

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 288

Witness Name: HIA 288

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 288

I, HIA 288, will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in the [REDACTED] in Derry. My mother was called [REDACTED]. I don't know much about my father but I think my mother was a single mother and unable to look after me. Life was difficult for her. She probably fell on hard times after the war. I was placed in St Joseph's Children's Home, Termonbacca when I was nearly five years old.

St Joseph's Children's Home, Termonbacca (4/9/1949 – 26/1/1953)

2. I was in Termonbacca from when I was almost five until I was eight years old. I had several visits from my mother whilst I was in the home. I still recall the little visiting room there. She never abandoned me. When I met my mother in later years she told me that when she came to the home to see me she was told by the nuns that I had gone to Australia and that it was none of her business.
3. I do not recall a great deal about my time in Termonbacca as I was only a child when I left the home.

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4. No-one spoke to me about Australia or asked me if I wanted to go there. It was just like a raffle, you got picked out and that was it.
5. I cannot recall whether or not we had a medical examination prior to departure.
6. I left Southampton on the SS New Australia on 26th January 1953. We were bundled on to the ship like a herd of cattle. We had carers on the ship with us but I never took much notice of them. I remember stopping at Port Said at the Suez Canal. I was told not to but I got off the ship at the port and got lost. It was a huge experience for a young boy and some of us just ran amok around the ship.
7. We arrived at Fremantle, got picked up in groups and transported to Clontarf. Some of the other children went to Bindoon or Tardun. They separated friends and even brothers were parted. I think I was brought to Clontarf initially by mistake as it was for older boys and I was still a junior. I was then taken to the junior school called Castledare. I went there for a little while and after several months I was moved to Clontarf.

Clontarf Boys' Town (1953 - 1960)

8. We were not very interested in school at Clontarf and I was not very bright at school. The standard of education was poor.
9. We had chores to do around the home and I used to look after the rose beds along the length of the driveway at the school. We all had work to do.
10. Of the various jobs I was given to do I recall vividly working in the piggery and the days spent in the bush ripping down trees in land clearance activity. We also helped to excavate and backfill the swimming pool on the site of the home. It was child labour.
11. One of my best memories of Clontarf is messing around with friends on the river. We made canoes and rafts and it was good fun.

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12. I was fostered during holidays by a family called the [REDACTED] family. My foster mother is in her nineties now and she still sends me a card on my birthday.
13. I did not see or have contact with anyone from the British Government or authorities in Northern Ireland throughout my time in care. We were like wards of State and the Australian government had a guardian role over us until we reached adulthood at twenty-one.
14. When I turned sixteen the authorities arranged a job for me. I think they were called the Commonwealth Employment Service back then. Most of the boys just took any job on offer for the sake of getting out of the institution and seeing what the outside world was all about. I took a job out at [REDACTED]. It involved spot welding and making items like trolley baskets. It was not very interesting.

Life after care

15. I left Clontarf in 1960. I couldn't settle and I drifted from job to job around Perth often in tractor and other machinery assembly employment. I was offered an apprenticeship with [REDACTED] as a diesel mechanic or diesel fitter at one stage but I was young and stupid at the time and regret not taking this apprenticeship position as I have always been interested in the motor industry. There were opportunities but at the time I did not appreciate the importance of acquiring a skilled trade. I moved around jobs a lot. The mining companies were not too bad and gave you a number of air fares per year.
16. I worked for an [REDACTED] company called [REDACTED] in the 1960's and 1970's. I then worked for [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] for seventeen years and I got a good redundancy payout from there in 1990.
17. I eventually found my mother in 1994 through the Catholic Welfare Association (Guardian Authority Catholic Episcopal Migration and Welfare Association) located at Victoria Square, Perth. My mother was living in [REDACTED] in New South Wales. She had migrated in the 1960's when she was married. She had

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stepchildren but no children of her own and was widowed. I got in contact with her and we exchanged cards and had telephone conversations. I didn't cry when we met but I cried the whole journey on the plane home. At Christmas 1995 my mother came and stayed with me. We got on very well together despite many lost years in our relationship. Sadly my mother passed away in 2009 when she was eighty-six years old. I attended her funeral.

18. I have returned to Derry twice. In 1999 I stayed in Termonbacca and I found it very eerie. I did a radio interview with Radio Foyle appealing for relatives and through this I found several cousins. I stayed with my cousins and was warmly welcomed. I visited Termonbacca and Nazareth House, Bishop Street where I went to school. It was a rewarding trip and my sense of having Irish roots was strengthened and became more definite. However my discovery of relatives did engender sadness at the lost years and the prospect of never seeing them again when I returned to Australia. I began regular telephone contact with my new found relatives and it gives me a very good feeling to know that I have a family even though they are so far away.
19. I have poor health now unfortunately and have had heart bypass surgery with two stents, cancer of the stomach, neck and leg. My leg has been operated on six times in nine months and unfortunately I could not fly to Ireland because of it when the British Government allowed us to travel back to our place of birth.
20. I received compensation of \$40,000 AUD from the Christian Brothers and I had to sign a confidentiality agreement.
21. I received \$45,000 AUD from the Australian Government under their redress scheme.
22. None of the child migrants from Ireland were given Australian citizenship during their time in care. They had to sort this out for themselves in later life. I also had to sort out obtaining a birth certificate when I had to obtain a passport to get to Ireland in the mid 1990's.

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23. I attend Clontarf reunions. I had lost touch with a lot of the guys I went to school with until we had reunions in recent years. It is good to get together and talk about the old days but it is entirely different to having your own family.
24. My only complaint about my time at Termonbacca is the manner in which they bounced us all out of there with no regard for parental consent or the impact it would have on family life. The way they handled it and the way they told my mother was awful.
25. I have lived a solitary life. I like the open space of the country and my independence. I have worked hard and I own my own home in Perth. The thing that hurts most is the lack of family. I was deprived of knowing my family. I never married but I saw my friends who married and had children and I know what a family should be. I have missed years of being with my family or having my own family.
26. I never had any photos of my mother until I found her. You had no way of keeping personal items as a child in those homes.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed  HIA 288

Dated 23 - 10 - 2013