussion she told me to get out of her sight. I really had to rely on the older girls to know how to cope with puberty.
11. I had protruding teeth and severe dental decay which caused me both physical and emotional distress. I used to try to hide my face and speak from behind my hands. **SR 112** would refer to my teeth in derogatory terms and tell me I was ugly and would never be worth anything. It eroded any self confidence that I had. During my time in Nazareth House I never once saw a dentist or a doctor.

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When I left Nazareth House I was taken immediately by my aunt to a dentist and over the course of a few visits my teeth were repaired.

12. In my view I was subjected to several different forms of abuse during my time in care at Nazareth House. I suffered physical abuse by being frequently bashed, battered, beaten and kicked by the nuns. They gave me hard slaps across the face regularly and I recall one incident when I received 140 slaps of the cane across my hands from **SR 112** leaving them bleeding and badly bruised for weeks. She verbally abused me as she did this by calling me an "evil and filthy liar" and screaming at me that I was good for nothing and would never amount to anything. Physical punishment was usually accompanied by verbal abuse. I recall the other girls counting out the slaps as this happened and telling me not to cry and I didn't cry in front of **SR 112** but I cried a lot when I was left alone following this incident. I told a priest, **NHB 18** about this punishment and showed him how **SR 112** had left my hand black and blue.
13. On one occasion when I was quite young at Nazareth House I was asked my name by a nun and I replied **HIA 140** "Sister" and she slapped me on the face. One of the other girls told me that I should not say anything when asked my name by a nun as we were only numbers to them. The next time she asked me I said nothing and she slapped me on the face again. That is when I learned that the correct answer was to give my number and I was Number **SR 112** I was treated like a criminal and made anonymous by being given a number and not using my name. I think they needed us to be anonymous as it made their cruelty easier to accept if they could not think of us as people.
14. The nuns used the cane frequently and indiscriminately. **SR 112** carried a cane with her at all times. She somehow managed to conceal it under her garments and could retrieve it immediately whenever she wanted it. It was long and thin and we were routinely whipped with it for a range of what she considered to be transgressions. Sometimes we were caned for things as simple as looking out the window or having our shoelaces undone.

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15. I suffered humiliation and degradation by being made to sit with urine soaked sheets on my head. I was also made to carry soiled sheets into the classroom where I was taunted by both classmates and nuns. I did not wet the bed often but this was common punishment for the crime of wetting the bed. We would be ridiculed by the other girls and nuns. They must have thought that type of humiliation would prevent us wetting the bed.
16. I suffered solitary confinement by being locked in cupboards alone on occasion for extended periods of time. This usually followed a beating or caning. I also recall being provided with poor clothing to withstand harsh winter days. I was often left outside in the cold, at times knee deep in snow and not being allowed to dry myself off when taken in. I never received any help when physically ill and recall constantly feeling weak and lethargic whilst growing up.
17. I was also subjected to emotional abuse by being told frequently that I was evil, dirty and disgusting, referred to as an idiot and told often that I was unwanted, worthless and would not amount to anything. The nuns often reminded me that I was illegitimate and that my father did not want me.
18. I suffered deprivation by being sent to bed without food or having my bedding taken away as a punishment.
19. Every day I was required to scrub tiled floors in the home on my exposed hands and knees with carbolic soap and then wax the floors. It usually took two hours every morning without a break. It led to me developing a badly swollen knee with excruciating pain but the nuns never treated it and expected me to continue kneeling on it to clean. It inevitably caused irreparable damage to my kneecap. In later life I had to have treatment on three occasions to remove lumps and growths on my kneecap. This helped my condition but I continued to have pain and weakness in that leg over many years especially if I had pressure applied to it or if I had to kneel on hard surfaces. It also resulted in me walking with a noticeable limp.

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20. I recall one girl in the home had a large head and was referred to by the nuns as "horse head". She was often taunted by the Sisters. I witnessed her commit suicide jumping from the roof. Her suicide was never addressed by the nuns and no counselling was arranged for the girls who witnessed it. We were left to deal with this traumatic event on our own and we were not even allowed to attend her funeral. I was about fifteen at the time of this incident. I think she was called **NHB 28**
21. I did not receive a proper education or any life skills to prepare me for life after care. We received little education beyond primary level. Although we did go to class we were expected to knit black shawls for the nuns rather than pursue a proper education.
22. I did not receive any visitors throughout my time in care. If strangers gave us small gifts like fruit we had to give them to the nuns and if we ate them we would be caned or smacked across the face. Events such as my birthday and Christmas were never celebrated and I was deprived of all forms of love and comfort.
23. I attempted to run away three times from the home when I was about eleven or twelve years old but each time without success as I was picked up and returned by local police on each occasion. The policeman told me it was my uniform that gave me away so I asked him to bring me a change of clothes to help me escape the next time. Unfortunately it was his job to take me back to the home.
24. I recall the names of only four nuns now, **SR 112** **SR 114** **SR 115** and **SR 113** the rest I have forgotten. I remember that **SR 113** was in charge of the nursery and **SR 112** was the head nun. A girl who worked in the nursery, **NHB 19** told me that **SR 113** was taken away by police one day for investigation for bathing the children in the nursery in water that was either boiling hot or too cold. **SR 114** and **SR 115** were never cruel to me.
25. I was not subjected to any form of sexual abuse during my time at Nazareth House.

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26. The abuse I have outlined were never isolated occasional punishments but rather they were part of a sustained and relentless pattern of abuse that took place on a daily basis over a period of years. Throughout my life I have felt ugly, unworthy, unloved, unwanted, dirty, evil, worthless and rejected. I have lived throughout my life with the recollection and fear of being rejected and humiliated. This had a deep and profound impact on me physically and emotionally. It severely limited my ability to find work as I was unskilled with little basic education and no self confidence. As a result I limited myself to factory or childcare work. I remember being offered an office job once and I did not have the confidence to accept it so I worked in a sweet factory instead which was low level work. I also recall always wanting to learn to drive but I never found the confidence to take lessons or get my licence.
27. I left care when I was sixteen and I was taken out by my maternal aunt, Aunt [REDACTED] who lived in Dublin. When the nuns told me she had come to take me I said she could not possibly be my aunt or she would have come to visit me sooner. She had three sons, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who were very good to me but my aunt did not treat me well.

Life after care

28. I moved to New Zealand in 1952. A nun I knew in Dublin introduced me to a man named [REDACTED] who lived in New Zealand and he needed a nanny so I went over there to work for him. I stayed with the family for two years. He was good to me but his wife showed me little kindness and then when I left them to work in a shop she tried to persuade me to return to work for them.
29. I married in 1957 when I was twenty seven years old. My husband had been married before. I had my first child before I married in 1956 and I had seven children in total. My husband was an alcoholic and a gambler. He left me for another woman after thirteen or fourteen years of marriage.

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30. My son moved to Australia in 1984 and I moved to Australia to be with him in 2003.
31. I lodged proceedings in the High Court in Northern Ireland against Sister Mary Monaghan as Superior General of the Sisters of Nazareth in 2010 for negligence, assault, battery and trespass to the person. This claim was discontinued on 23 May 2012 on the advice of my legal representative. I had pursued the matter at that stage for at least eighteen months but was told that I would no longer be included in these legal proceedings as I had not been subjected to any sexual abuse so this was a rather disappointing outcome. I never received any compensation. I obtained a psychiatric assessment during this claim and a conclusion was noted that I had moderately severe social phobia that had impacted on my personal and occupational relationships forcing me to lead a sheltered and restricted life. The psychiatrist linked my condition to my painful and difficult upbringing.
32. My background has also significantly affected my relationships with other people throughout my life. I attribute the breakdown of my marriage to my time in care as I could not relate to my husband emotionally or physically as my background did not prepare me for these adult relationships. We separated in the mid 1970's and we were divorced in the mid 1980's after twenty years of marriage. I had no further personal relationships post divorce. I have seven children and was a single mother for most of their upbringing. Fortunately I am close to my children and have their support in life.
33. My faith and my family have enabled me to try and make something of my life. I am over eighty now and time is marching on. I want justice for the many years I spent in care and the abuse and neglect that I suffered at Nazareth House and for the ongoing consequences of that abuse and neglect. I want justice, compensation and closure. I want this not only for myself but for my children who have also had to live with the consequences of what happened to me and I want this for the other girls that experienced the horror of Nazareth House with me.

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Statement of Truth

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

Signed HIA 140

Dated 12-11-2013