

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 323

Witness Name: HIA 323

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 323

I, HIA 323 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Kilkeel. I was known as HIA 323 I was one of four children. I have two older sisters – AU 64 and AU 65 and one younger brother HIA 240 My father was called [REDACTED] and my mother was called [REDACTED] I never knew my parents.

Nazareth House, Belfast (21/11/1942 – 28/08/1947)

2. I was placed in Nazareth House when I was two years old. I have never found out why at the age of two I was put in Nazareth House along with my brother and sisters.
3. My medical examination which also covers my sisters AU 64 and AU 65 is dated 15th July 1947 and the signature section for parent or guardian is signed by SR 188 Mother Superior of Nazareth House.
4. My two sisters and I left Nazareth House on 21st August 1947. We sailed to Australia on 28th August 1947 on the SS Asturias. We arrived in Fremantle on 22nd September 1947.

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St Joseph's Girls Orphanage, Wembley, (22/09/1947 - 1956)

5. When we arrived in Fremantle we were taken to St Joseph's Girls Orphanage in Wembley. My time in St Joseph's was physically and emotionally tough. It felt that the Sisters did everything to keep us apart and I believe this is the reason why I have never been close to them since. As a seven year old arriving in a strange country I was frightened and scared. The Sisters made no effort to comfort me and they made me feel as though I was a burden. I always had a feeling that I did not belong.
6. From the time I arrived I was made to strip floors and repolish them, make beds and even cart bricks and clear paddocks. There was always a Sister supervising us and if they thought we had not done the job properly or were not working hard enough we were punished.
7. I was born with a [REDACTED] and every time I went to the hospital for [REDACTED] it was made out to be a huge imposition. I was not given any support or encouragement or assisted with the exercises I had been told to do by the hospital. I was an easy target to be made fun of and the Sisters would even mimic me and say I was not normal and that I had to 'suffer for the sins of my father'.
8. When I was thirteen years old my formal education finished as I was deemed a 'dunce' and I was put to work in the foundling home. I did a 12 hour night shift for three years often unsupervised. I had to wake the toddlers, put them on the potty and change their bedding if they had wet the bed. Then I had to wake the older boys, line them up and turn my back whilst they urinated into a bucket. When everyone was back in bed I had to empty the potties and the bucket. While I was on my shift I had no bed and had to rest on the floor with one grey blanket to keep me warm. When my shift finished I had breakfast and then I worked in the laundry until 11.00am when I was allowed to go to bed for four or five hours.

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9. SAU 4 and SAU 25 were bullies. They pulled my hair and hit me across the body with a strap or cane for no reason. SAU 4 kept a cane in a bucket of water which increased the pain inflicted.
10. When I told the Sisters that I was having my period I was called a 'filthy swine' and given a few pieces of old sheet and some pins. They gave me no explanation as to what to do. Fortunately one of the other girls took me aside and showed me what had to be done. I was constantly taunted by the Sisters and told to get back to the Belfast gutter where I belonged.
11. The food was of poor quality and there was never enough. Weevils would often be found in the porridge and I would wait by the wood pile to get the crusts which had been cut off the bread in the Sisters dining room and thrown out. We shared a toothbrush which was used once a week. Baths were once a week unless you wet the bed and then you had a cold bath and were strapped for not being able to control yourself. I wet the bed until I was ten years old and I was constantly being reminded that I was useless. When I wet the bed I was made to stand next to the bed in the dark and if I dozed off to sleep whilst standing SAU 26 SAU 26 would whack me across the body with a strap. SAU 26 also hit me across the ears. There was no mercy shown by the nuns even though they were called Sisters of Mercy.
12. My identity was taken away from me and I was always put down. More often than not I was addressed by my surname or number which was number nine rather than my first name. I was called a mental defective, slut, good for nothing, dull and boring.

Life after care

13. When I left the orphanage I was given a job in [REDACTED] which I quite liked. However after ten months I was sent off to the Good Shepherd Home and I worked in the Laundry there for three months. Mr Young from the Welfare Department discovered I was there and that is the only reason I was released from the Laundry. I then got a job on a farm in [REDACTED]

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14. I have a daughter and twin sons. I never married. I had to raise my children on my own. I now have grandchildren and I am the proudest mother and nana in the world. My children make me so proud – they are pillars of society and we are a very close family. I now live on the old age pension and I suffer from diabetes, arthritis and heart problems caused by high blood pressure.

15. In the 1980's I found out that our mother died in 1949. Our father died in 1973 aged 73. None of us ever got to meet him. One day my sister **AU 65** and I went back to St Joseph's and spoke to **SAU 26** to ask if she knew anything about our parents as she came from Ireland. She said all she was told was to get as many beds she could find in the home as there were children arriving in four weeks.

16. The Sisters failed in their duty of care. I was undernourished, poorly educated, physically and emotionally abused, separated from my sisters as much as possible and not shown any affection or love to replace that of my family. I was ill prepared for entry into the outside world. From the time I left the orphanage I was never contacted by the Sisters to enquire about my welfare. I left the orphanage with a sense of worthlessness.

17. I lost my identity when I arrived in Australia. I have been searching for answers all my life. Why were we sent to Australia? Have I family in Ireland? Who gave these people a right to break up families and ship them thousands of miles away from their families and homeland? I know I will never find proper answers. I try to put my past behind me where it belongs but the memories never leave me.

I was known as [REDACTED]

I only found out that [REDACTED]
was a name in 1985. I
to not ~~use~~ use that name

[REDACTED]

20-8-2014

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Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 323

Dated

20 - 8 - 2014