

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 278

Witness Name: HIA 278

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 278

I, HIA 278 will say as follows:-

Personal Details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Londonderry. My mother died when I was five years old. She died in the Waterside Hospital but I am not sure if she died in childbirth as I have never been told the cause of her death. My father took care of me on his own for three years. My father was an ex-serviceman in World War One. He had a leg injury from the war and he became ill with an ulcer on his leg and was hospitalised. I ended up running around the streets asking people for food.
2. I had two brothers [REDACTED] and a sister [REDACTED]. I was the youngest in the family. [REDACTED] was a soldier in the British Army and was stationed in Malta at that time. He came home to sort things out. As my father was ill in hospital [REDACTED] was made my legal guardian and he placed me in Nazareth House, Derry. I was eight years old when I was placed in care and [REDACTED] was eighteen.

PRIVATE

Nazareth House, Bishop Street, Derry (4/7/1941 – 28/8/1947)

3. I was cared for quite well at Nazareth House. They used to take us to Fahan on holiday and we slept in a barn and thought it was great at the time. We also went to Buncrana and Moville.
4. The home was regimented in its routine. They made you line up for baths and you would have been smacked if you misbehaved but I do not remember the regime being excessively harsh.
5. I also recall being hit by a lay teacher, **SND 411** in the hands with a bamboo stick. She was trying to teach me left and right and North, South, East and West and I could not understand it so she beat me in frustration. **SR 84** spoke to her about this incident and told her not to hit me.
6. We had to scrub and polish the floors in Nazareth House on our hands and knees. On one occasion when I was about nine years old I missed a patch when I was scrubbing the floor as I was really tired and **SR 24** elted me for this. She also hit me over the head with a bunch of keys. I remember having nightmares and walking in my sleep as a result of that particular incident.
7. I also recall having to often request permission to speak in the home. Older girls would eat at our table and they would give you a clout if you made noise or did anything wrong. I remember one of them, I think she was called **SND 412** **SND 412** slapping me across the face. I did not like being treated this way by the older girls.
8. I do not recall anyone from the welfare authorities ever coming to visit me in the home.
9. When my father recovered from his illness he went to Nazareth House on several occasions with my sister to get me out of the home as he wanted to

PRIVATE

take me back to live with him. He would start a rumpus every time when he realised he was not allowed to take me home because my brother [REDACTED] was still my legal guardian and he had not signed me out. On one occasion [REDACTED] returned to the home when I was about nine or ten because he was getting married and thinking of moving to Canada. He told me that if he moved he would take me with him. However, this plan fell through as his wife decided she did not want to emigrate and in the end they settled and had a family in England. [REDACTED] told me that he made regular contributions to the nuns for my upkeep and he always visited me every time he was on leave.

10. I recall someone, I think it was Brother Conlon, coming in to a room and calling out my name. I cannot recall ever being asked whether I wanted to go to Australia but the next thing I knew there were eight of us from the home chosen to go to Australia.

11. I recall we had a medical examination prior to our departure. It was held in the Mercy Convent on Pump Street. They gave us a thorough examination and also examined our teeth. The only other time I saw a doctor at Nazareth House was when I had my tonsils removed.

12. The nuns took us to Fahan for a holiday before we departed for Australia. I remember I left on 28 August 1947 and I kept looking out the window that day to check if my father would come to say goodbye to me. I was fourteen when I left Northern Ireland.

Sailing (29 August 1947 – 23 September 1947)

13. I checked the archives years later and saw that the consent form for my being taken to Australia was signed by [REDACTED] SR 84 [REDACTED]. My father and brother visited me frequently when I was in Nazareth House but at no stage were either of them asked for their permission or consent to my being sent to Australia. I never saw my family for thirty years apart from one brief visit from [REDACTED] in/around 1956. My father died in 1948, one year after I was sent to Australia.

PRIVATE

14. We got a ferry from Larne to Stranraer and then we met the children from Belfast at the port. We took a train to Hammersmith and stayed there overnight. I sat up all night. We went the next day to Southampton. We were all lined up in groups. There was a Derry group, a Belfast group and a group from Wales. One girl was mixed race so she was taken away. I think she was in the Wales group. It was referred to as the "White Australia Policy".
15. We sailed on the SS Asturias. Two nuns travelled with us to Perth. They were called [SR 132] and [SR 133] [SR 132] was not very nice and she cut my hair on the ship from ear to ear because I had curly hair and she said the boys were looking at me.
16. We sailed on 29 August 1947 and arrived on 23 September 1947. I felt sad throughout the journey as I did not get a chance to say goodbye to my father.
17. There were eight of us in one cabin. One night around 3.00am I woke up and there was a young man at the end of our bed. I tried to find someone to report him to but I could not find anyone as no-one was really looking after us properly.
18. A lot of the children on the ship suffered from sea sickness.
19. There were novice nuns on the ship who were coming over from Ireland and they took us for lessons even though they were not there as our teachers.
20. When we arrived in Fremantle I asked [SR 132] if she knew when I would be returning home and she hit me a clout over the ear and told me to get in line. We did not even realise how far Australia was from Ireland. We never at any stage realised that we would not be going home. No-one ever told us that we were going to stay for good. We were just orphans in their view and we had to do what we were told.

PRIVATE

St Joseph's Orphanage, Subiaco (23 September 1947 - 1950)

21. We were transported by bus from Fremantle to St Joseph's Orphanage in Subiaco. It was run by the Sisters of Mercy. It was the same regimented institutional life as before. We had to work hard and do chores. We had to polish floors just as we had done in Nazareth House, Derry. In many ways the institutions were very similar.

22. I do recall social workers paying visits to St Joseph's Orphanage. They were employed by the Australian authorities. There was never any representative from the British Government or Northern Irish authorities checking on our progress. I do recall receiving one letter from [REDACTED] SR 84 on the first Christmas after I had left the home.

23. I was in the orphanage in 1948 when my father died and they gave me an opened letter from my sister [REDACTED] informing me that he had passed away. My father was a World War One veteran who died a year after I arrived in Australia. I had dearly wanted the opportunity to go back home and see him but I never got the chance to write to him or meet him. I cannot recall receiving any other mail during my time in care in Australia.

24. I was seventeen and a half when I left the orphanage and I was on my own from that point onward. They arranged a placement for me to study at a school in [REDACTED] just outside Perth and I stayed there for a year. I scraped through my Junior exams and got enough marks to gain entrance to nursing so I went to train as a nurse in Geraldton. There was a nursing college there called the Government School of Nursing. However, I found it really tough and left after a year as I had a poor standard of education and I was not really up to the required standard. In the end I left with another girl and we trained to be nurses in [REDACTED]. She was a girl from [REDACTED] called [REDACTED] AU 72 and she had sailed over from Derry with me. She sailed with her sister [REDACTED] AU 71 and her two brothers, [REDACTED] AU 73 and [REDACTED] HIA 324

PRIVATE

25. When I was twenty one I was contacted by Mr Young from the Child Welfare Department and he advised that I was no longer under their care. I told them I never knew I was in their care in the first place. The Child Welfare Department in Western Australia were given responsibility for child migrants until they reached twenty one years of age. In my case they showed a total lack of interest in my welfare and failed in their duty to comply with their responsibilities towards me as a child under their care. When I left care I was on my own in the world with no counselling or support from the Child Welfare Department and I had to deal with life the best I could.

26. I moved to Melbourne around the time of the Olympic Games in 1956. I stayed there for seven months and returned to [REDACTED] I met my husband there and finally settled in [REDACTED] We married on 15 February 1958.

Life after care

27. I became an Australian citizen when I started nursing. The process was relatively easy for me. I went to an immigration van in [REDACTED] that was parked near my work and I signed a form and became an Australian citizen there and then. I did not have a birth certificate or any documents as a child. When I was getting married I think the priest must have written to the authorities in Derry and obtained it on my behalf.

28. My brother [REDACTED] left the Army in 1956 and worked his way over on a ship as a steward so that he could visit me in Australia. He could only stay for a day and then he had to move on with his ship. When I was nursing in Geraldton he used to send me money orders out of his wages so that I would have the fare to travel back to Northern Ireland. However, I had no idea how to organise a trip home. I always got queried in the bank about the money orders and where I was getting the money from and I then told [REDACTED] to stop sending them to me.

PRIVATE

29. Being in care left me extremely sensitive. When I met my husband he wanted to look after me but I did not really want to be looked after. I was quick to take offence and my husband had to watch what he said in case I took it up the wrong way. At Nazareth House we almost had to request permission to speak so I think my sensitivity was influenced by my treatment in care. I often felt as if I needed counselling due to all the different things that happened to me along the way. I should probably have gone for counselling prior to getting married.

30. I met [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] when I visited England and Ireland in 1978. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] both lived in England at the time. I then flew to Ireland and reconnected with many extended family members and friends and I have maintained these contacts. I have three nieces in London and I have been visited in Australia by two of them so far. They make a fuss of me when they see me and it makes me think of what my family ties would have been like if I had remained in Northern Ireland.

31. I have been back to Derry several times since my migration to Australia. I returned in 1997 as part of the "Sentimental Journey" that was organised by the Sisters of Saint Joseph and Sisters of Nazareth in conjunction with the Child Migrant Trust and other fundraisers. I went with forty other child migrants and it was a wonderful experience. We stayed at the St Clements Retreat Centre in Belfast and we also visited Nazareth House in Derry and the nuns were very hospitable during our visit. I have made further visits to England and Ireland in 2008 and 2011.

32. My youngest brother [REDACTED] died in 1944 and is buried in a grave in Normandy and I have been twice to view his grave. I first visited with my husband and my nephew and niece from London. On the second occasion I went with my husband.

33. I am continually trying to re-establish contact with my wider family. In recent times I have discovered more relatives on my mother's side. My grandfather moved to Detroit and I have American relatives. I have also visited my

PRIVATE

father's grave in Derry. My sister [REDACTED] is also deceased and buried in Derry. My brother [REDACTED] placed her in care in the Good Shepherd Laundry in Derry. I am not entirely sure but she was probably about eleven when she was placed there. [REDACTED] is also now deceased and buried in England. When a crisis such as ill health affects extended family members I have to overcome an unfair financial burden as I cannot help the fact that I have family in both countries. I was called on to assist my sister-in-law who was seriously ill and died shortly after my visit. Three months later when my brother was ill I was not in a financial position to visit and look after him. This tyranny of distance means that I will continue to carry these burdens as long as our families live.

34. I now have four sons and two daughters. I also have sixteen grandchildren and a great grandchild. When I was having my fourth child [REDACTED] was experiencing difficulties with the pregnancy and my husband was called to the hospital. I remember asking him to ensure that if anything ever happened to me he would never allow any of my children to be placed in a home. Whilst I harbour no ill will towards the Sisters of Mercy this experience obviously left its mark on me as indicated by the total fear of my children ever being placed in care.

35. My complaint concerns mainly the manner in which I was selected for migration to Australia, the fact that I was sent there when I clearly had a brother and father who did not give permission for this move and neither myself nor my family members were informed of our rights in advance of my departure. Indeed many child migrants were shipped without parental approval, signature or permission and officials signed these approvals ignoring the rights of these children to be brought up in their own culture and in their country of origin which I consider to be fundamental human right. I discovered in later years that it was possible to apply to return home if you had been transferred as a child migrant. However, after I left the home there was no-one to explain any of these rules to me or how I or any member of my

PRIVATE

family could go about doing this. In my view I should never have been selected as an appropriate candidate for migration in the first place.

Statement of Truth

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

AU 84

Signed

Dated 30/11/2013

My wife **HIA 278** passed away on 25th November 2013 and as her husband I have signed the statement on her behalf. She instructed me that she was in agreement with the contents of this statement prior to her death.