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HIA REF: 300

Witness Name: HIA 300

**THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 300**

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I, HIA 300 will say as follows:-

**Personal Details**

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Coleraine. My mother was [REDACTED] and she was a domestic servant from [REDACTED]
2. I was placed in care in St Joseph's Children's Home, Termonbacca when I was very young but I do not know what age I was when I was placed in care. I do not know the reason why I was placed in care. My mother must have been aged somewhere between eighteen and twenty years old when she had me and she was unmarried. In later years she married a man named [REDACTED] and she became known as [REDACTED]

**St Joseph's Children's Home, Termonbacca (1939 - 1947)**

3. I remember very little about my time in Termonbacca. I do not recall the name of any of the nuns or civilian workers or the other residents. I cannot recall a great deal about my time in care in this home. All I will say is that as an adult I never swim in the ocean and I never have a bath. I link this back to my time in care as a child when we had a bath once a week in the home. I

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recall that whatever the nuns put in the water had a burning effect on my skin and I found out in later years that it was a cleaning agent called Phenol.

4. I recall the nuns stating "all those who want to go on holiday put your hands up". We all put our hands up as it sounded exciting but I had no idea at the time where Australia was, and nor did the other boys. There is a medical form dated July 1947 showing that I was examined prior to departure although I do not recall this examination. We were taken to Liverpool and I thought that we had arrived at our destination when we got to England. I had no idea that our journey was only beginning.
5. On my migration forms it shows that SR 81 the Mother Superior of St Joseph's Home, Termonbacca signed in place of my parent or guardian giving authority for me to be transferred to Australia.
6. We sailed on 29 August 1947 on the SS Asturias and arrived in Australia on 22 September 1947. I do not recall who went with us as a guardian on the ship but no doubt there would have been someone travelling with us. I cannot recall any members of the crew. I recall I did not have my own cabin and that there were about twelve of us sharing accommodation on board the ship. I remember staying below deck a lot of the time. Some boys went up on deck to be sick overboard but most of the time I recall being confined to below deck so the journey was not very enjoyable.

#### **Castledare (22 September 1947 – 1 February 1949)**

7. I don't recall how many children travelled from Termonbacca on the ship with me. We arrived at Fremantle and the Archbishop, the Mayor of Fremantle and Senator Tangney and Senator Fraser representing the Commonwealth Government were there to greet us. I went to Castledare initially as a junior boy on 22 September 1947 and remained there until 1 February 1949.

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8. I recall being taken to the home in a thirty seater bus but I do not remember which boys from Termonbacca came to Castledare with me. I do however remember that they took our suits from us and gave us shorts and a shirt. We were not given any shoes. Even in winter we were not provided with shoes but we did get a jumper at that time of year.

**Clontarf Boys Town (1 February 1949 – 5 February 1956)**

9. I was moved to Clontarf in 1949. I recall very little about my first year at Clontarf. I was there for seven years. I recall someone passing comment to me that it was exactly like the home in Northern Ireland but my own view was that the punishments at Clontarf were excessive and there was overuse of the cane and the strap on all the boys. I also thought there was excessive bullying in the home by the Brothers. It happened to everyone. There is a report by Barry Coldrey who was a Christian Brother himself, and he concluded that the level of discipline and punishment was what one would expect given the accepted norms at the time but I felt that the regime was excessive.
10. The standard of education at Clontarf was very poor. There was little effort made with our education and I was not able to read when I left Clontarf.
11. When I arrived in Australia the Brothers changed my date of birth. My real date of birth is [REDACTED] but they changed it to [REDACTED] and then it became [REDACTED]. I think it was changed initially to tie in with a feast day but eventually it just caused confusion for me. I remember when I went to join the Army it became a difficulty, and I had to apply for a proper birth certificate to sort out the confusion once and for all. Also, even after twenty two years service, I was never made an Australian citizen. I wanted to extend my service by another three years to have twenty five years served, and I had to apply at that stage to become an Australian citizen. It always made applying for jobs or promotion very difficult when my paperwork was not in order.



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12. I was never visited during my time in care in Australia by the Child Welfare Department or anyone from the British Government or Northern Ireland authorities.
13. We were expected to do a lot of physically demanding work at Clontarf. We built a swimming pool and did a lot of gardening. The buildings were already in existence when we arrived at Clontarf so we did not have to do quite so much heavy labouring work as the boys who were sent to Bindoon.
14. I was physically and sexually abused by the Brothers at Clontarf. I ran away in the end and was brought back by police and beaten by [REDACTED] BAU 16 for running away. I was then sent off to Victoria to do gardening and kitchen work without pay and when I complained to a Brother, I was beaten again and sent to Sydney where I was made to work as a gardener. As soon as I complained again I was returned to Clontarf. This took place between 1956 and 1957.
15. I had not returned long to Clontarf when they arranged for me to be picked up at the main gate by a farmer called [REDACTED] and I worked for him for eighteen months in an area called [REDACTED] until late 1958. I stayed in a tin shed with an older worker. We had two chairs, a small table and a little lamp between us. I did heavy manual farm work all day, from 6.00am until 7.30pm, for minimal pay. The family took me to church on a Sunday but that was the only outing I had throughout the week. No-one from the Child Welfare Department came at any stage to check on me when I was at this farm. By the time I was eighteen I had had enough and I decided to join the Army.

#### Life after care

16. I joined the Army when I was eighteen. I was in the Army for twenty five years serving in Malaya, Borneo, Thailand and Vietnam. I became a Warrant Officer (WO1) and educated myself throughout my army career. I became a District Sergeant Major in [REDACTED]

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17. When I left the Army I became a local councillor for the [REDACTED].
18. I have been Treasurer and also President of the [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] which is a pensioners group for retired soldiers.
19. I married my wife [REDACTED] in July 1967 and we have been together for forty-six years. We have one son and he is severely disabled with scoliosis.
20. I visited Ireland with my wife in 1974. I tried to find my mother and we met a nun in Dublin, and she and another nun drove my wife and I to Donegal. I was also assisted by [REDACTED] who was linked to the Catholic migration authorities in the UK. The nuns located my mother in [REDACTED] and left me and my wife with her. She lived in a very small house and I knew from her circumstances that she did not have very much in life and probably put me in care because she could not afford to raise me.
21. My mother had married a man named [REDACTED]. I found it difficult to make conversation with her that day. I asked her if she knew who I was and she said the nuns had told her. She asked me where I had been over the years. She had no idea that I had been living in Australia. She said the nuns in Derry had told her that I had been put in foster care in Southern Ireland. I visited her the following day and gave her an Australian cap and flag. Even though the conversation flowed more freely on that occasion, and she showed me around her house and garden, I didn't think there was any mileage in asking her about my father or why she placed me in care. I think she was embarrassed by the situation and I did not want to push her on the subject. I told her nothing about my life in care and she did not question me about it and we left it at that.
22. I was never told who my father was and I never asked.

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23. I visited Ireland again in or around 1993. This trip was paid for by the Christian Brothers and they also paid for my wife to travel with me. I returned to [REDACTED] but my mother had been moved to a nursing home in [REDACTED]. It was a high care facility and my mother could only communicate on this occasion by nodding her head. I had contacted the home in advance to advise them of my visit and my mother had a carer who told me that she had been waiting for us to arrive. She may have been suffering from dementia. It was a wasted trip and I only visited her once as we could not communicate with each other.

24. My third and final trip to Ireland was in 1997. My mother was still in the same nursing home and had the same carer. I stayed quite a while with her on that visit but visited her only once as she was still not able to communicate with me. When I returned to Australia she died three weeks later and I received an e-mail from her carer advising me of her death. I was also contacted by my mother's lawyer regarding her will, but I told them that I did not want anything and that anything left by my mother to me, should go to her carer.

25. I was contacted about seven years ago by a man named [REDACTED] from Canada. He said that we were related and he e-mailed me about five times. I had asked my mother at one stage if I had any brothers or sisters and she said no so he was probably related in some way to [REDACTED] and for that reason I did not follow up on these e-mails. I think his name was [REDACTED].

26. I received \$15,000 AUD under the Australian Redress Scheme.

27. I have not maintained any links with ex Clontarf residents as I left Western Australia for twenty five years and lost touch, and had no affiliation with any of the other boys in care.

28. My philosophy is not to look back in life. My childhood did not help me at all and I would have had every right to sit back and blame my past but I feel that life is what you make it so I just got on with it.

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**Statement of Truth**

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

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Signed

Dated 21 Oct 2013