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HIA REF: 286

Witness Name [REDACTED] HIA 286

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF [REDACTED] HIA 286

[REDACTED] HIA 286 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. I was placed in Nazareth House, Bishop Street, Derry when I was a baby.
2. I have a brother called [REDACTED] who is about six years older than me and a sister called [REDACTED] who was four years younger than me. Unfortunately [REDACTED] passed away in 1998. My mother was in the nursing home in Nazareth House because she had a stroke and she was crippled. [REDACTED] was also placed in Nazareth House but I didn't know this until years later. [REDACTED] was placed with an aunt in Derry called Aunt [REDACTED]. I don't know anything about my father.

Nazareth House, Bishop Street, Derry (1933 - 1947)

3. I was placed in Nazareth House when I was a baby. I remained there until I was fourteen years old. I never had any visitors all the time I was in the home.
4. I recall that the nuns beat me with a belt almost daily. They did this when I answered back or spoke out. They didn't like children answering back to them. I was a bit of a live wire. The nuns that were in Nazareth House were called

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SR 84 SR 98 and SR 24 We like SR 24 She was a young nun and she was nice to us. SR 84 and SR 98 beat us. They both used a big thick strap and a bamboo cane to hit us. They also used their hands to hit us a clout across the ear.

5. In the home I slept in a big dormitory and I think there were over one hundred girls in it. I recall the beds were warm enough and the food was good. I don't know if the food was enough – we didn't know any different at the time and took what we got.
6. On a typical day we got up at 6am and went to Mass. After Mass we got breakfast and then we had to do our chores before school. My job was to scrub the floors on my hands and knees. I cleaned the passageways which were tiled and other girls waxed and polished other floors. Everyone had their job to do. A nun supervised us while we worked and hit us with a stick if we weren't doing the job correctly. It may have been hard work but I got used to it.
7. After we finished our chores we went to school. The school was in Nazareth House. The nuns in the home were also the teachers. SR 84 was my teacher and she also hit me in school with a strap whenever I spoke back. After school we went to chapel and then to bed. I was a good scholar and I did well at school.
8. In the home I took every day as it came. I got on with it. Every day was the same. Life in the home didn't change.
9. One day when I was fourteen the nuns went around and picked out a certain number of girls to go to Australia. The nuns didn't ask me if I wanted to go; they just told me I was going. I think about thirteen girls were picked. Of those, about five were aged between four and seven years old. I recall that the nuns told us that Australia was a beautiful country with plenty of activities in the outdoors. I cried for weeks after being told I was going to Australia.

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10. I think I had a medical examination in Nazareth House before I left. I think about four weeks passed between being told I was going and boarding the ship. We travelled to Southampton and sailed on 29th August 1947 on the SS Asturias. I arrived in Fremantle on 22nd September 1947. I was sick the whole journey; it was a horrible trip. I cried the whole way. Most of the girls did. I think there were about fifty boys and girls on the ship from Ireland, Scotland and England. Nuns travelled with us on the sailing. They were not from Nazareth House in Derry. They were from a different Order and I don't know who they were. On the ship we went to school and were taught by the nuns. We also went to Mass and we played games. The crew looked after us well.
11. When we arrived in Fremantle the girls were split up. My friends were taken to Geraldton with the nuns who travelled over on the ship and I was taken to St Joseph's Orphanage in Subiaco along with one other girl from Nazareth House in Derry called [REDACTED] HIA 278 (now [REDACTED] HIA 278). St Joseph's was run by the Sisters of Mercy.

St Joseph's Orphanage, Subiaco (22 September 1947 - 1949)

12. I was in St Joseph's for about two years and I left when I was sixteen years old. I cried for months when I left Ireland. I was homesick. I had left behind everything that I knew. I wanted to go home and I told the nuns and they told me to settle down and that I would be alright.
13. The Sisters of Mercy nuns were similar to the nuns in Nazareth House. They were cruel. They beat us with a strap. I played up and when they hit me I hit them back as I was older. On one occasion [REDACTED] SAU 4 who was a big heavy nun, hit me so hard with her hand I had to be hospitalised. I have permanent deafness in my right ear as a result of this beating. Most of the nuns were Irish but I think [REDACTED] SAU 4 was Australian.
14. We had to do work in St Joseph's much like Nazareth House. I helped out in the kitchen.

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15. I think officials from the Child Welfare Authority may have visited the home but they never spoke to the children.

16. I left St Joseph's in 1949 when I was sixteen years old.

Life after care

17. When I was sixteen I got a job in the Immigration Department and I boarded in the home. It was a good job because I had quite a good education. I loved working there. Later the nuns found an Irish family called [REDACTED] for me to board with. The [REDACTED] were lovely.

18. After a few years I left the Immigration Department and I became a nursing assistant. I travelled all around the countryside working in various hospitals. I wanted to see a bit of Australia.

19. I met my partner [REDACTED] in the 1960s and we have one son called [REDACTED]. Sadly [REDACTED] passed away many years ago. [REDACTED] is my carer and he looks after me very well. I live on my own as I like my independence but [REDACTED] doesn't live too far away. I have two grandsons whom I used to babysit when they were younger. They are now thirteen and fifteen years old.

20. I never had a birth certificate as a child and I only obtained it in recent years with the assistance of Margaret Humphreys from the Child Migrants Trust. The Trust also found out about my family in the late 1980s. I didn't know that I had a sister in Nazareth House. No one ever told me. Also, we used to go to sing and dance for the residents in the nursing home in Nazareth House and my mother was there and I didn't know it.

21. I have been back to Northern Ireland three times since my migration to Australia. The first time I went back was after I found out about my family in the late 1980s

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/early 1990s. I met my brother [REDACTED] for the first time. I also visited my Aunt [REDACTED] who looked after [REDACTED] as a child. I asked my Aunt for more information about my family and in particular my father but she wouldn't tell me anything. She has since passed away. [REDACTED] and I have a good relationship and I stayed with him on my visits. We keep in touch however it is more difficult now as [REDACTED] has Alzheimers. I have never met my sister [REDACTED]

22. In 1997 I returned to Derry as part of the "Sentimental Journey" that was organised by the British Government. I travelled along with a group of other child migrants. I visited again in 2004.

23. I was out of touch with the girls from the home in Nazareth House who had migrated. One day in the 1980's [REDACTED] HIA 335 (now [REDACTED] HIA 335) traced me and knocked on my door. From then I have had good contact with them and we have reunions. I stay with my friend [REDACTED] HIA 278 when my son goes on holiday.

24. I received \$13,000 in compensation under the Redress Scheme in Australia in 2009.

25. I was upset leaving my home in Derry at the age of fourteen although looking back I may have had better opportunities in Australia.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed [REDACTED] HIA 286 _____

Dated 23-10-2013