

PRIVATE

HIA REF: 349

Witness Name HIA 349

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 349

HIA 349 will say as follows:-

Personal Details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Londonderry. My mother was called [REDACTED] and she was a single mother when I was born. I think I was born in a workhouse in Derry.
2. To the best of my knowledge I was placed in a baby home with the Sisters of Nazareth in Bishop Street, Derry until I was two years old and then I was transferred on 4 June 1942 to St Joseph's Children's Home, Termonbacca. My mother had me when she was forty three years old and she died in 1945 when I was only five years old. She had suffered for a period with chronic colitis and her death certificate notes she died from cardiac failure.

St Joseph's Children's Home, Termonbacca (4 June 1942 - 28 August 1947)

3. I remember only a few things about my time in Termonbacca. I recall often being locked out in the cold as a punishment for wetting the bed. I was freezing and my feet hurt as I had to stand out in the cold hard ground. I also recall that we were bathed in very cold water in the home.

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4. I remember walking from Termonbacca to school at Bishop Street although I cannot recall very much about my time at school. I do not recall the names of any of the teachers or the individual nuns in the home as it was so long ago.
5. I do not recall any discussions regarding Australia prior to our departure and I do not have any memory of being asked whether or not I wanted to go. My Child Migration Form was signed by SR 81 the Mother Superior of St Joseph's Home, Termonbacca as my guardian and is dated 7 May 1947. I do not recall having a medical examination but I have obtained a copy of my medical examination form which is dated 10 July 1947.
6. I do not recall how many boys came on the sailing from Termonbacca or who we picked up along the way but we sailed on the SS Asturias from Liverpool to Fremantle on 29 August 1947. We arrived on 22 September 1947. I have few memories of the journey to Australia other than being seasick a lot during the trip. We did not have females looking after us but I think a few Christian Brothers came to look after us. I recall during the trip we stopped at Port Said in Egypt and I saw people from the ship throwing pennies down into the water and natives diving in to get them. We were allowed to run around the ship at times.

Castledare Boy's Home (1947 – 1950)

7. When we arrived at Fremantle we were given oranges by a local politician who was there to greet us. I was then taken by bus to Castledare. Some of the other boys went on to Clontarf but I remained at Castledare from I was seven years old until I was ten.
8. I recall I used to wet the bed at Castledare. As punishment I was made to stand in front of the other children with the wet sheet over me.

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9. [REDACTED] BAU 25 is the only Brother I can recall at Castledare. I know that I was punished by the Brothers for running away from Castledare but I cannot recall who punished me for absconding.

10. I was transferred to Bindoon when I was ten years old.

Bindoon Boy's Home (1950 -1956)

11. I recall more about Bindoon as I was a lot older then. I remember being flogged by [REDACTED] BAU 26 for calling him names and answering back. Brother [REDACTED] BAU 1 often hit me with a cane or on the backside with a lump of wood for minor misdemeanours or just when he felt like it. He seemed to be in a rage all the time. I tried to avoid him during my time in Bindoon.

12. The work was hard at Bindoon. We milked cows, mixed lime and cement, picked up large rocks from the bush to help with the building work and we did all this barefoot. I recall stealing fruit from the orchard and food from the pigs as we were constantly hungry at Bindoon. The Brothers would come out looking for us with torches at night trying to catch us stealing food.

13. I was sexually abused by older boys at Bindoon and physically abused by the Brothers.

14. When I left Bindoon I could hardly read or write as there was no focus on educating the children. When I turned sixteen the Brothers arranged for me to work in East Perth in a signwriting shop. I worked for a man named Mr [REDACTED]. I earned £3.00 per week and paid half on my board and lodgings to the Catholic lady [REDACTED] that I stayed with at the time. I stayed with another boy from Clontarf. She had a grown up family and her husband had died so she was considered a suitable landlady. I only stayed there nine months as I had been promised an apprenticeship and it never materialised.

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15. I found my own jobs after that and worked at a wheat and sheep farm for a couple of years at [REDACTED] and then worked further North at a sheep and cattle farm. I had a boss there who kicked me around and threatened to return me to Bindoon so I moved on to driving trucks back in Perth when I was nineteen or twenty. I did mining work at [REDACTED] in Queensland when I was twenty one but was involved in an accident in the mines so after that I stayed at [REDACTED] and drove a concrete truck for twenty five years retiring just before I turned sixty as I had to have a lung operation.

16. I never heard from the Child Welfare Department when I turned twenty one and I never received any money from them or any correspondence at that time.

17. In 1997 I liaised with a social worker in relation to tracing my birth mother. An Irish friend that I worked with had obtained a copy of my birth certificate for me before I retired and it made me curious to find out more about my past.

Life after care

18. I married my wife [REDACTED] when I was forty five years old and we have two sons who are now twenty three and twenty eight years of age. I was put in touch with my cousin [REDACTED] by the Catholic Migrant Centre in Victoria Square, Perth. Her mother and my mother were sisters but she was unaware of my existence. I visited her for the first time in 2003 and she was very welcoming. She gave me photographs of my mother who had died by the time I made contact with my cousin [REDACTED]. Unfortunately my relatives could not tell me a great deal about my mother. [REDACTED] lives in Donegal. She has two daughters and four sons so I now have a lot of family in Donegal. I visited Nazareth House in Bishop Street during this visit. I spoke with a young nun but she was too young to even recall that it had been a boy's home in the past.

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19. I was assisted financially by the Australian Government to pay for my trip to Ireland in 2003. I returned to visit my relatives in Ireland in 2008 and this trip was funded by the Christian Brothers. My last two trips to Ireland in 2011 and 2013 were assisted by the British Government following their apology to the child migrants. My wife and I visited Nazareth House, Bishop Street. My cousin [REDACTED] son was driving us around that day and we spoke to a nun and she told us that the home was in fact closing down in the very near future. We also visited Termonbacca but I did not recognise the exterior of the building.

20. In my view my time in care left me awkward around women and I lacked social skills. I think it is the reason why I married very late in life. I would have liked to have the opportunity to marry much earlier in life and to have grandchildren now. I also keep in close contact now with all my Irish relatives. My cousins have grown up families and every time I visit there are more relatives to meet and they welcome me with open arms. I often wonder how life would have been if I could have been close to my family and extended family throughout my childhood. I acutely feel the pain of that separation throughout my life and that is why I keep going back to visit my relatives regularly. It saddens me when I think that access was denied to me for so many years.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed _____
[REDACTED]

Dated 23-10-2013