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HIA REF: 303

Witness Name: HIA 303

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 303

I, HIA 303 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Belfast.
2. I was the oldest of five [REDACTED] children, four of whom were migrated to Australia from Northern Ireland. My brother HIA 318 was born a year after me in 1946, my sister HIA 339 was born in 1948 and my sister HIA 401 was born in 1950. I found out in later years that I had a younger brother AU 95 who was born in 1952. I lived with my mother for the first year of my life. My mother was unmarried. My cousin told me my mother was my father's housekeeper and he was the father to all my siblings. He was a married man. My grandfather helped my mother until he died. My brother HIA 318 was then put into Nazareth Lodge and my sisters were placed in Nazareth House. My mother worked in the Good Shepherd Laundry in Newry and then in Dublin until she died in 1999 aged seventy two.

Nazareth House, Belfast (13 December 1946 - 6 May 1953)

3. I was placed in Nazareth House, Belfast in 1946 and remained there until I was deported to Nazareth House, Camberwell, Victoria, Australia in 1953. As I was so young I have very little memory of my time in Nazareth House. I recall it

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being a very cold place where I was expected to do a lot of hard work. I recall scrubbing concrete and wooden floors, tying rags to my feet and skating over the floors to ensure they were properly polished and peeling potatoes in the kitchen.

4. I recall my [REDACTED] my mother's sister, visiting Nazareth House, Belfast on occasion and bringing fruit with her which I assume was for me but I do not recall getting to speak to her at any stage.
5. I was deported to Australia when I was eight years old. The records from Nazareth House show that I left the home in Belfast on 6 May 1953 and I know from receiving my documents from the Australian Authorities that my sail date to Australia was 8 May 1953. I travelled on the Otranto arriving in Australia on 10 June 1953. I recall very little about the actual voyage to Australia. I cannot recall ever being asked whether or not I wanted to go to Australia. I just recall being told by the nuns that I would have a better life there.

Nazareth House, Camberwell, Victoria (10 June 1953 – 1961)

6. When I arrived in Australia I was placed in Nazareth House, Camberwell in Victoria. I remained there until I was fifteen or sixteen. The home was run by the Sisters of Nazareth.
7. I was made to work extremely hard in the home. My tasks included scrubbing floors, peeling potatoes, scrubbing the scullery, making my bed over and over, doing laundry work, lifting wet washing, wringing out sheets and working from 7.00am with time off only to go to church.
8. The food in the home was of a very poor quality. I recall being given mouldy cake at times and I recall picking off the mould. The meat was so full of fat and gristle that it made me gag on occasion.
9. I was sexually assaulted in the home on more than one occasion by a workman employed by the nuns. He worked in the garden and in maintenance. He got me in the shed on a few occasions and exposed his penis, pulled down my pants

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and tried to penetrate me. I was terrified and tried to hit him and get away. I could not tell the nuns or they would have blamed me and given me a beating.

10. My sisters ^{HIA 339} and ^{HIA 401} and I were sent to Camberwell and my little brother ^{HIA 318} was sent to Castledare for a year and then on to Bindoon in Western Australia. From Nazareth House in Victoria my sisters were later separately placed with adoptive families but I was left behind in Camberwell. I was fifteen years old when this happened. I remember crying and feeling distressed when they left and wondering why I could not go with them or why I could not also be adopted by another family. I was told by the nuns that I was too stupid and that "nobody would want to take such a fat lazy cow".
11. I was determined to stay in touch with my sisters and I was able to visit ^{HIA 339} at the home where she stayed with the family. ^{HIA 401} went to stay with a family called who thought I was a bad influence on ^{HIA 401} and would not let her see me. Unfortunately when I visited ^{HIA 339} her foster father tried to sexually assault me on two occasions so I no longer thought it was safe to visit their home. I sent many letters to my sisters and to my brother at Bindoon but I did not discover until later years that they never received my letters. I did not see my sisters again for over thirty years.
12. I recall Nazareth House as a cruel, hard, cold institution. The nuns were harsh, unkind and would often call me names. ^{SAU 19} and ^{SAU 20} were particularly cruel. They called me "dunce, stupid, fat lazy cow" and they also said hurtful things to me calling me a "slut just like your mother" or that I had no brains and would never by any good and would never amount to anything. On one occasion when I was crying because I missed my mother they told me to "shut up, your mother's dead".
13. I was very anxious as a child and I continued to wet the bed until I was fifteen years old. I was cold at night and had only one thin blanket and a flat pillow. The children who wet the bed were humiliated and treated badly. I recall being left to stand at the end of my bed for an hour or more with the urine soaked sheet over my head.

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14. I was often beaten by the nuns. They used a stick like a curtain rod and swiped my hands with it. If I moved they would whack my legs and I would often have bad bruising and welts from the sticks they used. In the classroom they used canes and rulers to hit my hands, especially across my knuckles. They would come up behind me and box my ears with the flat of their hands which often made me dizzy and sick with pain. I recall refusing to let them see me cry but that just made them hit me more. They would pull your hair or grab your ear and twist it and drag you by the hair for a beating.
15. I do not recall anyone in authority checking up on me and my progress throughout my time in residential care in Australia.
16. I was taken out of school when I was thirteen because they said I was too stupid to educate and I was trained to do domestic cleaning. I have had to work hard and do long hours my entire life as a cleaner.

Life after care

17. I tried for many years to find my brother but the Christian Brothers at Bindoon had changed the spelling of HIA 318 name from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED] which made my search almost impossible. It was not until I got in touch with the Child Migrants Trust in the late 1980's that I was able to locate HIA 318 in the early 1990's in Western Australia. The Trust also located my sisters. I made contact with HIA 339 in 1997 and we now have a good relationship. I have never met my sister HIA 401. It came as a total shock to me when I found out in 2002 that I had another brother AU 95 in Northern Ireland who had been adopted.
18. I had contacted the Child Migrant Trust initially as I wanted to find my mother, [REDACTED]. The nuns did not give the CMT any information on my mother in sufficient time, despite the fact that she worked in the Good Shepherd Laundry all her life and unfortunately I was not able to make contact with her before she died.

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19. I married in 1964 but my husband was abusive to me so I only stayed with him for a few years. I moved to Perth in my twenties and my daughter [REDACTED] was born in 1968. She has three children so I am now a grandmother and I have a close relationship with my daughter and her children. I had a son, [REDACTED] when I was only seventeen and I was forced to give him up for adoption. The Australian Government apologised last year to all those affected by the issue of forced adoption. The Child Migrant Trust helped me to locate [REDACTED] in 2002. He lives in [REDACTED] as he was adopted by a [REDACTED] family. Although there is an obvious language difficulty I was able to visit him in [REDACTED] and we keep in touch.
20. In 2002 Vincent Kearney from the BBC made a Spotlight documentary on child migration and interviewed HIA 318 and I as well as other child migrants. My cousins in Belfast saw the programme and got in touch with the Child Migrants Trust. I visited Northern Ireland and met my cousins in 2002. It was a successful trip but unfortunately the second trip home was not so successful. For some reason my cousins had seemed to turn on me and we did not get on so well on this occasion but there were many different strains on our relationships.
21. I worked as a cleaner throughout my life in the residential care sector, washing and ironing laundry and doing cleaning duties and it was back breaking work. I spent my life on my hands and knees scrubbing floors and now I suffer from knee and back pain. I retired a few years ago and now I do voluntary work for the elderly.
22. I received \$20,000 AUD about six years ago from the Sisters of Nazareth under their "Towards Healing" scheme. Although I never felt their apology was sincere I never took a civil claim against the nuns.
23. I have suffered from severe depression and anxiety at various periods throughout my life. I feel as if everything I ever loved was taken away from me and all I was left with was hard work and never-ending sadness through no fault of my own.

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Statement of Truth

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

Signed **HIA 303** _____

Dated 4/6/2014 . _____