

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 330

Witness Name HIA 330

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 330

HIA 330 will say as follows:-

Personal Details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Magherafelt. My mother was called [REDACTED] and she was from Strabane, County Tyrone. My father was from Donegal. My mother told me that she had me when she was in the Good Shepherd workhouse, but I am not sure where this was located. It was war time and people did not have much so my mother could not afford all she wanted for me, and the Sisters helped young mothers that could not support their children. When I was born the parish priest and a social worker became involved and I was brought to Nazareth House in Derry when I was only one day old.
2. I was told by my mother in later years that I was placed in care on the instructions of my grandmother.
3. I had two sisters, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] is four years younger than me and [REDACTED] is one year older than me.

PRIVATE

Nazareth House, Bishop Street (1941 - 1947)

4. I remember very little about my time in Nazareth House. I know I have a scar on my leg from when I was little but I do not know exactly what happened to cause the scarring. I thought I fell into the back of a fire but I am not sure if it was a burn or a cut, or if it happened at Nazareth House or at home.
5. I think my sister [REDACTED] was also in care with me, as she told me that she could recall one day in Nazareth House when I would not share a bicycle with her. I was a very determined child and I wanted the bicycle to myself, so one of the nuns [REDACTED] SR 83 beat me with her belt on my legs for not sharing. My mother's brother, Uncle [REDACTED] took [REDACTED] to England when she was fourteen, and sent her to work in convents as a cleaner and a cook.
6. I recall being taken by the nuns on holiday to Sligo and Fahan. They had a place there and they would take the children on holiday there, once or twice a year by bus.
7. I went to school in Bishop Street.
8. I do not recall being asked whether or not I wanted to go to Australia. I just remember being told I was going there. My mother told me in later years that [REDACTED] SR 84 signed me out, giving authority for me to go to Australia but no-one ever asked my mother for permission. [REDACTED] SR 84 completed the relevant paperwork including the relevant medical documentation, but I do not recall receiving a medical examination prior to departure.
9. I sailed on 29 August 1947 on the SS Asturias. I recall there were hundreds of people on the ship and there were only two nuns to look after us and one nurse, so it was chaotic on board the ship at times. We used to run off and hide in the picture theatre on the ship just to get away and have a bit of fun. I recall a lot of the children were seasick on the ship.

PRIVATE

Nazareth House, Geraldton (1947 - 1965)

10. We disembarked at Fremantle on 22 September 1947 and we were met by Bishop Gamba, Monsignor Langley, Monsignor O'Connor and Cardinal Gilroy and we were taken by bus to Nazareth House, Geraldton. A lot of the children were separated from their friends. Some were taken to St Joseph's Orphanage and some went to Geraldton. I was taken to Geraldton. I recall that a lot of the children were crying on the bus trip. We were dressed for winter, but it was really warm on arrival in Australia. The journey took a long time but it is much quicker to get there now, as the roads have been greatly improved.
11. I recall I got one beating at Geraldton. I was waving goodbye to one of the college girls, and I was hanging over the balcony on the veranda at the time. It was really high and if I had fallen I would have been killed so SAU 5 SAU 5 was trying to protect me at the time, so when I look back she was right to hit me.
12. There was one nurse SAU 6 who was very kind and if anyone was in trouble they went to her and she would comfort them.
13. We had to work hard at Geraldton. We had to wax the dormitories on our hands and knees and clean all the windows, lights, walls and ceilings.
14. My only complaint about Geraldton was that I had to intervene when I saw the nuns beat the other children. I never gave the nuns any reason to beat me and I tried to be good during my time in care there.
15. One day I asked SAU 5 who my mother and father were and she said to me 'dear your mother and father are dead, now run along and play'. I longed for my family because the Australian girls had visits from their families once a week.

PRIVATE

16. I worked hard for the nuns. I worked as a cleaner at Nazareth House from when I was thirteen until I was fifteen. I also helped them to look after patients in an old people's home in Nazareth House. I then worked as a cleaner for a man name [REDACTED] from the age of sixteen to nineteen. I worked at St John of Gods Hospital in Geraldton then as a kitchen assistant from the age of nineteen, for between six months to a year. I worked as a dental nurse in Geraldton until I was twenty three years old. I loved that job.

17. I was subjected to sexual abuse by a priest at Geraldton. His name was [REDACTED] AU 19 He is now deceased. He continued a relationship with me from I was sixteen years old until I was twenty four. I was in love with him and he ended the relationship, leaving me broken hearted. He left the priesthood and married a Polish girl named [REDACTED] who was younger than me. The nuns found out about this relationship and sent me to Nazareth House in Fremantle. I had a nervous breakdown there as a result of my failed relationship, and I could no longer eat or sleep. The nuns moved me to Heathcote which was a psychiatric facility. I also attended another psychiatric facility called Greylands in Claremont and I continued to go in and out of psychiatric care for many years thereafter.

18. I had a partial stroke whilst in Heathcote and I lost my memory. They gave me electric shock treatment and injections that constantly hurt me. In fact I think their treatment of me has resulted in brain damage. I still have to have regular injections to keep my mood stable. I never had any visitors throughout my time in Heathcote. The staff were cruel to me and left me feeling very disorientated. I often saw them beating patients. They drugged me heavily and then put us out in the cold to have our tea, or they would lock you up even though you were going through a very traumatic time. I have suffered severe depression.

PRIVATE

19. I made friends with a girl called [REDACTED] in Heathcote and she helped me with my depression as I just wanted to die, and she tried to give me enthusiasm to get on with my life. I was returned to stay with the nuns at Nazareth House, Hilton Park in Fremantle, and [REDACTED] rang me as she had arranged a blind date with a man called [REDACTED] for me. I was twenty seven years old at this stage.

Life After Care

20. I married [REDACTED] in 1971 when I was thirty years old. We had three children, two daughters and a son. My husband had a drink and a gambling problem. In the end he gambled all of our savings and we lost our family home because of his addiction, so now I live in a smaller property.

21. I started looking for my mother in 1978. I wrote to the Sisters of Nazareth in Derry and advised that I was trying to get in touch with my family. I then got a letter from my sister [REDACTED]. I cried upon receipt of this letter.

22. I visited [REDACTED] and my mother in Ireland in 1984. My mother and I both cried when we met again, but I told her that I did not mean to hurt her or cause her any upset. I asked her why she had given me up and she said it was not her decision but that my grandmother decided to put me in care. She was embarrassed by my turning up and she did not want anyone to know that I was her daughter. She told me to tell people that we were just friends. I refused and said I wanted people to know the truth and to know that she was proud of me, as I had come a long way to see her.

23. My sister [REDACTED] welcomed me with open arms when I returned to Northern Ireland. As she was caring for my mother and I was there for six weeks, I was able to help out and give her a break. I then went to England to visit my sister [REDACTED] on this trip but she was less welcoming when I met her for the first time. She was always quieter and more reserved than [REDACTED] but we still correspond with each other and keep in touch.

PRIVATE

24. I have been over to meet my relatives five times. On one occasion I had won \$1000 AUD on the lottery so this helped to pay for one trip. Another trip was funded by the UK government. It is always a good reunion when I visit, but I don't think I will go again as it would be too much for me now. I would love my sister [REDACTED] to visit me in Australia.

25. I visited Nazareth House when I was in Ireland. I cried during the visit as I felt very emotional. The nuns were great and made us feel very welcome when we paid them a visit. In my view they were really heroes. They were hard and tough. They themselves worked long hours, and they had to cater for children, babies, the elderly and themselves, so they had to cater for many different needs.

26. My mother had five brothers [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] gave me a claddagh ring which I passed on to the family. [REDACTED] is now deceased. He died one night when he was staying with my sister [REDACTED] in England. He was ninety four years old.

27. My mother had a twin sister called [REDACTED] and I met her also in Strabane. She died when she was eighty four years old. My mother also died at this age, but I could not attend her funeral due to a bomb scare at Perth airport.

28. My mother did not want me to know my father. Her twin sister [REDACTED] told me one day that she wanted to tell me who my father was. She said it was a brother of [REDACTED] a man called [REDACTED]. She sent me discuss it with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] said that if he was my father he never told anyone and he took it to his grave with him. He is deceased now and buried in [REDACTED]. All my trips to Ireland were for six weeks but the last time I visited was in 2012 with my daughter [REDACTED] and we went for four weeks. The purpose of the visit was to find my father's grave. I visited his grave and felt overwhelmed when I was there. I would have loved to have met him. [REDACTED] and I also

PRIVATE

visited Scotland and England during that trip and we stayed for two days with the nuns at Hammersmith.

29. I have had continuous poor mental health since leaving care. At times I still want to lie down on my bed and cry. I attended counselling but I do not wish to attend any longer as I found it of limited benefit for someone with my background. I was still receiving psychiatric treatment when my children were younger, but fortunately they help me a lot and I have not had to return to a psychiatric facility since my daughter turned sixteen. She is now forty one years old. I suffer from bipolar disorder but it is kept under control by the injections I receive every eight weeks.

30. My memory of being in care is that I longed for someone to cuddle me but the reality is that there was no-one there to do that. I craved affection but there was no-one there throughout my time in care to show me any affection. I keep in touch with the ex-Geraldton girls and they are a real lifeline for me, they are like sisters.

Statement of Truth

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

Sign **HIA 330**

Dated 23-10-2003