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HIA REF: 61

Witness Name: **HIA 61****THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995**

WITNESS STATEMENT OF **HIA 61**

I, **HIA 61**, will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Belfast. I lived with my mother and my older sister ^{HIA 63} [REDACTED] and my younger sister **HIA 62**
2. I recall two people coming to our house. They took us to get some new clothes and said they were taking us somewhere where we would be looked after. My mother had passed away but we didn't realise this. I was aged approximately six years at the time. ^{HIA 63} [REDACTED] was aged nine years, and **HIA 62** was approximately two years of age.

Nazareth House, Belfast, 1961 - 1971

3. ^{HIA 63} [REDACTED] and I were brought to Nazareth House. **HIA 62** was put in with the babies. A day or two after arriving, we were taken on a bus to the countryside, which I think was Glenariffe. When we came back from the countryside, ^{HIA 63} [REDACTED] and I went to see **HIA 62** but there were rails between us. In the garden there were big metal railings between the nursery and the older girls section so if we were all out in the garden at the same time we could see each other but we weren't allowed to touch apart from our hands. She was crying when we left her and she didn't want to let go of our hands. She remained in the

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nursery until she was aged about five years. We didn't have any contact with her other than when we were in the garden. I remember being pulled away from her on one occasion by a nun, **SR 31** I think.

4. There were three groups, St Ann's Group, Sacred Heart Group and Our Lady's Group, and there was one nun in charge of each, **SR 116** **SR 134** and **SR 31**. Each group had approximately thirty three children. Each group was on a different floor in the home and had its' own dormitory. We were all given numbers which the nuns would use to identify us, but at a later stage they started to use our surnames. ^{HIA 63} remembers being called by a number because she is older than me. I would be more familiar being referred to as **[REDACTED]**
5. We were in St Ann's Group of which **SR 116** was in charge. She had a cell in our dormitory so that she could keep watch on us and make sure we were in bed. The dormitories were like hospitals, with about thirty wee iron beds. We had to paint our beds cream every summer. **SR 116** taught the infants. I was in her class.
6. We got up at 6.45am. In the morning we had to pull our bed sheets back and the nuns would come round to inspect our beds. I only ever wet my bed once, at a time when I was in **SR 134** group. I remember sweating, hoping **SR 134** would pass me by. She pushed me out of the way and felt my bed. She grabbed me by the back of the head and stuck my nose in the bed sheets, and rubbed my face in it, then pulled me back by my hair. If we wet the bed, we had to take our sheets off and leave them on the floor. It was as if we were being marked out, so everyone would know what we had done, and we would be teased by the other girls. We had to make our beds after they were inspected.
7. After our beds were inspected, we had to wash, and then **SR 134** would inspect us. She would point at us and we would have to put out our hands, turn them over so she could look at our arms, and then show our necks. If I had a mark on my neck **SR 134** would scrub it again, but she would use a

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scrubbing brush meant for the floor and my neck would bleed. If we had our period, we were only given a certain number of sanitary towels and the nuns wouldn't give us anymore. It would smell awful and when we were at St Monica's other girls would comment on how we smelt foul. Every week our knickers were examined. We had to line up and wait our turn. We then had to turn our knickers inside out and if there were any marks we would get smacked in front of all the other girls.

8. Mass was at 7.15am. We also had to say the Rosary most evenings before bed. We would take turns saying the Decades. We had to go to Mass twice on Sundays, in the morning and again in the afternoon for the Benediction. Sometimes we would even have to go to Mass three times in one day but this was infrequent. On occasions the nuns would want music for their Mass, and some girls would be brought up to sing for them or pump the organ.
9. Breakfast was either cornflakes or porridge. Sometimes the porridge in the morning would be burnt. I remember one occasion when I was trying to eat the burnt porridge. **SR 116** grabbed my hair and started feeding me the porridge with a spoon. She just kept pushing it into my mouth, even though I hadn't finished what I was eating. I was nearly sick. She just kept scraping the porridge and feeding it to me until the plate was clean. She did this to me on more than one occasion. Sunday dinners were quite nice sometimes. We might have got a bowl of chicken soup, and maybe some chicken and vegetables. Every Sunday evening we had spam salad. We would have been given a fried egg on Christmas morning which we all looked forward to. I don't remember anything about Christmas dinner.
10. We did get to play a little bit, but most of our spare time was spent doing chores. After school we would be sent to sweep the corridors, clean the bathrooms or wax and polish the floors. From the age of about seven, I worked in the old people's home. We would set the tables for their meals. I liked it because the old people shouted and I didn't have to worry about my poor hearing. Sometimes I was sent to work with the old men and I didn't like that because they tried to touch me. None of the girls liked being sent to see

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the old men. **SR 221** knew I preferred working with the women so she would send me back over to the women's section.

11. Once a week we had to clean the organ in the church and polish the chalice.

SR 134 would look after the children cleaning the first six rows, and **SR 31**

SR 31 would supervise the children on the next six rows. Sometimes if the nuns left their glasses case sitting down, we would peek into it to find out their real name. We were just making our own entertainment. I was caught once by

SR 134 and she nipped me on the neck. **SR 31** name was **SR 31**

SR 31 and **SR 134** name was **SR 134** **SR 116** first name was **SR 116**

12. In the autumn time we had to clean the garden and sweep all the leaves up.

We weren't allowed to have our sleeves below our elbows so we would have been cold. We had to lift the leaves with our hands and if the nuns saw us kicking the leaves up, we would have been clapped over the head. We weren't really allowed to laugh.

13. Anytime there was thunder and lightning the nuns would tell us that we had made God angry and he was moving furniture in heaven. **SR 31** would

grab one child, and make them listen to the thunder and say that we must have done something to make God angry. I remember **SR 116** telling

SR 31 there was no point trying to get me to listen because I wouldn't be able to hear the thunder.

14. For some reason **SR 116** always picked on me. She really took against me, and she was the worst nun as far as I was concerned. She was always

beating me over the head, and smacking me across the ear. Sometimes she just hit me with her hand and sometimes she used the metal crucifix of her Rosary Beads, her big leather belt or a big bunch of keys. The **SR 116**

would be around the home, but I don't remember her ever being there when **SR 116** was beating me. **SR 31** was quite sly when she

was being cruel. She would do things, give you a smack over the head when there was nobody else around.

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15. I remember one occasion when I was standing in the bathroom, and I didn't hear **SR 116** when she spoke to me. I got a whack to the side of the head and I fell to the floor, after hitting my head off the metal part of a mirror. My head was bleeding. I remember waking up in bed with a bandage over the left side of my head. I started to have difficulties with my hearing after this.
16. When I couldn't hear **SR 116** she would come right up to my face, in an intimidating way. I was sent to the [REDACTED] office once by **SR 116** **SR 116** just because I couldn't hear what she was saying to me. The [REDACTED] made me kneel outside her office for half a day, and then she eventually came out and told me I could go. At one stage a teacher came into Nazareth House to teach us. I think she was called [REDACTED] I could never hear in school, and so I was sent to the Royal Victoria Hospital to get my ears checked. I would have been aged eight or nine years at the time. I was brought by a lady who always took us for our medical appointments. I think she might have been called [REDACTED]
17. I had to do a hearing test where I tapped the desk every time I heard a noise. The doctor asked me did I have a fall, did I bang my head on the walls or did somebody hit me. I told the doctor that one of the nuns hit me over the head. The doctors would always ring the Convent with the test results. When I went back to the Convent, **SR 116** told me that I had to go back to the hospital and tell the doctor that I had been telling lies. I said that I wasn't telling lies and that she was always hitting me.
18. I had to keep going for tests and operations and I remember always wearing bandages. When I was at the hospital for tests, the doctors would say that they would ring the Convent with the results. I knew then when I went down for supper if I was in trouble. **SR 116** would just point at me and I had to wait in her cell. One night she forgot about me and I had to kneel outside her cell all night.

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19. After the first test, **SR 116** told me that I would have to do better the next time. During the next test I was scared so I kept tapping even though I couldn't hear anything. After the test the doctor said the nuns wouldn't be very happy because I was lying, tapping even though I couldn't hear anything. When I arrived home I was sent to see **SR 116**. She made me kneel down in her cell and face the wall. She threw holy water over me, and told me that when she was finished with the holy water, the devil would be out of me. She said that God was watching me and that she would beat the devil out of me for telling lies and I was so confused. The doctors had told her that I was lying in the test, because I was tapping the table even when there was no noise. I was even more frightened then because I couldn't do right for doing wrong. I was trying to make things better by doing better in the test but I had just made things worse for myself.
20. I saw a specialist who said that the damage to my ear was very severe, and it had been caused by beatings on the head. The damage was too severe for him to be able to do anything about it, so he told me I would have to wear a hearing aid. I had to wear one with a big wire, like a transistor radio. I tried to grow my hair and I would pull my hair over my face to hide the wires. I remember not really hearing anything in class and **SR 116** would pull my hair back and make me take off my pullover so that everybody could see the hearing aid in my pocket. I think she did this intentionally to embarrass me. My nickname when I was little was **[REDACTED]**
21. I had no difficulties with my hearing before I went into Nazareth House. I always liked to sing. I remember before going in to Nazareth House, walking to school with my mother and being able to hear the birds sing, and singing along with them. When I first went in to Nazareth House and we made our Holy Communion, we were taught a song to sing and because I had the nicest voice, **SR 31** let me sing the first verse by myself alongside the organist. After my ear was injured, I wasn't allowed to sing anymore because I couldn't hear the right time of the music properly. I remember **SR 31** grabbed me by the hair and pulled me away from the organ. She told me I wouldn't sing again because I was holding everyone else back. When I was

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supposed to come out of **SR 116** class she had to keep me back a year because I was so behind.

22. From then on **SR 116** made my life hell. She still kept beating me. She beat me throughout my childhood. At one stage I was in **SR 134** group because there were too many in **SR 116** group, but **SR 116** always kept that contact with me. Whenever I looked she was there and she would find fault with me. She always seemed to be waiting on me, and seeking me out. She told me all the time that I was deaf, I was hopeless, and I would never go anywhere in my life. She always threatened me that I would be put in the Good Shepherd with all the naughty people. She said that because I was deaf I would be better in a backward school with the stupid people. I had no confidence anyway because I was deaf and so I believed all that she told me. I often wondered whether I had done something in a past life to deserve what was going on.

23. On one occasion I was in the bathroom and **SR 116** called me. I didn't hear her so she came behind me and just pulled me by the hair. I told her that I couldn't hear her but she told me to wait in the corner and she would give me my punishment later. I had to go over to the old people's part of the convent where one of the residents, **██████████** had died. I was very fond of **██████████** and wasn't aware that she had passed away. My punishment, along with another girl, **NHB 126** was to lift **██████████** body in and out of the bath, and bath her with cotton wool. Then she was laid out on a table and we had to comb her hair, put powder on her face and put a shroud on her. I remember that **NHB 126** wanted **██████████** glasses and I wanted her hearing aid, but it didn't fit because it was for the wrong ear. We then had to wheel the trolley to the dead house. When **SR 116** came back to check if we had finished, we got another beating because we didn't put any cotton wool in her ears, nose and back passage. Every day until **██████████** was buried, I had to go and pray for her soul in the dead house. This affected me quite badly as I was only nine or ten years at the time.

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24. Despite everything that **SR 116** did to me, I always asked her if she wanted me to do anything. I always tried to be on her good side in the hope that she would leave me alone, and maybe pick on somebody else, but she never left me alone.
25. I find it very difficult to talk about **SR 116**. I always wondered how holy people could act in the way they did, especially when they were looking after children. **SR 116** was always in my head so I tried to find out about her. I heard that she has been to Nazareth Houses all around the world, and that there were problems everywhere she went and that she had to keep changing her name. I also heard that she was entered as a novice at the age of eighteen years, when she had mental health difficulties so sometimes I think that maybe she didn't know any better.
26. I rarely had visitors. There was an elderly couple who I used to believe were my grandparents, **[REDACTED]** and the gentleman came to see me a couple of times, but he was getting old. It turned out that they were my mother's aunt and her husband. If we had visitors we were brought into a room to see them. Sometimes we would ask to go into the garden because the nuns would say yes to anything in front of visitors, but we would get a smack as soon as they left.
27. We had to go to Confession every Saturday and I would be trying to think of things to say, about what I had done wrong. I would be saying the same sins over and over again. Once I took a penny when I shouldn't have. I knew I shouldn't have taken it but I couldn't help myself because we only ever got money when visitors came in and gave us some, so we were rarely able to get sweets from the tuck shop. I said a prayer when I stole the penny and promised I would pay it back when I was older. As soon as I got a job at the age of sixteen years, I put three pennies back to make up for the one I had taken.
28. There was a wall with barbed wire, separating the home from the Holy Rosary. We would climb over the wall because there was a big apple tree. We

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would pinch the apples and put them down our knickers. If we were caught the nun would make us wait in the big dining room until all the children came in for supper. The nun made us show the other children what we had been doing and what the consequences would be. I had to stand and hold my knickers while all the apples fell out onto the floor. Then I was beaten or made to stand in the corner with my nose facing the wall, and I wouldn't be allowed to eat. We had to be really careful when we ate the apples because we had nowhere to hide the core afterwards. One girl tried to throw the core down the toilet but she was caught. She had to take it out of the toilet and she got a beating.

29. People would come to the home to adopt children. Because of our ages, nine and six years, quite a few people wanted me and **HIA 62** but we didn't want to go because of **HIA 63** who would have been left behind in the home. She was around twelve years at the time. I thought if we left, we might never see her again. The nuns told us we were ungrateful because we refused to go out with these people, and they would hit us over the head with keys or with the cross of the Rosary beads.

30. There was a couple, **NHB 100** and **NHB 101** who would take myself and **HIA 62** out for a holiday. They lived in Newry. I was aged about nine or ten years at the time. They were very good to us when they took us out. We had nice food and she would give us sweets, but we didn't want to share them with her three children because we weren't used to getting sweets in the convent. **NHB 100** would call us selfish and send us to our bedrooms.

31. **NHB 100** would take me to **NHB 100** Monastery to see her brother-in-law who was a monk, **NHB 75** I think he was in his thirties. We didn't really know what we were doing there. He would take us in one at a time. The first time I went in to see him, he put me on his knee and talked to me. The second time he touched my legs and he bounced me up and down on his knee. I remember wondering what I was sitting on because I could feel something hard underneath. He lifted me off and then he took my hand and put it on top of his penis. Every time I tried to pull away, he would hold my

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hand tighter. He told me to come and see him every time we were out with his sister. Every time I went, he would touch me or make me touch him. After two or three years I really didn't want to go back. On one occasion he let **HIA 62** come in at the same time as me. **HIA 62** was wearing a little short dress. He put his hands up and down her legs and I pushed him away and told him not to do that. When we went back to the Convent I told **SR 116** **SR 116** that I didn't want to go back there. She pulled my pants down and with the belt of her Rosary Beads, she smacked me repeatedly. She told me that I was ungrateful and the **NHB 101/100** were good people, coming to take us out for a holiday. I said I didn't want to go the holy place anymore but we still had to go on for a few years. This affected me quite badly. A few years later I confided in a girl called **NHB 133** who I knew from the convent, about what **NHB 75** had done to me. She was also taken out by the **NHB 101/100** on occasion but I don't think she was taken to the monastery. In around 1996 or 1998, **NHB 133** told me that she had seen on the news that this Brother had been arrested as he had been abusing boys as well. I believe he was arrested on 78 counts of abuse.

32. We didn't celebrate birthdays in Nazareth House. We celebrated the feast days for the saints whom the nuns were named after. We always celebrated the Feast of St Anthony of Assisi on 4th October. We had to do concerts for the nuns. We would get a cream bun, and we were allowed to watch a film chosen by the nuns. **SR 134** and **SR 31** both loved **[REDACTED]** so we had to watch Reach For The Sky or 39 Steps. We also put on a big show once a year, as a thank you, for the families who would take us out for weekends and for holidays. We had to start off singing to the Reverend Mother, and then the families would come in. I enjoyed the concerts because I loved singing, but the nuns would often tell me to be quiet because I am deaf and was singing out of time. I would be a few bars behind everyone else.

33. We did Irish dancing but if we didn't stand up straight then the nuns put a big black stick through the sleeves of our outfit, across our back. This made us stand up straight. If we slumped again the next day, **SR 134** would smack

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us and hit us on the knuckles with a metal spoon. There was a lovely man, [REDACTED]

NHB
127 who used to come in to the home to teach us drama.

Life after care

34. A Social Worker came to visit me in Nazareth House when I was aged around fifteen years. She got me an interview for the [REDACTED] but they wouldn't take me because I was Catholic. I got a job in another bakery and after I settled in the nuns found me digs. I felt that there was no preparation for leaving Nazareth House. I tried to go back on one occasion. I rang the bell and asked did they have any jobs but SR 31 told me I had to make my own life.

35. I met my husband [REDACTED] I was getting threatened so we moved over to [REDACTED]. We got married after three years. I didn't really want to get married but I wanted security. He worked in [REDACTED] and then he became a long-distance lorry driver. The distance suited me. I was married to my first husband for twelve years. I didn't fall pregnant for twelve years, because of my difficulties with physical intimacy. We separated when [REDACTED] was aged eighteen months. I raised him on my own for three years, before I met my second husband, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] is very good to me and [REDACTED]

36. My son [REDACTED] is twenty six now. My background has had a big impact on him. I feel like I have passed a lot of my issues on to him. He suffers from mental health difficulties including depression and body dysmorphia. He has attempted to take his own life and is having counselling. Sometimes I wonder if [REDACTED] is being punished for something I did wrong, or whether I sheltered him too much as a child, because of my own background. He has asked me if he did something in a past life to deserve what he is going through, the same question I have asked myself. He is now volunteering four days a week, with the elderly and with people who have special needs.

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37. I have had counselling all my life. I have had counselling to help me improve my confidence and assertiveness. I have extreme difficulty with physical affection and have had counselling to deal with this. Some days I wake up and think "what did I do to deserve this, losing my mother and then all the beatings and abuse". These were holy people. Sometimes when I go to bed, I just wish I was dead. I know some of the girls who were in the home with me have committed suicide, and some of them are alcoholics. My sisters haven't had any counselling. They would tend to drink to deal with what they have been through.

38. I still clean. I have two cleaning jobs. I clean for two old ladies, and I also work in a care home. I have always preferred working in a job where I can get on with it and I don't really have anyone else to answer to. I am always worried that if I can't hear someone, I will get a smack for not answering. I have worked with the elderly all my life. I have never had the confidence to do anything else or feel that I could do anything else. I was brainwashed all my life. I believe that I could have achieved a lot more if I wasn't so damaged. I feel that I was cheated out of my education. I have never gone to college. I always used to think that maybe I could sing with a group but that didn't work out because of my hearing difficulties. I am good with numbers and I would have loved to work in a bank. When I came over to [REDACTED] I went to see a specialist, Dr Frazer, about my hearing. He said he didn't think he was going to be able to repair the damage because it was so severe. He told me that one of the bones was broken but he would try to replace it. My hearing improved for about six months. I just try to get on with it.

39. Even though I only wet the bed once, I am still paranoid about wetting the bed. I jump up straight away if I feel the need to go to the toilet in the middle of the night. I have issues with food and the way I eat. I still clean my house rigorously and would even ask my neighbours to come in and check it sometimes.

40. I sent off for my birth certificate and discovered that my name is [REDACTED] HIA 61 and not [REDACTED] HIA 61 as I had been led to believe by the nuns. I also discovered

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that my birthday was [REDACTED] and not [REDACTED] as I had always thought.

41. I am not sure about my faith anymore. I do pray and I go to Church when I feel the need to. I ask God to forgive the people who abused me. I never reported the abuse I suffered at the hands of the monk because I didn't think anyone would believe me.

42. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to police because I didn't think anyone would believe me.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 61

Dated

22-10-14