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HIA REF: 63

Witness Name: HIA 63

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 63

I, HIA 63 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED]
2. I am one of four children. I have two younger sisters HIA 62 and HIA 61 and one older brother [REDACTED]
3. My mother died when I was nine years old. My father was already dead at that stage. Before she died, my siblings, mother and I were living with an old couple who we called our grandparents but they weren't actually blood relations. They were too old to look after us. The day after my mother died we were taken away. We didn't get to go to her funeral and we weren't even told how she died. My two sisters and I were taken to Nazareth House and my brother was taken to Nazareth Lodge. I think the Church might have been involved but I don't remember any social workers or anyone from the Welfare.

Nazareth House, Belfast (3rd June 1961 – 31st October 1967)

4. I went into Nazareth House when I was nine years old and I stayed there until I was almost sixteen. When we first went in, HIA 62 was placed in the nursery because she was only about two at the time. HIA 61 and I were put in St. Anne's group, which SR 116 was in charge of. HIA 61

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was about five or six. We were given numbers in the home – I was number [REDACTED]. Later we were moved into the Sacred Heart group which [REDACTED] SR 134 [REDACTED] was in charge of.

5. It was very hard being separated from [REDACTED] HIA 62 [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. We had already lost both our parents and then we lost each other as well. The day after we went into the home, the older children were due to go on holidays to Glenariff so [REDACTED] HIA 61 [REDACTED] and I had to go with them. We were away for two weeks. I remember not wanting to leave [REDACTED] HIA 62 [REDACTED] in the nursery but we had no choice. As soon as we came back the first thing I did was ask one of the nuns if I could go see [REDACTED] HIA 62 [REDACTED] in the nursery. I was allowed to go up and when [REDACTED] HIA 62 [REDACTED] saw me she ran to me crying and threw her arms around me. She hugged me tightly and wouldn't let me go. I felt so guilty because she must not have known what was happening. In 24 hours she had lost her mother, her brother and then her two sisters were gone too. She probably thought she'd never see anyone again.
6. [REDACTED] HIA 62 [REDACTED] was in the nursery for a few years. I used to go up and see her sometimes but it just depended on the nun's mood whether they allowed you up or not. The nursery was separated from the older children's part by railings and sometimes we would see [REDACTED] HIA 62 [REDACTED] and hold hands through the railings. It was really hard being separated from her. We never got to see [REDACTED] even though he was only down the road in Nazareth Lodge.
7. The routine in Nazareth House was you got out of bed in the morning and you were straight on your knees saying your prayers. Then you washed and dressed. There were three groups in the home – St. Anne's, Our Lady's and Sacred Heart. On a Sunday we all had to go to Mass but during the week the groups took turns at going to Mass. You'd go to Mass if it was your group's turn, then you'd go down for breakfast. There was a lot of indoctrination in the home. We said the rosary and benedictions every single night and we were encouraged to confess our sins. It was all fire and brimstone. On Christmas Day we had to sit through three Masses in a row and if any children got tired or fidgety [REDACTED] SR 134 [REDACTED] would nip your neck in the church.

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8. The food in Nazareth House was a mixed bag – some of it would have been alright, some of it was horrible. I always remember eating horrible, lumpy porridge and you had to finish it or it would be spoon fed to you. The nuns took turns in supervising mealtimes. There were three main nuns – SR 116 SR 116 SR 134 and SR 31. Sometimes we would get what we called slop for dinner – I don't know if it was leftovers or what. I wouldn't say we were starved in the home but there were times I remember being hungry. It wasn't like you could get yourself a biscuit if you were hungry. You were fed when you were fed and that was it. At Christmas we would get an orange and a fried egg at breakfast – that was a big deal. I know the nuns ate better food than us because I worked in the kitchen for a short time and I saw their food. They ate very well – there was no fat on any of their food and they ate omelettes and things like that.
9. We used to go to Christmas parties outside the home which was one of the few things we had to look forward to. You would be waiting to see if your name was called and it was exciting getting out of Nazareth House. I remember we would be given presents like talc sets or something and that was nice.
10. People used to come up to the convent wanting to take children out for the day. HIA 61 and I were taken out by this woman called who lived on the She was a lovely woman and she was good to us. She was very wealthy and she used to bring us somewhere for the day and then back to her house for tea before dropping us back to the home.
11. The bedding in the home was basic. We slept in rows of little iron beds. When we first went in HIA 61 and I had to top and tail in the same bed because there weren't enough beds. There was a heating system in Nazareth House and it was always warm enough inside. The only time we were really cold was when we were forced to play outside in the garden on cold days and we had to keep our sleeves rolled up to our elbows.

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12. I went to primary school onsite in Nazareth House. [SR 116] [SR 31] [SR 31] and [SR 134] all taught in the school. When I was eleven I remember thinking I'd be doing my 11+ soon but then [SR 31] told me I wasn't eleven, I was only ten. That was deliberate on [SR 31] part. She didn't like me and it was about control. I had to stay an extra year in [SR 31] [SR 31] class then and I never did my 11+. I went to St. Monica's Secondary School on the [REDACTED] but I left when I was fifteen. The nuns never encouraged education. I believe if I had stayed in school longer and got some qualifications it would have been better for my career.
13. We had a lot of chores to do in the home. It wasn't just a bit of cleaning or tidying up after you; it was excessive manual labour. There was a huge hall with parquet flooring and we had to wax and polish that every weekend. There was a line of us and one girl would put the wax on, the next would polish it and so on. That floor was gleaming by the time we were finished with it. In the mornings after breakfast, we had to go and mop and clean the landings. [SR 116] would come along with her finger to see if you missed any dust. It was hard work – too much for small children.
14. A lot of the children in the home wet the bed. I never did but I witnessed the humiliation those girls suffered. Before they got the buzzers for the beds, I remember one nun who I think was [SR 134] putting the wet sheet over a girl's head as punishment for wetting the bed. That happened to a few different girls.
15. We got bathed once a week in Nazareth House. There were three tin baths for washing our hair out in the yard – one for each group. We had to queue up and take our turn. The water was warm but it was never changed so you were lucky if you got washed first you got the clean water but if you got washed last the water was filthy. We were bathed in Jeyes fluid which should never have been used. When it was put into the bath, the water turned white. The Jeyes fluid made my skin red and inflamed. We had to wear a pinafore in the bath to protect our modesty and when you got out you had a sheet put around you.

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16. When you got to the age where you were going to get your period you were given a book called 'My Dear Daughter' and told to say a prayer to Our Lady. We weren't given any sex education at all. Anything you learned was from the older girls. If you needed a sanitary towel, you had to go ask the nuns. The nuns never just handed one to you; they made you leave the dormitory and then they would leave one under your pillow. The sanitary towels were limited to one a day and we never had enough.
17. We used to get our underwear changed once a week. We had to go down to **SR 122** who was in charge of the sewing room and show the gusset of our underwear. If there were marks on your underwear, you got a clout. That was awful. The children were so frightened they'd be running around trying to swap their pants. Another time when I was coming out of the classroom **SR 122** was there and I must have been playing up. She hit me on the knuckles with the side of a ruler and it really hurt. **SR 122** **SR 122** could be very wicked sometimes and she did whatever would hurt you the most.
18. Any clothes or shoes we got in the home were usually hand me downs. I remember one instance when we all got brand new jelly shoes – I think they were called 'Jellybeans'. It was great to get something new but of all the children, mine were the first to rip. **SR 116** accused me of cutting the shoes with scissors but I hadn't – there was no way I could get scissors in the home. She hit me over the head with the shoe and told me to go into her classroom, kneel down and not to come out until I said I cut them. I was about ten or eleven at the time. I didn't know what to do because if I told the truth I would get in trouble and if I lied and said I cut them I would get beaten too. It was a Catch 22 – I was never going to win. I knelt down in that classroom the whole day crying; I was too frightened to come out and say I had cut the shoes. I never did say I cut them. Eventually **SR 116** had to tell me to come out of the classroom. After that the other children's shoes started to rip as well.

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19. There was a lot of physical and mental abuse in Nazareth House. After about a year, **HIA 61** and I were moved from St. Anne's group into Sacred Heart because of the shortage of beds. **SR 134** was in charge of Sacred Heart. Once when I was about thirteen or fourteen, I must have done something naughty and **SR 31** brought me into her storeroom. She started slapping me with a stick and then she pulled up my nightdress and started hitting me on the backside. I was so embarrassed because I was at a tender age but she just said "this is where you need it".
20. I went to the dentist once and he asked me why I hadn't been cleaning my teeth. I told him the truth – that I didn't have any toothpaste. We would have been given toothpaste in the home but mine must have run out or something. The dentist must have phoned the nuns because the next thing I knew **SR 134** **SR 134** made me go into the hall and stand on a chair in front of all the other children. She humiliated me in front of everyone saying "oh, **HIA 63** told the dentist she had no toothpaste". I don't know how long she made me stand on that chair but it was for hours.
21. I remember one time when I and a few other girls ran up to the serving table in the dining room to see what was for dinner. **SR 116** came in and said whoever was up at the server had to go up and wait outside her classroom. You had to stand there and wait until she was ready to come slap you. It was a form of mental cruelty. On another occasion I was standing on a swing and **SR 116** told me to get up to her classroom. She came at me with a bamboo cane and it snapped in half and flew across the room. She just said "there's plenty more where that came from", got another stick and continued to beat me.
22. **SR 116** was a very physical woman – more so than the other two. She was the youngest of the three nuns and I later heard she had psychiatric problems. She should never have been in charge of children; she had no compassion whatsoever. She would spontaneously grab your forearm for no reason whatsoever, take her hand back as far as it would go and slap you

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leaving imprints of her hands. It was always at least six slaps – three on each forearm. That was when she wasn't using sticks.

23. **SR 134** was a cruel, mocking woman. She would always say derogatory things to you. One day when I was about fourteen I was wearing a black dress with a white collar and she said "get that dress off you, it's too short with your fat legs". When I was in St. Monica's, me and two other girls mitched school for the day and we were sitting in the dormitory chatting to a girl who was sick in bed. If you were sick you were just told to stay in bed for the day. When we heard someone coming we ran and hid – two of us in the wardrobe and one under the bed. When **SR 134** found us, she banged and shut the door of the wardrobe half a dozen times and shouted "I've a good mind to leave you there". Then she took us down to her classroom and made us stand there in front of the class all day as punishment.
24. We lived in fear in the home. **SR 31** was always threatening you with Middletown or the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd was across the road and it was like a Magdalene laundry for wayward girls. We were terrified because we'd heard of girls going to Middletown and never being seen again. We lived in fear of being sent away. It was awful especially if you had siblings in the home because you didn't want to be separated from them.
25. At one stage we were moved into Our Lady's dormitory but we were still in the Sacred Heart group. There were two older girls in Our Lady's called **NHB 25** and **NHB 40** who were constantly getting beaten in the home. They were around fourteen at the time. Every single night, one of those two girls got beaten by **SR 31**. They didn't have to do anything; she targeted those two girls. I remember feeling bad for them but you were also glad it wasn't you. You were constantly thinking about who was going to be beaten next. **SR 31** would take girls individually into the storeroom so I never witnessed her beat anyone but the girls would come back crying. One time **SR 31** found **NHB 40** in the garden mitching school and she brought her up to her classroom. **SR 31** told **NHB 40** to kneel down and then she started chopping off her hair with scissors. It was awful; **NHB 40**

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head was bleeding and [REDACTED] SR 31 was just cutting chunks of hair off in front of the whole classroom. It was humiliating for [REDACTED] NHB 40

26. I don't remember anybody from the Welfare ever coming to inspect the home. The only visitors I remember are benefactors who were people who donated money to the home. They didn't come that often. We always knew when they were coming because we would have to be neat and tidy and the place had to be tidied up. One of the nuns would say "stand up for your benefactors" but we didn't really know what it meant at the time. The benefactors didn't speak to us at all; they just came in, had a look around and might have nodded at you.

27. I left school at fifteen and I stayed on working in the home for about a year after that. I actually got one of the better jobs working in the parlours. This involved answering the door, answering the telephone, cleaning and serving the priest his meals. A priest came in to say Mass every day. His name was [REDACTED] and he was the curate of Nazareth House. I remember Bishop Daly sometimes came in to say Mass and I served him his breakfast. It actually wasn't a bad job. I got paid £4 a month and I got my food and board for free.

28. I left Nazareth House on 31st October 1967 a few weeks before my sixteenth birthday.

Life after care

29. My first job after I left the home was organised by the nuns. It was working as a nanny for a family in Belfast but I didn't like it. Then I got a job as a nanny for a family called the [REDACTED] on the [REDACTED] and I enjoyed that. I worked as a waitress in the [REDACTED] cafe for a while as well. That's all I was qualified to do – domestic work. I had left school with no qualifications and my education was poor.

30. When I was nineteen I got pregnant with my daughter [REDACTED] I didn't marry her father but I kept [REDACTED] I used to go up to Nazareth House to visit my sisters

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and [REDACTED] was constantly pressuring me to give [REDACTED] up for adoption to a good Catholic family. I knew girls who had had babies and given them up. I stayed strong though and kept my daughter. I was living in [REDACTED] with two other girls and the woman across the street was a registered childminder. She looked after [REDACTED] while I worked as an auxiliary nurse in the [REDACTED]

31. I used to visit my brother [REDACTED] in Kircubbin as well. When [REDACTED] HIA 62 was about fifteen she got into trouble and was thrown out of Nazareth House. She was put under the care of Social Services and she was allowed to come and live with me. The social worker [REDACTED] NHB 115 knew me from when I had [REDACTED] I used to get a cheque from the Welfare for [REDACTED] HIA 62 keep.

32. After I left Nazareth House, I went back to visit my old family home. The old couple who had raised my mother were still living there and I would visit them. I moved to [REDACTED] in about 1978 or 1979. After I moved, I didn't go back to Belfast very often and they are both dead now. I managed to locate my mother's grave in [REDACTED] cemetery but there is no headstone.

33. I have been married 37 years and I have two daughters and one granddaughter who I love. My marriage has not been easy. We've had our ups and downs but we have both worked on it. I feel I am lucky in that respect as I know a lot of girls from the home were never able to form any sort of relationships or marriage.

34. Growing up in Nazareth House has impacted me deeply. I am not comfortable with intimacy and touching. I attribute this to the fact that between the ages of nine and fifteen I was never touched by anyone. I am able to hug my children because I want them to know they are loved but I am not 100% comfortable with it. I have never been able to initiate any sort of intimacy with my husband.

35. I have been fortunate in my career. I started out doing domestic work, then I trained as a cook and through that I got a job as a care assistant. I am now a Care Officer with [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] I work with people who need to learn the life skills necessary to live independently. I just fell into

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this career and I am fortunate because I did not receive a good education in the home.

36. I have told my husband about growing up in the convent but I wouldn't go in to much detail with him. I am very close to my two sisters and we often sit and chat about Nazareth House. We try to remember the good times but we sometimes get angry thinking of the nuns.

37. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to the police. The thought never crossed my mind as I didn't think of it as abuse.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed **HIA 63**

Dated 28/08/2014

Name	Room	Admitted	Left	By whom taken	Remarks
[REDACTED]					

HIA 63	[REDACTED]	3. 6. '61	31-10-67.	Went to [REDACTED]	Mother dead.
HIA 61	HIA 62 [REDACTED]		15-3-74	Her Sister [REDACTED]	HIA 63

