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HIA REF: 266

Witness Name: HIA 266

## THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

## WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 266

I, HIA 266 will say as follows:-

**Personal details**

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] England.
2. My mother was called [REDACTED]. She was not married when I was born. My surname was spelt [REDACTED] as a child. I never knew my mother and I don't know if I had any brothers or sisters.
3. I was placed in St Joseph's Children's home, Termonbacca on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1944 when I was four years old. I don't know how I moved from [REDACTED] to Termonbacca.

**St Joseph's Children's Home, Termonbacca (14/9/1944 – 6/5/1953)**

4. Whilst I was in Termonbacca I suffered constant physical abuse from the nuns. I endured physical pain, social and psychological harm and neglect whilst in the nuns' care. I do not recall any of the nun's names in Termonbacca. I do recall saying 'yes Sister' and 'no Sister'. Beatings by the nuns were the norm and almost daily. The nuns carried out the beatings with a bamboo cane in order to inflict the most pain.

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5. The nuns had many rules in the home and any infringement or defiance of those rules earned the boys involved a very harsh and severe thrashing. The nuns enforced their authority by inflicting pain. Life in the home was controlled by beatings.
6. We were required to keep our eyes looking down towards the ground when speaking to a nun. A boy was being defiant and challenging the nuns' authority if he did not observe this rule. If this rule wasn't observed it resulted in an instant harsh punishment being inflicted.
7. Every nun carried a cane in her belt and she was always ready to use it at every opportunity. To exact the most fear and terror the nuns administered beatings to the bare buttocks in front of all children who were around and made us listen to the victims crying and screaming with pain. It was their way of warning us not to misbehave or the same thing would happen to us. When we tried to shield our backsides from the blows the nuns beat our backs, legs and knuckles instead. It took me a long time to be able to hold eye contact with people. I believe not being able to maintain eye contact held me back on promotion in jobs.
8. We never knew when the nuns were behind us. We would be laughing together one minute and then suddenly we would be whacked across the back with a cane with a nun saying 'you are not allowed to do that here'. It was frightening as we never knew where they came from – they just appeared all of a sudden like ghosts. Sometimes I heard the swish of the sleeve of their habit and the next thing I felt was a thump. I spent most of my time in Termonbacca living in fear of being beaten.
9. In Termonbacca we were forced to engage in hard and strenuous manual labour from the age of about six years old onwards. Tasks we had to complete included cleaning and scrubbing the floors in the chapel, dining rooms, study halls, kitchen, laundry and passageways. We were made to line up on our hands and knees and scrub. The buckets of hot soppy water were very heavy and our knees were often sore and bled and then scabbed. When we had

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finished scrubbing to the nuns' satisfaction we had to start again waxing and polishing the floors. Again we had to do this in a line and on our hands and knees. These were daily duties. Toilets and bathrooms were inspected by the nuns after cleaning. If any excrement was found in the toilet bowls after they had been scrubbed the whole team doing the cleaning was punished. We never received a word of praise, nor were we ever given or offered encouragement even when our work was well done. The words 'bad', 'disgusting', 'dirty' and 'evil' boys were the only way the nuns described us.

10. I also had to work in the Laundry. I had to stand in a bath full of sheets and curtains along with about six other boys to wash the laundry. Then we had to put the items through a wringer and turn the heavy handle to wring them out.
11. We slept in a big dormitory which had rows of beds. Even when we were in bed sleeping the nuns never left us alone. As children we used to sleep with our hands between our legs to keep warm. The nuns came in and pulled the blankets back and accused us of playing with ourselves and hit us across the knuckles which was very painful. The nuns made us sleep with our arms crossed over our chests. In the middle of the night if your arms moved out of this position a nun came and hit you with her cane. They used to say things like 'you are a bad boy' and 'you are going to hell'. I do not remember any of the nun's names but I can still picture them in my mind.
12. We attended school in Nazareth House, Bishop Street. This was where the girl's home was and it was also run by the Sisters of Nazareth. Every day we witnessed the humiliating and degrading treatment which the girls had to endure. The girls were beaten, insulted and made to wear their soiled underwear on their heads whilst standing in the corner of the classroom. They were usually shivering and cowering from fear. They were made to walk between classrooms still wearing their underwear on their heads and they were subjected to insulting and jeering taunts from boys, girls and the nuns. The girls' treatment was particularly distressing, frightening and traumatising to the victims and the rest of us children who had to watch. We couldn't say anything because we would have been beaten by the nuns. I felt guilty for not saying anything and I felt sorry for



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the girls. They were children who looked totally dejected. My feelings of guilt and low self esteem started at this time.

13. We weren't given any fruit to eat in the home. However the nuns ate oranges and apples and when we cleaned up after they had eaten I would eat the orange peel and apple core and skin. They tasted beautiful to me. I still eat orange peel today rather than the orange. I also ate the egg shells that the nuns had left on their plates. I was hungry the whole time in Termonbacca. We didn't get enough food. My favourite food was bread and dripping. The older boys were in charge of giving out the food in the dining room and they would take the biggest and best bits of bread and the rest of the boys were left to fight over the leftovers. We were lucky if we got a slice of bread. When we walked to school we walked past fields with turnips and I was so hungry I would eat them.
14. The older boys in the home were in charge of the younger ones and they used to beat us. The nuns let them abuse us because they were doing their job of supervising us. However I did see the nuns hit the older boys with a cane too. No one escaped the abuse.
15. Religion was a big part of life in the home. We went to mass almost every day and I was an altar boy so I was always in the chapel. We also had to say the rosary every night.
16. I never had any visitors in Termonbacca. One day a woman came and met me when I was walking from school. She asked me to sit down with her and she gave me lollies. She was lovely. I didn't know who she was but she was very friendly. She may have been my mother, I don't know. I was looking forward to running into her again but I never got the chance as I was shipped off to Australia.
17. I was taken along with five other boys and told by the nuns that I was going to Australia. I was never asked if I wanted to go. When the nuns told me that I was being sent away to Australia I felt shocked and horrified. I said I didn't want to go. I didn't want to go to a place where convicts had been shipped over the

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years. That was my impression of Australia back then. My life at Termonbacca had been a living hell but I did not want to leave. I was very afraid of being moved so very far away from all my friends and everything I had ever known. The nuns told me a lot of nonsense about Australia – that there was always sunshine, that children rode to school on horseback and that lots of fresh fruit could be picked straight from the apple and orange trees. I was given no choice in the matter.

18. The preparation for going to Australia was one of the worst times of my life. They took us to a dentist and I was held down in the chair by one of the nurses and a dentist forced my mouth open and drilled my teeth and inserted fillings. I was screaming and he told me to shut up. That was the first time I was ever at the dentist and it was a terrible experience. A week or so later I woke up in hospital. They told me I had my tonsils removed. The nuns in Termonbacca told me that where I was going there were no medical facilities and so they had to do the procedure before I left so I wouldn't have any problems when I was out there.
19. I think about five boys from Termonbacca were taken with me to Australia. We were taken on a ferry to England and accompanied by nuns from the home. When we reached London I tried to run away at the train station but I they caught me and dragged me back. We were then taken down to the port in Southampton. I was shipped to Australia against my will on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1953. On the ship a man supervised the boys and a woman supervised the girls. I do not know who they were. The passage was great. We played games with each other and there were very few restrictions. We could go wherever we wanted on the ship. There was plenty of food. There was food everywhere. It was the most food I ever saw in my life. When we walked on deck men were handing out ice creams in small cups about three times a day. I used to fill my shirt full of buns.
20. When I arrived at Fremantle we were met by Arthur Calwell who was the deputy Labour leader in Fremantle. We had our photographs taken. We were put in nice clothes for the photos and then had to change into shorts and a re-stitched shirt.

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Bindoon (June 1953 - 1956)

21. We were taken to Clontarf Boys Town for one night. It was run by the Christian Brothers. I was then taken from Clontarf on an old bus belonging to the Brothers to Bindoon. I was there from when I was thirteen to sixteen years old. There were over one hundred boys at Bindoon from Ireland, Scotland, England, Malta and Australia. The conditions at Bindoon were much worse than Termonbacca. Bindoon was hell. The Brothers used to punch us with their fists. I was hungry all the time. Sometimes the Brothers would make us bring back a dead sheep from the paddock and then they boiled it for us to eat. We would have to pick the maggots out of it before we ate it. Then we started to eat the maggots as they tasted better than the meat.
22. We were made to work in Bindoon and education was non-existent. We worked on the farm and pulled out trees on the land. **BAU 1** the Head Brother, made us work on the construction of a new building which looked like the Taj Mahal. We had to do all the work such as mixing concrete in our bare feet. I regularly had lime burns on my feet because I had no protection from the cement. When we worked in the fields chasing cattle or driving tractors we wore a thin shirt and I got sunburnt constantly on my face and arms. In the winter it was even worse – it was freezing. The Brothers gave us an old bag to wear over our heads to keep the rain off while the rest of our body got soaked. In Bindoon we were given cold showers and told that that would make a man of us. I did complain as did other boys, but we just got a beating for doing so. The Brothers said we were telling lies and we got punched in the face and kicked on the backside with their big heavy boots. We also got beaten across the shoulders with a cane. There was a lot of violence in Bindoon from the Brothers and older boys and I was sexually abused by **BAU 3** during my time there.
23. I do not recall ever seeing any inspectors or representatives from Northern Ireland or the British Government. I don't recall ever seeing any inspectors from the Australian Welfare Authority.



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24. I left Bindoon in 1956 when I was sixteen. The Brothers got me a job as an apprentice in a printing firm in Perth. I completed my five year apprenticeship there. During this time I stayed in [REDACTED] in Perth which was named after [REDACTED] BAU 1

Life after care

25. When I completed my apprenticeship I got a job in another printing firm when I was twenty years old. I joined the Air Force in 1963 and I stayed there for twenty five years. During that time I met my wife [REDACTED]. We had three children – [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Unfortunately [REDACTED] passed way in a car accident when he was twenty eight. I left the Air Force in 1988 and worked in security at [REDACTED]
26. I found family life difficult at times. My wife has had to intervene sometimes and keep me under control as I was a strict disciplinarian with my children. I suppose discipline is all I have ever known in my life. I found it hard to have relationships with my family. I couldn't get close to people, even my own family. However I have mellowed since our grandchildren were born. I have never trusted anyone in authority because of my experiences in institutions. I have always found it difficult to look people in the eye because in Termonbacca that was deemed arrogant. As a result I lack confidence in myself.
27. I have suffered from bouts of depression over the years. I have been to psychiatrists and counselling and I found that this helped more than anti depressants which I was prescribed. I am no longer on any medication for depression.
28. I gave evidence about my time in Bindoon to the Australian Commission about five years ago. I received \$40,000 AUD in compensation. It was initially supposed to be about \$80,000 AUD but there was a change of government at the time and the new government reduced the level of compensation. This upset many people who had lived in institutions in Australia.

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29. I had always hoped that someday I would be released from the nuns at Termonbacca to go to live with my mother. Every woman I saw I thought to myself that she could be my mother. Once I was taken to Australia I realised getting back with my mother would not be easy. Many years later I found out that my mother had died of cancer in hospital in England in December 1965. She is buried in England. I always hold it against the nuns for sending me to Australia and ruining any chance I ever had of getting to see my mother and getting to know her.
30. I will never understand how the nuns could have been so cruel and sadistic to the young children who had been placed in their care. They just didn't stop at hitting once. They kept hitting us repeatedly as if they were out of control.
31. I didn't get a birth certificate as a child. I managed to get my certificate years later.
32. I visited England and Ireland last year. I found an unmarked grave and was told that it was where my mother was buried. I went back to Derry and visited Termonbacca and Nazareth House in Bishop Street and spoke to the nuns there. I was happy that I went back as it put a lot of ghosts to rest.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

**HIA 266**

Dated

22<sup>nd</sup> OCTOBER 2013.