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HIA REF: 274

Witness Name: **HIA 274****THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995**

WITNESS STATEMENT OF **HIA 274**

I, **HIA 274** will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED]
2. I was born in a mother and baby home called [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] Co. Westmeath. My mother was a single parent and was helped to go there to have her baby by the nuns from the Sacred Heart Convent in Armagh, where she was from.

Nazareth Lodge, Belfast (13/12/1944 – 3/2/1948)

3. I was placed in Nazareth Lodge, Belfast on 13th December 1944 when I was three weeks old. My mother called me **HIA 274** but the nuns changed my name to [REDACTED]. I was called [REDACTED] until I was seventeen years old. I do not know why or when this was done. My mother told me my real name when I was seventeen and had started to correspond with her.

Nazareth House, Belfast (03/02/1948 – 1950)

4. I was then placed in Nazareth House, Belfast on 3rd February 1948 when I was three years old.

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5. My mother paid for my upkeep while I was in care in Nazareth House. My mother often visited me as did my step father. It was her intention to come back for me when she got herself established and was able to care for me. When my mother came to collect me she was informed that I was no longer there and that I had been sent to Australia. My mother told me this in her correspondence when I was older.

Sailing Dates (8 February 1950 – 6 March 1950)

6. I was deported to Australia without my mother's consent or knowledge in 1950 when I was five years old. The Nazareth House records show that I was sent to Australia in November 1950 but I know from receiving my documents from the Australian Authorities that I arrived in Perth on the SS Asturias on 6th March 1950. This ship left Southampton on 8th February 1950. Even though my mother was alive the consent form was signed by the Mother Superior of Nazareth Lodge, **SR 174** As I was born in the South of Ireland and I was therefore an Irish citizen I do not understand how the Sisters of Nazareth and the government had the authority to send me to Australia.
7. Because I was so young I have no memories of my time in Nazareth House. My grievance is that I was sent to Australia without my mother's consent or knowledge and from that day I lost my identity and all connections to my family, my home and my country.

St Joseph's Orphanage, Subiaco (1950 – 1960)

8. When I arrived in Australia I was placed initially in St Vincent's Foundling Home, Subiaco, Western Australia. Shortly thereafter I turned six and I was placed in St Joseph's Orphanage which was in the same grounds. I remained there until I was fifteen. The home was run by the Sisters of Mercy.
9. Luckily for me my mother was a very determined woman and she eventually got the name of the home I was sent to in Perth. When I was Grade 3 or 4, to my

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surprise, I received a letter from my mother. Up until then I had never allowed myself to think about having a mother. Because I was in an orphanage I considered myself an orphan. The letter was read out in front of my entire class. It was not read to me in private or given to me to read myself in private. I found out that she had got married and had had another baby. She was still living at her mother's house as housing for Roman Catholics was not a priority and difficult to find. As she had more children they were given a house of their own. She had six more children. I wrote back in reply to her letter but I doubt that the letter was ever posted to her. That was the only letter I received from my mother. I kept that letter for years but it got lost at some point. As far as I know I was the only child migrant to receive such a letter.

Life after care

10. When I was seventeen my Welfare Officer in Australia gave me my mother's address and I started to regularly correspond with her and my step-father and three of my siblings. A friend I was working with wanted to go travelling and to visit relatives in Holland. I wanted to go to visit Ireland. However because I was a ward of state I was not allowed to go until I was twenty one. We finally went by boat in 1967. On finally meeting my family I found it very difficult to make conversation. I was introduced as a cousin from Australia. I was unable to call my mother mum. I started to call her [REDACTED]. She told me to call her [REDACTED] if I wasn't able to call her mum but we had been taught to always address our elders by their married title. My mother passed away in 1985 and I was never able to call her mum. I have no doubt that the lack of bonding when I was a child impacted on our relationship.
11. I moved to London and lived there for two and a half years, going to Ireland for Christmases and long weekends. I now live in Australia.
12. In 1997 a group of child migrants flew to London to commemorate 50 years of being sent to Australia. It was a very rewarding trip for a lot of people and a few of the girls even found relatives they never knew about. Those who were from England, Scotland and Wales received a lot of press coverage upon their return.

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A trip to Belfast was arranged for the migrants from Ireland but we were not greeted by anyone from the government or the press on our return. It was such a let-down. I felt as though Northern Ireland was refusing to accept our experiences. A couple of days after we arrived in Belfast some of the other girls were contacted by the press.

13. In February 2010 I attended a reception in Downing Street for child migrants when Gordon Brown delivered his apology in the House of Commons for the United Kingdom's involvement in sending children to former colonies. There were almost one hundred child migrants there from Australia, New Zealand and Canada. When Gordon Brown came over to shake my hand I showed him a picture of my family to show him the people he was apologising to.
14. I became very angry about my emigration when I had my son. My partner was out at work for long hours and I found it difficult to bring up my son on my own without the support of an extended family. I would cry in anger at all the things he would miss out on growing up such as family get-togethers, playing with cousins, going away for family weekends. Birthdays and Christmases were very quiet and not events that I looked forward to.
15. In the late 1980's my friend **AU 49** and **AU 49** a group called ICAS (Institutional Child Abuse Society) which was a support group for survivors of institutional child abuse. **AU 49** had a breakdown when she received her papers from the Australian authorities and she had decided that the way to get through everything was to set up this group to make sure that child abuse in institutions was brought to light. The group was in existence for just under one year. We received a lot of calls from boys who had been abused in their institutions and they went on to set up their own organisation. I still keep in touch with other survivors through a support group in Perth called Tuart Place. I sing in their choir.
16. I am very grateful that this Inquiry is being held as I think that the terrible things that happened in the past should never be forgotten. I would like to see a

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memorial of some sort dedicated to the children who, through no fault of their own, were sent away from their families and homeland.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 274

Dated

19-6-2014