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HIA REF: 304

Witness Name: HIA 304

## THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 304

I, HIA 304 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Belfast. My mother was called [REDACTED]. She was unmarried. I was placed in Nazareth Lodge as a baby. My mother wrote to me in 1980 and told me the reason why she placed me in care. She worked at home in [REDACTED] helping her elderly mother and father and she became pregnant after a relationship with a protestant man called [REDACTED]. When her parents found out they called the priest and she was put in a Laundry between Dungannon and Newry. She was later sent to Belfast where I was born. After I was born, she was sent back to Newry and remained in the Laundry until she was twenty one. My mother later moved to [REDACTED] in England.

Nazareth Lodge, Belfast (1938 - 1947)

2. I do not recall very much about my time in Nazareth Lodge. I remember a well dressed lady visiting me once or twice. I do not know who she was but she was not my mother. Life seemed to be comfortable enough although as a child I was hungry, but most children are. In the home I never knew when my birthday was. I was never told and I only found out when I was adopted in Australia. I have no particular unhappy memories of being in Nazareth Lodge.

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3. I do not know how we were selected for going to Australia. We were told by the nuns in the Lodge that we were war orphans and that is why we were being sent to Australia. We were given new clothes and a suitcase. One day when we were playing up as boys do, I recall one of the nuns saying something like 'I hope that ship sinks on the way out there' as punishment for misbehaving.
4. We got a ferry from Belfast to England and we travelled on a train to Southampton. I sailed on the SS Asturias on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1947. There were paying passengers on board as well as a large number of children from other orphanages. I had a good time on the ship. I think there were about five or six bunks in a cabin. Two nuns travelled with us and they were called SR 132 and SR 133
5. My migration form, which is dated 11<sup>th</sup> March 1947, is signed by the Mother Superior of Nazareth Lodge, SR 102. My medical certificate is dated 15<sup>th</sup> July 1947, however I do not remember having a medical examination.

**Castledare (1947 – 1948) & Clontarf Boys Town (1948 – 1950)**

6. I arrived in Fremantle on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1947. I cried and cried when I got off the ship. I was attached to the ship and didn't want to get off because I liked life onboard. When we got off the ship we went into a shed at the Port and our fingerprints were taken for identification. I think they were taken by officials from the Welfare Department. I remember we were given cotton wool to clean the ink from our fingers. I was then taken on a truck to Castledare Boys Home, where I stayed for about nine months.
7. After Castledare I was taken to Clontarf Boys Town. Life was fairly hard at Clontarf. It was set on a big area of land and we had long school days and then we had to do work in the home after school. We had to do gardening, farm work,

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and dig out bulrushes in swampy land. Life did not seem very much different from life in Nazareth Lodge. The routine was similar.

8. At Clontarf boys were regularly fostered out by families during Easter and Christmas holidays. I was fostered out by two different families during holidays. A couple called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] adopted a boy I was friendly with, called [REDACTED]. They thought that it would probably be better to take two boys at the same time and so I went to live with them around 1949. I was officially adopted by them on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1950, and my surname was changed from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED].
9. The [REDACTED] owned a dairy farm in [REDACTED]. They adopted [REDACTED] and me as they wanted a family and they thought that boys would be more useful to help out on the farm than girls. They treated me well but it was hard work – milking, clearing land and fixing up fences. Like most children living in that area we got up early in the morning and helped with the milking before school. After school we were out working on the farm. That was the way of life. [REDACTED] didn't like it and left and went to live with [REDACTED] brother and his family.
10. Officials from the Child Welfare Department visited the [REDACTED] to check on me. The [REDACTED] were very strict Catholics and they were elderly. There was no fun and games and maybe I didn't have a childhood like other children but it was all I knew. I got paid very little and it was irregular. Sometimes I got paid every six weeks. I stayed there until I was twenty four, when the [REDACTED] were selling the farm. I was devastated when they told me they were selling the farm. After leaving the farm I worked in a saw mill for a while, and then with a farm machinery company where I stayed for sixteen years. When [REDACTED] died in 1963 I lived with [REDACTED] whom I called my mother, in Perth. She died in 1976. I stayed in contact with my adopted brother [REDACTED] but I haven't seen him in over four years.
11. I had a poor education. I struggled to read and write. I completed a correspondence course in farm machinery which I was interested in. However I



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am good with my hands and I can fix most things and I feel that if I had a decent education I could have been an engineer.

### Life after care

12. I married my wife [REDACTED] in 1971 and we have two children – a son called [REDACTED] and a daughter called [REDACTED]. I only obtained my birth certificate when I was getting married. I was hard to live with at first, as my upbringing was very different to that of my wife's. She came from a family of seven. I saw things as black or white and took things literally. Thankfully I didn't have any problems relating to my children and I am close to them and I am very proud of them. I am very self-critical and I always think I could do better. I become annoyed and frustrated with myself easily and sometimes I feel inadequate. I do not know how to accept praise. I think this stems from my time in care when I never received any praise as a child and I never felt valued.

13. When we had our first child, my wife wanted to know about our family health history and that is when she asked more about my family and the fact that I was a war orphan. She wrote to the Sisters of Nazareth in Hammersmith in the mid 1970s and they said they couldn't give us any information. She then wrote to a priest in St Malachy's Church in Belfast where I was baptised and he gave me the address of my mother. When I got her address I wrote her a letter and she replied and said she was pleased to hear from me, but also horrified. She had put a lid on her past and now it was reopened. When my mother moved to England she married and had two children. She never told her husband or children about my existence. I was a secret and only her sister [REDACTED] knew about me. My mother's parents had passed away at that stage.

14. We wrote letters back and forth to each other and she told me that when she put me in Nazareth Lodge the nuns told her that I would be adopted and brought up in Ireland. She had no idea that I had gone to Australia and she was never asked for her permission. We exchanged letters for only a couple of months in the late 1970s or early 1980s because she was terrified her husband would

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intercept one of the letters and find out about me. My mother died in 1986 aged sixty six from bowel cancer. I never got the chance to meet her.

15. My mother told me I had a half-brother [REDACTED]. She didn't tell me I had a half-sister called [REDACTED]. I only found this out after she had died. I visited England for the first time in 2005 and met [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. This trip was paid for jointly by the British and Australian Government. I am still in contact with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and we have a good relationship. I visited Ireland for the first time about eighteen months ago with my wife and children. This trip was paid for my wife and I by the British Government after the then Prime Minister's apology in 2010. I went back to St Malachy's Church where I was baptised and visited [REDACTED] where my mother was born.

#### Statement of Truth

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

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Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Dated \_\_\_\_\_

11/12/13