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HIA REF: 200

Witness Name: HIA 200

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 200

I, HIA 200, will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Belfast. I lived with my parents, RG 76 and older sister in [REDACTED]. I am the fifth child in the family. My father was [REDACTED] and my mother was a housewife. My home life was unsettled because of my father's [REDACTED] and my parents rowed frequently. In 1973 we moved to a housing estate in [REDACTED] just after I started secondary school. RG 76 and I began playing truant from school, breaking into shops and stealing. I was sent to Rathgael Training School on a Training School Order for playing truant from school for 1 to 3 years for the first time in July/August 1974 when I was [REDACTED].

Rathgael Training School (August 1974 to December 1975)

2. Initially, I was moved to Lisnevin assessment unit for 6 weeks. Lisnevin was fantastic and I have no complaints about my time there. However at the end of the assessment period, my prosecution for stealing had come up before the Courts and I was sent back again to Rathgael as the judge sentenced me to serve a sentence for theft which ran concurrently with the Training School Order for truancy. I remember my time in Rathgael as very frightening because it was a tough disciplined environment.
3. I experienced a lot of physical, emotional and verbal abuse at Rathgael both from the other boys and from staff members. Some members of staff at

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Rathgael were fine but there were a couple who treated me very badly. In particular, I remember **RG 13**. He was an older man who was in his sixties and he was **██████████**. **██████████** He was the housemaster in House **█** where I lived initially. He was quite violent and always shouting at us. I remember a particular incident one evening at about 7pm when we were getting ready for bed, he made everyone in the house run around the outside recreation area in our pyjamas as a punishment. Even though it was the summer months, it was absolutely freezing. I think it was a way which he had of asserting his authority but I found it humiliating.

4. I remember another incident one night when **RG 13** slapped me hard on the head and face. We had been to Bangor for an outing earlier that day, and as a group, we told, **RG 14** the staff member supervising us, that we were allowed to have some time to ourselves for an hour. This was untrue. **RG 13** found out and blamed me for lying to **RG 14**. Another member of staff who was called **RG 15** witnessed what was happening and tried to intervene. She started to scream at him and shouted at him to leave me alone. **RG 15** was quite young, **██████████** I remember her well because she was so friendly. He began shouting back at her and told her to mind her own business. She left Rathgael shortly afterwards and I suspected she was dismissed because he complained about her.
5. There was another member of staff called **RG 16**. He was **██████████** man who was **██████████** He was also a bully and I felt afraid of him. I remember one incident in August 1974 when he took us to Stickland's Glen in Bangor for a day at the seaside. We drove there by minibus and when we got there he made us all jump into the sea. **RG 76** **██████████** could swim but he was afraid of deep water. **RG 16** **██████████** knew this but he just threw him in the water anyway. I felt very threatened by him.
6. I was discharged from Rathgael in December 1975. I went back to live with my father and I attended **██████████** However, I continued to play truant from school and I was sent back to Rathgael as a day boy in May 1977. I hated school. I had a phobia about attending it. This was so bad that I

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even started playing truant from Rathgael School. I was returned to Rathgael on a full time basis for a short time in December 1977.

7. I was sent to House [REDACTED] this time and my housemother was [REDACTED] RG 72 who was a lovely lady. However, I was absolutely distraught at the thought of being in Rathgael again. When she told me to put my uniform on again, I refused. I remember standing in a small cloakroom where the laundry and clean clothes were kept and not wanting to put these clothes on because I had such negative associations with them. [REDACTED] RG 16 came rushing in and he hit me on my face and head and told me to get my uniform on. I was so upset by this I absconded and went home that day. He collected me from my father's house but because he knew he had treated me badly, he apologised.
8. I remember a lot of peer bullying at Rathgael. It was both verbal and physical and there was very little you could do about it. For example, I remember one boy's mother passed away. His father was [REDACTED] and the other boys teased him by saying that 'his father had [REDACTED]'. I felt especially vulnerable at night because you were locked in a room with 6-8 other boys. If one of them had it in for you, there was nothing you could do. I remember being punched by the other boys quite often. There was no-one I could complain to about it because no-one would listen to you. I feel I have an inferiority complex about myself as a man because of the bullying I experienced there. These feelings of inadequacy have stayed with me.
9. There was a member of staff called [REDACTED] RG 73. He was of average build, with [REDACTED]. He was very unpredictable in his behaviour. For example, I remember he caught me doing something wrong and he punched me in the stomach. I was so taken aback by the impact of the punch, that for a moment, I couldn't breathe. He thought I was exaggerating and he gave me another slap. He was a [REDACTED] and I looked to him for support when the other boys were bullying me. However, he always used to jump on the bandwagon and encourage the other boys to tease me.

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10. Most of the other boys were from Belfast and I remember getting teased a lot because I had a [REDACTED] accent. On one occasion, I remember walking into a classroom where he was the teacher and he said, "Hello, Sexy^{HIA 200} I am heterosexual, but this teasing had a homophobic element to it and the boys would then make comments about my sexuality which implied I was gay. All the other boys would laugh at this and this kind of teasing went on constantly. It was very hurtful and I felt humiliated by it.
11. There was another member of staff, **RG 17** who taught [REDACTED] He was in his [REDACTED] had [REDACTED] He had [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and was very strict. He was also a bully and he physically punished us using a slipper which he called [REDACTED] He would beat us for minor misdemeanours in front of the other boys. I remember being frightened of him and being beaten by him on occasion. Rathgael just tolerated this sort of behaviour and it was normalised to a degree.
12. I started smoking when I was 8. I was addicted to it from a very early age. When I was in Lisnevin, I was allowed 6 cigarettes a day, however this was absolutely forbidden at Rathgael. I desperately needed cigarettes, and I frequently got caught smoking. I was constantly going off to have a cigarette and then I had to lie about where I had been. The staff were always finding me out and punishing me because of this. My housemaster always mentioned this at house meetings in front of the other boys as an example of bad behaviour. They would call me names like "sleekit" "slimy" and "underhand". These names stuck with me and I am still sensitive about people perceiving me in this way.
13. The regime at Rathgael was quite strict. We got up at 7.30 or 8.00am, got washed and ready to go to school. We all had breakfast together and then went to the school. The school was separate from the building where we lived but we went back to our main houses for meals. Classes in Rathgael were streamed but the education provided was very basic and the standard was so low that I found it difficult to adjust when I went back to [REDACTED]

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in 1976. For example, at [REDACTED] there were technical drawing classes which I found impossible to keep up with as we were never taught this in Rathgael.

14. School finished about 3.30pm and we could do whatever we wanted before bed time. There was a snooker table, some miniature tennis courts where we played "patter tennis", and a swimming pool. The site itself was quite open but we were all locked in at night. There were opportunities to abscond but I only absconded once, following the incident where I was returned to Rathgael because I was frightened about getting caught and punished.
15. If any boy did run away, the police usually caught them quite quickly. The staff would isolate you for a time after you were returned and you were made to wear shorts instead of jeans. The boys who ran away were closely supervised by a housemaster for a while after they were caught.
16. My father came to visit me every weekend when I was in Rathgael. My parents had separated at this stage and my mother had moved to [REDACTED]. She visited less frequently as it was difficult for her to travel. I don't remember any external visitors coming to Rathgael for example, social workers or health/education welfare visitors. I was able to talk to certain members of staff, for example, the staff who were my housemasters about the things which bothered me while I was there, [REDACTED] RG 18 or [REDACTED] RG 19. They were both good men, but there was a sense that if you complained about bullying, they were all in cahoots with each other and nothing would really be done to change behaviours.
17. I remember Rathgael as an almost entirely negative experience. When I went there first although I was getting into trouble, it was not serious trouble and looking back, I can see that I was quite innocent. I was exposed to a lot of negative influences there and my own behaviour started to escalate into more serious drinking and crime. Things happened to me in Rathgael which made me feel very insecure about myself and have adversely affected my whole life. For example, I was never taught to value myself and I never had the confidence to push myself career wise. Consequently, because I missed

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out on so much of my education, I felt the only real job I could do was to work as a labourer [REDACTED]

Life After Care

18. I left Rathgael when I was [REDACTED] and never went back to full time education. After I left Rathgael, I began to drink heavily. I always felt a bit vulnerable in social situations and alcohol helped me deal with that. I had an alcohol problem from my late teens to when I was nearly 40. I feel that it stole decades of my life away. I worked as a labourer but I found it hard to commit to a job when I was drinking. I was also in and out of the criminal justice system for the best part of 16 years. When I look back at my behaviour now I feel shame and embarrassment because of some of the things I did.
19. In 1998, the police arrested me for driving without tax or insurance and possession of cannabis. Prior to my arrest, I had been on a serious drinking binge for about a year and a half. I wasn't eating properly and I had lost so much weight, I really thought I was going to die. This arrest proved to be a turning point in my life. I began the withdrawal process in prison and I felt that God had given me this opportunity as one last chance. I have changed since those days and now I am a born again Christian.
20. I do some voluntary work now with my Church and it is a great comfort to me. Since I became a born again Christian, I have told my experiences to members of my congregation quite frequently. When I think about giving that testimony, I also think about how my experiences in Rathgael affected me. I would like the opportunity to contact some of the people who abused me back then in order to let them know how those experiences hurt me. However, I found out some years ago, that some of them, for example, [REDACTED] **RG 16** are dead. It would have been nice to receive an apology directly from them.

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21. I would like to meet some of the other boys I was in Rathgael with to see how they have dealt with their experiences in care. It would be lovely to be able to talk with other people who went through the same things I did. I do reflect a lot on my time in Rathgael and I am glad of the opportunity to try to find a resolution to my experiences there.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed HIA 200

Dated 15/4/15.

HIA 200

[REDACTED]

1/1

N^o 24

60 MK

36

6 70

2pm Summoned to [REDACTED] office where I was informed that as HIA 200 was in breach of the contract drawn up between himself and the school, that he was being boarded in the school until his discharge next Friday. HIA 200 understandably upset at the decision but was adamant he wouldn't stay.

2.20pm Taken to unit where he refused to don school attire - [REDACTED] informed and came and spoke to HIA 200 who agreed to put on school clothes. [REDACTED] escorted HIA 200 to school.

3.50pm HIA 200 absconded from school prior to coming to unit for the evening.

5.05pm HIA 200 returned to unit by [REDACTED]. Apparently HIA 200 returned of his own accord. [REDACTED] to speak to HIA 200 after tea.

6.15pm Had discussion with HIA 200 who has calmed down considerably and was able to see that the easiest solution to his problem will be to stay the week and be discharged to employment as soon as possible. HIA 200 seems to think he can spend the week in sick bay, a request which will I'm sure not be granted.

9.05 As expected HIA 200 wishes to sleep in Sick bay were not granted and he has been placed in the 6 bed dorm.

12-3-78

Went to Weatherder's factory for a test for employment - unfortunately failed.

23-3-78

John called for HIA 200 who was discharged.

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19.

Date		M.
7/5/75	Visited by [redacted]	
8/5/75	First thing in the morning I asked HIA 200 if he had been given any cigarettes by his father. He said no. I found 7 cigarettes in his trouser pockets, wrapped in an envelope addressed to his father.	
27/5/75	Smuggled back cigarettes from leave. The cigarettes were subsequently stolen by [redacted] and [redacted]	
2/6/75	HOUSE MEETING: 1/2. 20 Needs considerable social pressure to stimulate a more acceptable pattern of behaviour.	20 I
9/6/75	Reported by [redacted] for being cheeky to [redacted]	
15/6/75	During visits HIA 200 went down to the Adventure Playground with his sister who provided him with cigarettes. On return to the unit [redacted] asked him if he had any cigarettes. He replied emphatically No! When threatened with a search he handed over 6 N96.	
16/6/75	Review board: Recommended RETAIN - Agreed.	
26-8-75	Transferred to Pre-release	
1-9-75	Very careless about his job in the sawery.	
4-9-75	Visited by [redacted]	
7-9-75	Smoking Report.	
15-9-75	Review Board - Retained for a further period of training.	
3-10-75	Housemeetings: - Very lazy and slow, takes the brotherly love bit too far, in trying to protect his brother.	
28-10-75	Housemeetings: - Not making any effort at all, needs considerable pressure put on him.	
6-10-75	HIA 200 week-end leave stopped - cheeky attitude to [redacted]	
2-12-75	Housemeetings: - Average month for HIA 200 the week after the above offence, he settled down quite a bit, and tried very hard, but as the month progressed he gradually slipped back to his old ways.	
8-12-75.	Review Board - [redacted] leaves at Christmas to start school in the new term.	