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HIA REF: 296

Witness Name: HIA 296

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 296

I, HIA 296 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Magherafelt. I am the second youngest in a family of eight children. My brothers and sisters are called [REDACTED] HIA 309 [REDACTED] HIA 279 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I lived with my parents and seven brothers and sisters in [REDACTED] until my mother died in childbirth when I was two years old. The baby also died. My father was unable to care for us and we were placed with extended family except for my eldest brother [REDACTED] who was already working by then. He stayed with my father.
2. After a year my four sisters and us three boys were placed in Nazareth House and Nazareth Lodge in 1949. I stayed in Nazareth Lodge until 1956 when I was shipped to Australia with my brothers HIA 279 and HIA 309 on the SS Strathnaver on 24th December 1956.
3. I had no contact with my father until years later when I traced him and spoke with him on the phone. He was deaf and it was very difficult to communicate with him. He did say to me 'I never wanted you all to go.' It was very upsetting to hear this. He died before I was able to return to Northern Ireland.

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Nazareth Lodge, Belfast (24/11/1949 – 21/12/1956)

4. I was placed in Nazareth Lodge on 24th November 1949 along with my brothers HIA 279 and HIA 309. I was three years old at the time. HIA 279 is two years older than me and HIA 309 is two years younger than me. I never knew I had brothers in Nazareth Lodge. I only found out I had brothers when we were sharing a cabin on the ship to Australia. I have seen photographs of us as children and in one photograph I am standing next to HIA 309 in the Lodge and at the time I didn't know he was my brother.
5. I was physically and sexually abused whilst in Nazareth Lodge. I was about five or six years old when the sexual abused started. I was sexually abused by older boys, in particular, by an older boy named NL 71. I think he was in SR 71 SR 71 Group. In the dormitory he would call me over and make me take off my pants and lie on the floor under the bed. He would then make three of us smaller boys do that at the same time and he would kneel next to the bed with his pants down and make all three of us fondle his erect penis until he was finished. He would also touch our private parts and make us roll over and he did dirty things to us.
6. Sometimes one of the nuns would come into the dormitory whilst NL 71 was abusing me. He would keep on abusing me even though she was in the room because she couldn't see us as we were under the bed. If she did see him it probably looked like he was just cleaning up or something. I was abused by NL 71 NL 71 until I left for Australia. It went on for years.
7. There were four or five older boys who also abused us smaller boys in Nazareth Lodge. However I cannot remember their names. It was almost like it was a gang, what they did to us. I lived in absolute dread of these boys. I was abused about two or three times a week until I left when I was ten years old. The abuse became almost normal but no less upsetting. I never resisted – we were trained for absolute obedience and you did what you were told.

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8. The abuse would happen during the day and night. At night **NL 71** or one of the other older boys would come and shake me in the night and say 'toilets!'. The toilets were dark and dreary and always a scary place. I would get up and go into the toilets where there would usually be three or four older boys waiting and often a couple of younger boys standing there. The older boys would make us masturbate them in a group and they tried to arouse us as well but we were young and frightened. This was a terrible ordeal that lasted about half an hour at a time. I do not remember the older boys trying to penetrate me or making us perform oral sex. However I cannot rule out that they didn't do this because I have tried to put this out of my mind all my life and have only allowed myself to think about it since the abuse inquiries in the last few years. I have never told my wife or family any of this.
9. In Nazareth Lodge I was sexually abused by **SR 71** from the age of about seven or eight until two days before I sailed to Australia. **SR 71** would take me into a room so we were on our own. I would stand next to her while she sat and read to me from a book which I think was the Bible. She always told me I was special. She said things like 'you are my favourite **HIA 296** We didn't wear any underpants in those days and while I stood next to her she would slip her hand up my shorts and play with my genitals.
10. **SR 71** cell was next to my bed. She would sometimes come in and slip her hand into my crotch to 'check if I was wet' but would fondle me again as she did when reading to me.
11. The last time **SR 71** abused me was just before I sailed to Australia. She again played with my genitals and I got an erection. As she fondled my penis she said 'you'll make some girl very happy one day'. I don't remember feeling distressed, it was just what she did and she made it seem like it was affection. I wrote to **SR 71** afterwards for years and I cannot believe how long it took for the penny to drop that she was in reality a child abuser.
12. I was also physically abused by the nuns in Nazareth Lodge. This sick form of physical abuse I think had sexual overtones. The nuns would make us line up

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on the balcony and we would all be naked. The older boys would herd us naked along the balcony into a room where [REDACTED] SR 71 or [REDACTED] SR 152 would beat us across the buttocks with a leather strap and sometimes a cane. This happened a lot. Sometimes it happened because nobody owned up to some misdemeanour or someone failed underpants inspection.

13. The older boys would often deliberately push us naked into boys standing in front of us and jeer at us in a sexual way. It was terrifying. Sometimes the gang of boys that sexually abused me would pull me out of the line in a protective way. I knew I owed them another session in the toilets to pay my debt to them.
14. I was tortured by the nuns over bed wetting or soiling my pants. Another nun whose name I can't remember would scream and flog us if we wet the bed. She would drag the sheet off the bed and make me stand naked lined up with the urine soaked sheets over our heads. We had to stand there a while and then we would get belted again. I was terrified of wetting the bed which probably made me wet the bed even more.
15. If I soiled my trousers the other younger boys and I would have to stand naked in the toilets while the nuns hosed us down and we had to push the excrement down the drain with our toes. Then I was put in a horrible smelling bath that was a milky colour. It stung my body.
16. I was regularly caned by the male teacher at the school in Nazareth Lodge. I cannot recall his name. One day I screamed so loud one of the nuns came in. There was violence everywhere – from the older boys, the nuns and the teachers.
17. Apparently my sisters who were in Nazareth House came to visit me once a month in the Lodge. I never knew they were my sisters and their 'visits' consisted of walking down to the Lodge and passing me bread and jam through the fence.
18. I do not know how I was selected to go to Australia or what I was told. I don't remember having any medical checks or officials speaking to me either in

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Northern Ireland or in Australia. I don't recall saying goodbye to my sisters in Nazareth House but then I didn't know who they were anyway.

19. I left for Australia on 24th December 1956 on the SS Strathnaver. There were fourteen of us from Nazareth Lodge that was sent including my two brothers **HIA 279** and **HIA 309**. This was when I found out I had brothers. On the ship we were supervised by two older civilian women.
20. I believe I was sexually abused by two officers on the ship who wore full white uniforms. Over three days they kept taking me into a cabin. One would take me in and the other was waiting in the cabin. When inside the cabin they told me to lie on the bed. I don't remember any more detail except I think that they gave me money. I wonder if I was drugged because I don't remember the details but I have always felt very bad about it.

Castledare (22/01/1957 – 14/02/1958)

21. When I arrived in Australia on 22nd January 1957. I was sent to Castledare Boy's Home because of my age. **HIA 279** and **HIA 309** were sent to different institutions. We were never able to protect one another. It was a very lonely childhood and I have never felt any real connection to them. I have no recall of trauma or abuse in Castledare.

Tardun Agricultural School (14/02/1958)

22. After Castledare I was sent to Tardun when I was nearly twelve years old. My life there was a living hell. I was already deeply traumatised by the abuse I suffered in Nazareth Lodge. I was physically and sexually abused in Tardun. It was a harsh environment of fear and deprivation.
23. I felt anxious from the moment I arrived. When the bus pulled up at Tardun all the older boys were leaning over the balcony looking at us and I knew what they were thinking. The sexual abuse began on my first day by boys who were three to four years older and who were much bigger and stronger. **AU 59**

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followed me around like a dog on heat. **AU 60** and **AU 61** were the same. They would get me in a dark place and I couldn't get away without a belting unless I gave into them sexually. Eventually they would simply gesture at me from a distance and I would go wherever I was told and give them what they wanted.

24. The worst abuser was a boy called **AU 62**. He was around five years older than me and he worked full time **[REDACTED]**. He was often violent. I learned to co-operate very quickly. He abused me in the kitchen, vegetable room, corridors, dormitory, sheds – basically anywhere at any time. The assaults were dirty, degrading, terrible things.
25. I was also abused by the Christian Brothers. It was Christmas and I sneaked into the Brothers' dining room to pinch some of their Christmas cake. **BAU 38** **BAU 38** came in quietly behind and asked me what I was doing. I expected a beating so I begged forgiveness. **BAU 38** locked the door and said 'I've heard a lot about you **HIA 296** and I know what you like'. He then exposed his erect penis and told me to touch it. I started screaming and **BAU 34** began banging on the door allowing me to escape.
26. I suffered serious physical assaults whilst in Tardun. When I was about twelve we were travelling on a bus to Perth to sing. The boys in the back of the bus were all fiddling with each other. When we stopped for a break they went into the bushes and continued to do it. The next day when we got back to Tardun **BAU 34** accused me of being the ringleader on the bus. I denied it and he got angry. He said he would teach me a lesson. He started flogging me with his leather belt all over my body. He hit me so hard that I wet myself and began screaming. He chased me around the room and he kept swinging at me. His belt flew out of his hand so he ripped off one of the planks that still had nails in it and started flogging me with that. I managed to escape and I ran away and hid for hours outside. I was covered in cuts, bruises and welts. I was terrified. I thought he was going to kill me.

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27. The threat of serious physical assault was ever present. [BAU 36] and [BAU 37] were particularly violent. Often the violence followed obsessive questioning about 'which boy was fiddling with whom'.

Life after care

28. In 1995 I met my family in Northern Ireland for the first time. I don't remember how my sister [REDACTED] got in touch with me originally but before I left Tardun I was writing to her. I could not return home to Ireland earlier than 1995 because of the high cost of international travel. I was reunited with my sisters [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. She now lives in a [REDACTED] in Belfast and we are in regular contact. My other sisters have sadly passed away. I have been home to Ireland five times and I am returning again in August. I have been able to return with the assistance of the Child Migrant Trust which administers the Family Restoration Fund which was set up following the apology by the British Government. I received the highest tier payment of \$45,000 under the WA Redress Scheme in 2010.

29. I would sum up my life in Nazareth Lodge as hell. I lost my family and identity. I was constantly beaten and sexually abused. The nuns were brutal. I lived a life of terror – terror if I wet the bed or soiled my pants, terror at night that the older boys would come for me. It makes the sexual abuse by [SR 71] which was masked as 'affection' all the more sinister. I believe [SR 71] died when she was [REDACTED] in the 1990's.

30. I have been profoundly affected by my traumatic childhood. Institutional care has had a devastating effect on my family life. I have never spoken to my wife or two daughters about what happened to me. I have only spoken to the Child Migrants Trust.

31. I only received a copy of my birth certificate [REDACTED] when I was twenty years old. I educated myself as an adult after I had a poor education as a

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child. I have always worked. I was employed at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. I medically retired a few years ago after suffering [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. I suffer from lifelong entrenched fear and shame because of my
lost childhood. I didn't make any lifelong friends with the exception of HIA 285
HIA 285 I possess a very deep seated resentment of what happened to me in
Nazareth Lodge and Tardun and I have lived with that resentment all my life and
will continue to do so for years to come.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 296

Dated

3/6/2014