

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 273

Witness Name: HIA 273

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 273

I, HIA 273 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Co. Louth in the Republic of Ireland. My father had lived in Belfast but wandered around different parts of Ireland mainly Derry, Omagh and Dublin. He met my Mother and they married in a Catholic Church in Dublin.
2. I was the oldest child. I had two younger brothers and a younger sister. We lived close to [REDACTED] in County Louth but moved around a bit.
3. When I was around five years old I remember being at home alone with my Mother. We lived in [REDACTED] in the Republic of Ireland. I didn't know where my brothers and sisters were at the time. My mother had gone off somewhere, perhaps down to the cowshed, and I put a log on the fire and the log rolled off and caused a fire in the house. It was an accident but I always blamed myself that it might have been part of the reason why my brothers and sisters and I were placed in care. Following this incident there was a knock at the door and there was a man in uniform with a woman in a funny black outfit. One of them grabbed me by the arm. My Mother tried to pull me away from them. Eventually they won and I was put in a black car and driven away. I was taken

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to a place with a high wall with broken glass at the top and barbed wire fences. This was the start of my separation from my family.

Nazareth House, Belfast (November 1942- August 1947)

4. I didn't know at the time but my sister **AU 63** who was eighteen months old at the time was already in the babies section of Nazareth House and my brothers were in Nazareth Lodge. I never saw my brothers again even though the homes were only one street apart. I never saw my sister again in Ireland. I found it really hard because I loved my two little brothers. My sister was a sick child with callipers on her legs and my Mother had to spend a lot of time looking after her. It had been my job to look after my two little brothers, **AU 67** and **AU 68**
5. Life was immediately hard because I didn't speak English, only Irish. I was laughed at and pushed around and made a joke of because of this. Before I went into Nazareth House I was an extrovert. I attended Feis' and Celtic dances with my father but because of my treatment I became introverted. I used to sit in the corner with my knees under my chin and my arms folded across my shoulders and there I would sit for days on end.
6. Then a little nun called **SR 71** took me under her wing. She taught me how to walk on stilts and tried to keep me out of harm's way. She was very nice but she couldn't be there for me twenty four hours a day.
7. Life was very difficult in that place. I wouldn't say the nuns were cruel in any shape or form because you never saw them, they spent most of their time looking after the old people who lived there. The big girls looked after us. They bullied us and they were the ones who did the damage. Of course the nuns must have trained them and I would say the girls were doing as they were told.
8. We didn't eat very well but nobody ate well then. It was the war years and everybody was hungry not just us so you can't put the hunger down to the Institution, it wouldn't be fair to say that. The public would sometimes come in

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with donations of food during the war. We lived on potato and leek soup and I loved it but it wasn't nutritious enough to live on every day. The public would come in at Christmas time and would give us fruit and things like that. To me that was kind.

9. Every morning we got up to pray. There was a Church there and you went down the stairs from the dormitory. There was a morning Mass said by Fr. Flynn. After Mass we went for breakfast which was usually a piece of bread and dripping. Then we went to school. That's when we saw the nuns. They were good teachers and I was a good learner, I was of a pretty good educational standard when I left. At that time I was in a state of mind where I could still learn.
10. At lunch time it might be potato and leek soup or a plate of mashed potato. Again, this was because it was war time. At teatime we had a piece of bread or some porridge. Sometimes we would get extra vegetables if they were available or whatever the public had donated. Before bed we got a type of chocolate drink. That was an average day.
11. Sometimes we would go out of the home and ride on trams in Belfast. I liked it when we rode the trams. We were allowed to see the Christmas decorations and a big nativity, which was lovely. Sometimes people would give you pennies. I took the pennies back and gave them to the nuns.
12. When we went back behind that Home door the good times went and the bad times started again. But there were joyous times as well as very bad times.
13. Saturday was a work day and we had to work in the dormitories polishing the floors, those days were different to week days. Sundays were different too. Sunday was Mass day. We used to go into the apple orchard and say the Rosary. It was a crab apple orchard, only tiny little apples. I used to steal them. The girls used to put me out the window because I was the smallest there and they would get me back up the fire escape and get me back through window into the dormitory. After saying the Rosary we would go to Mass and then the public used to come in. Sometimes they would bring in dry, hard cake. Sometimes they brought little tubs of ice-cream.

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14. We spent the first Sunday of the month praying on our knees in the Catholic Church for most of the day. That was more or less what life was like.
15. During the war we never left the premises much. 1946 changed everything. The war had ended and on a Sunday we were allowed to go down to the park. What I didn't know at the time, but I know now, was that my brothers were on the other side of the park but we never mixed, we weren't allowed to see each other.
16. All the girls had a primrose coloured dress. They were pretty but we all looked the same, there was no individuality whatsoever but I suppose we were lucky to have one pretty dress being young girls.
17. In 1946, just after my birthday, I was told I was leaving. I was so happy at the thought of going home.
18. On 28 August 1947 at 10.30am my [REDACTED] my father's sister, came to visit me. She had brought my two cousins, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], also to see me. My younger sister **AU 63** was there and I was told by a nun that she was my sister. I did not recognise her as she was no longer a baby. We sat in a room together talking. A nun then came into the room and said 'Time to go'. I grabbed **AU 63** hand thinking that I was going home and that I needed to go the other way out of the building with my family but they walked out the front door and I was put with the other girls that were being sent to Australia. That was very sad, I thought I was going home.
19. In 1947 we were dragged here and there, going down to Belfast hospital to get medical checkups, all the needles and jabs in our arms. My medical examination form is dated 15 July 1947 but my child migration form is dated 1 December 1946. It is my understanding that no papers were to be signed authorising child migration from Northern Ireland to Australia prior to 1 January 1947 so I think my child migration form was illegally signed.

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Sailing (28th August 1947 – 22nd September 1947)

20. On 28th August 1947 at 3 o'clock in the afternoon we boarded a boat to go to England. It was cold that night and we were on the top deck of the boat and they took our coats off us even though we were cold. I don't know why. The coats were in a pile next to a nun who I later found out was called SAU 12. We had nothing to eat or drink on the boat. We got off the boat in Liverpool and got on a train that seemed to take hours. We got off the train in a place called Hammersmith. We still hadn't eaten or had anything to drink. We went into this building, called Nazareth House. We slept in a big room on canvas or hessian beds. They gave us nighties, a piece of cake and a glass of milk and we went to bed very late.
21. When we got up we got sandwiches and milk. Then a lot of kids got on a bus. I think there were kids from Derry as well as Belfast. We must have gone to the docks in Southampton. We were all ushered on board by name, taken to our cabins and locked in. This was probably for our own protection as we could have run riot, we were only children. We were given tea in our cabins.
22. The trip wasn't too bad but I was pretty upset as a child when I woke every morning and I realised I was out in the middle of an ocean. I thought I was going home. This went on for weeks. We went to school and sometimes did drills.
23. I had no idea at any stage prior to the sailing date that I was being sent to Australia. No-one had ever asked me if I wanted to go there or told me prior to my departure that it was their intention to send me there.
24. I didn't see my brothers but I was left in charge of my sister AU 63. People were really nice to me on the boat. They gave us breakfast, lunch, tea and sometimes supper as well. We had sports day on the deck and we were allowed to win as I was not very good at sports.
25. Then on 21st September 1947 we were all called up in the evening onto the deck and we were told whoever spotted land first was going to get a pound. One of the boys got it, as usual. That evening we packed our cases and left them open

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on the bed. SAU 12 took an envelope that had been taped to the inside of our cases. They took an envelope off every one of us. I found out later from the Catholic Child Welfare Department that these envelopes contained our birth certificates and baptismal certificates.

26. We got off the boat to a great fanfare. Archbishop Prendiville and Senator Tagney were there to welcome us. We were told we were there to fill the "empty cradles of Australia". We went into a big shed and we were fingerprinted, given a bunch of oranges, three oranges on a stick.

27. We were then taken to Fremantle Town Hall. The girls went on a green bus. We had a big dinner but I wouldn't let AU 63 eat it because I hadn't seen that type of food before. I let her eat the apple pie because I was familiar with it.

St Joseph's Girls Orphanage, Station Street, Subiaco (22/9/1947 – 5 August 1954)

28. We then got on a bus and we were taken to the Black Hole of Calcutta. The correct name is St Joseph's Girl's Orphanage. It was run by those horrible creatures the Sisters of Mercy.

29. When we got off the bus I went to grab AU 63 my sister. I got boxed across the ears by SAU 13 and AU 63 was sent the other way. We were separated. I never saw AU 63 again while I was at the orphanage.

30. I was taken to a big room with other children. My clothes were taken and I was given a number - Number 127. From then on 127 became my name and that's how I was known.

31. In the first few months the Australian girls were very cruel, poking fun at us and trying to smash us up on the American swing which was a pole in the middle with swing seats all around it and the Australian girls would push us in towards the pole.

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32. After about six months a nun told one of the girls one day who was crying and homesick that she would never be returning home and that none of us would ever be returning to our homeland. Prior to that we had all thought that we would be going home at some stage.
33. I was sent to St Vincent's Foundling Home to look after the babies. The babies there were between three and five years old. My job was to polish the huge verandas on my hands and knees. They had to shine like mirrors or you would pay for it. I was 10 years old.
34. When I was 11 my Aunt [REDACTED] boys came to visit, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was my mother's sister. I had a marvellous week. I went out with them everywhere and they gave me my father's contact address. After they left life went back to the usual routine.
35. When I was 12 I asked if I could write to my Father. I was told by the Mother Superior, SAU 4 that my Father was dead, he didn't want me and had abandoned me. I called her a liar and I got a hell of a flogging for that and then was told to get my pillow and blanket and I was moved to look after the younger babies at St Margaret's which was the mother and baby section of the home. The babies there were new borns up to eighteen months. I worked with one old eighty one year old nun, SAU 14 She was lovely but too old for the job. There was just me and her looking after 36 babies. I was very isolated. That is when the real isolation started.
36. Between the ages of twelve and fifteen I served night duty in the nursery. I had to feed the babies, give them their bottles. There were too many babies for me to feed on my own so I used to roll up a nappy, balance the bottle on the nappy and stick the bottle in the babies' mouths. Some of the babies were only a few hours old waiting to go out for adoption.
37. One night one of the babies died whilst I was on duty. I don't know the cause of death and no-one ever blamed me for it but to this day I have blamed myself for this death. The Police investigated and there was an inquest. SAU 4 got into trouble because there was such a young child in charge of night duty.

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This didn't make any difference to SAU 4 and she continued to reign supreme.

38. After that they sent me to Rockingham for a weekend for a holiday. Then one of the nuns died and I had to come back for her Requiem Mass and it was unfortunate that my holiday came to an end as it was the only time I was ever allowed to leave that hole.

39. During my time in the home there were a lot of public floggings. The nuns used canes that had been soaked in water to beat the girls. Girls could be flogged for talking to boys or getting our period. This meant girls were dirty, marriageable women and they got a flogging for it. These floggings were often out of control not stopping until the nun in question had drawn blood from the girl being punished.

40. I rebelled against this treatment at times. On one occasion I refused to tell tales on another girl so I was put in solitary confinement for seven days and then sent to see a Psychiatrist, Miss Watts. I was not a nutcase, I was a traumatised child because of what had happened to me in Ireland. They tried to get me committed to Claremont Mental Hospital, they succeeded with my brother who was eventually placed in psychiatric care but they didn't succeed with me.

41. When I was fifteen I was visited by Mr Young from the Lands and Surveys Department (later titled the Child Welfare Department) to find out what I wanted to do when I left care. Until 1952 we had no real guardians until Mr Young took over. I told him that I had not been in school since I was twelve as I had been working night duty in the Nursery and the Laundry. Mr Young told SAU 4 off. He said he had told her before that she wasn't to put the children on night duty at the expense of their education. I had never even heard the word "educated" before then. I was punished for telling Mr Young that I wasn't in school.

42. I was sent back to school and I had a lovely teacher there. She was an Irish nun, SAU 15 She tried to keep up my Irish traditions such as music and spoken Irish. She got me through my exams to get into nursing. I proved them

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all wrong by passing. I got 98% in the exam, the youngest to ever pass the exam. I was fifteen years old at the time. After school I worked at [REDACTED] Department Store in Perth and remained living at St Joseph's Home.

43. One point worth noting is the fact that it is often stated that the male child migrants helped to build the home at Bindoon but the female child migrants – the "Joey" girls – helped to build a great portion of St Joseph's and that point is often overlooked.

Life after care

44. On 5th August 1954 I moved out of the home and was sent to live in foster care with [REDACTED]. It was a rural area at the time but is now a suburb of Perth. I ran away from [REDACTED] and Mr Young placed me with a new carer, [REDACTED]. I then went to train to be a nurse in January 1955 and moved [REDACTED] Perth.

45. I was awarded an ex-gratia payment of \$45,000 under the Western Australian Redress Scheme.

46. I could not get a passport until 1994. I had no entry papers or documentation regarding my migration to Australia and I refused to become an Australian citizen. It was not until there was State acceptance in 1994 that Irish children had been brought to Australia under the child migration scheme that I was able to obtain a passport and then I travelled back to Ireland eleven times.

47. My first trip back to Ireland was in August 1994. I talked to many people during this trip to find out more about my past. I wanted to trace my mother but unfortunately I was never able to make contact with her or find out anything about her.

48. I never met my brother AU 67 again. He died of alcohol poisoning.

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49. I met my brother **AU 68** when he was twenty one but he died at thirty four. We were very close. **AU 67** and **AU 68** were both at Castledare initially. **AU 68** was sent to Bindoon and **AU 67** went to Clontarf.

50. My sister **AU 63** was also an alcoholic and I nursed her for seven and a half years until she died at sixty two years old. She died due to pneumonia. I took both my brother **AU 68** and my sister **AU 63** ashes back to Ireland on their instructions following their death and cremation. Neither of them wanted to be buried on Australian soil.

51. I think when I returned to Ireland that I was trying to "find myself". I went everywhere on foot and met people and asked questions about my past but I did not get the answers I was looking for. I still feel that I don't belong anywhere and that I don't belong to anyone. My time in care has always made me feel throughout life as if I am on the outside looking in. The road of the abused child never ends, it is continuous because the mind does not let you forget.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 273

Dated

9-6-2014

For all persons, sixteen years of age and over, and those under sixteen not accompanied by parents.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION, AUSTRALIA HOUSE,
LONDON, W.C.2.

MEDICAL EXAMINATION.

Declaration by Applicant

NAME

HIA 273

Full Name of your Captain

ADDRESS

1. Have you ever had any serious illness or surgical operation? If so, please furnish details.

2. Have you or has any member of your family ever been in a Sanatorium or other institution or attended for the treatment of Tuberculosis?

3. Have you ever had Eruptions or any sign of disease of the Skin? (Primary or Secondary)

4. Have you or has any member of your family ever suffered from mental diseases or epilepsy or been treated in an institution of any kind for these Diseases?

5. What medical attention have you required during the last twelve months?

I hereby certify that the information supplied by me to the Medical Examiner is correct in every particular.

Signature of applicant which must be made in the presence of the Medical Referee.

Results of Medical Examination.

Age	44 1/2	Height, in Boots	Weight, Clothed	498 7 lbs
A. Heart	Normal	F. Genito-Urinary Organs	Urine	Normal
Blood Pressure	Normal	G. Sight	Visual acuity	4/6
H. Lungs	Normal	with glasses or none	Distance 12 ft	4/6
(Chest and Tubercles)		Cause of defect in sight		
I. Nervous System and Mental Condition	Normal	H. Hearing	Normal	
J. Intelligence	Good	I. Physique	Normal	
K. Digestive Organs	Good	J. Skin	Clear	
		K. Number of vaccination scars and date of operation	Good	
		L. Teeth	Good	

REMARKS (include particulars of any departure from normal conditions not fully set out in above.)

In cases where the Medical Examiner is unable to describe the applicant as being in perfect health, he should state under "REMARKS" the exact nature of the defect which he finds and whether it is of temporary or permanent nature. Any disablement received on Active Service or otherwise should also be noted and commented on, and if a Pension is received the amount of it should be stated.

The presence of Pediculi should be noted. In the case of married women, if pregnant, please note the fact in "Remarks" column, and state number of months.

I certify that I have this day examined the above-named and am of opinion that the applicant is in good health and of sound constitution, and not suffering from any mental or bodily defect which would cause inability to enter a foreign army.

Date 15/7/47

Signature (and Qualification)

Address

TO: CHIEF MIGRATION OFFICER, AUSTRALIA HOUSE, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.2.
(Room 64)

PLEASE TURN OVER.

MEDICAL EXAMINATION

For Children under the age of sixteen years accompanying their parents.

Name in full	Age	Physique	Heart	Lungs	Standard at School and Intelligence	Efficiently Vaccinated	REMARKS As to disease or mental or physical defect, past or present, of any kind, including those of speech, sight, hearing, gastro-intestinal disorders, or enlarged glands, in any of the persons named, and as to any defect received from the local School Medical Officer relating to any child attending school.
HIA 273	9 1/2	1 Good	Normal	Normal	Normal	Yes	Immune to diphtheria very intelligent Teeth good. Throat clear Height 4'6"
AU 63	6	Good	Normal	Normal	Normal	Yes	

I certify that I have this day examined the above-named and find them in good health and of sound constitution, and not suffering from any mental or bodily defect which, in my opinion, would unfit them for carrying their own living when they become of an age to do so.

Date 15/7/47

Signature and Qualification

W. R. Ruston

I hereby certify that the information supplied by me to the Medical Examiner is correct in every particular.

Address

Blackburn House

Signature of parent or guardian

SR 174

Affixed in the presence of the Medical Referee.

Note.—It is essential regarding the Medical Examination is particularly important to satisfy himself that the applicant is in every way a fit subject to pass a thorough medical examination, accompanying any disengagement, abnormality, impairment of function or capture as applicants are liable to reaction both at the point of collection and at the point of arrival.

M. J. ... *WG3*

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Department of Immigration
Australia House, London.

CHILD MIGRATION

Group Nomination No: _____
(This form is to be completed by the Overseas Representative of the
Sponsoring Organisation)

1. Name in full (in block capitals surname first) HIA 273
2. Full Postal Address (in block capitals)
NAZARETH HOUSE
BELFAST
3. Age 9 1/2 Date & Year of Birth _____ Place of Birth _____
4. Sex F Weight 4 1/2 stone Church Denomination R.C.
5. Furnish name and address of parent, guardian or next of kin
(if father is living his name must be given)

6. Is there any record of mental disease in the child? NO
7. Has he or she at any time been subject to fits? NO
8. Educational standard II

Signed P. J. ...

For and on behalf of: The Catholic Child Welfare Council for Scotland
(Name of sponsoring organisation) Victoria St. Edinburgh

Date: 1-12-1946

PARENT'S OR GUARDIAN'S CONSENT (FATHER IF LIVING)

I _____
(insert full name, occupation & address)

of _____
the {father
mother} of HIA 273
guardian

hereby consent to my child/ward proceeding to Australia under the
Commonwealth Child Migration Scheme.

Dated this 1st day of DECEMBER 1946

Signature _____

Witness (s) Thomas Lynch Qualification Chaplain

Address Nazareth House, Queen's Road Belfast.

The Witness must be one of the following, viz., a Member or Official
of any Banking Firm established in the United Kingdom, any Mayor,
Magistrate, Justice of the Peace, Minister of Religion, Barrister-at-law
Registered Medical Practitioner, solicitor or Notary Public.

On completion this form should be forwarded to :

The Chief Migration Officer
Australia House,
LONDON, W.C.2.