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HIA REF: 350

Witness Name **HIA 350****THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995**

WITNESS STATEMENT OF **HIA 350**

HIA 350 will say as follows:-**Personal details**

1. I was born on **[REDACTED]** 1940 in County Derry.
2. I lived with my mother and older brother **AU 97**. I remember having a warm and loving relationship with both of them. My father did not live in the family home. My brother and I were placed in care when I was nearly six years old and he was nine years old. Our mother died on **[REDACTED]**
[REDACTED]

Nazareth House, Bishop Street (8/1/1946 – 28/8/1947)

3. I was sent to Nazareth House when I was nearly six years old. I remained there until I was seven.
4. During the day I often spent time going to school, doing prayers, playing in the playground and playing games such as skipping and hopscotch. Sunday was 'treat day' and we would get to see our families. My uncle **[REDACTED]** would bring my brother **AU 97** over to visit or take me to visit him. After my first

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communion in May 1947 all contact with my family stopped. I was devastated and constantly asked where my brother was.

5. I ran away from Nazareth House on two occasions back to my house which was close by. Someone always found me and took me back. Once I was put into a dormitory without a meal for that day as punishment for running away.
6. I took an IQ test while in Nazareth House and Brother Conlin, a Nun and a government official were there. I was patted on the head and told I was a 'clever and smart girl' and was going to go on a trip to Australia. There were five junior children and a few aged fourteen years old. We were given the impression that life was going to be like a fairytale, with lots of fruit, sunshine and kind people.
7. I left on 28th August 1947 when I was taken to Australia. I sailed on the 29th August 1947 on the SS Asturias. We realised we weren't going back home and we were not allowed to send letters back to our families. I was denied any effort to see my family and my brother was unable to locate me.
8. I was medically examined before I left Northern Ireland. I was seen by a British Medical Officer and I recall injections which left scabs on my arms. **SR 140** helped to clean this.
9. **SR 132** and **SR 133** accompanied us to Australia and from the beginning I suffered pain at the hands of the Sisters of Nazareth. The voyage was really difficult. **SR 133** was kind and good but **SR 132** threw me across the ship's deck for talking to boy migrants. This happened on a couple of occasions and I was thrown into items on the ship which I remember was very painful. The first time this happened was shortly after disembarking from Northern Ireland. I was speaking to the boys trying to find out some information about my brother. **AU 97 SR 132** beat me with her belt when I asked where my brother was and she hit me with her leather strap numerous times over my body. She did this to some of the other girls too.

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10. I arrived in Fremantle on 23rd September 1947 and I was taken to Nazareth House in Geraldton, Western Australia. The home was run by the Sisters of Nazareth.

Nazareth House, Geraldton, Western Australia (23/9/1947 – 1959)

11. **SR 132** and **SR 133** went to Nazareth House. **SR 132** regularly beat me and other girls in the home. We were regularly stripped naked and beaten in front of other children. This was often at times when we were menstruating.
12. On one occasion **SR 132** kicked me down the stairs. This was just after she had kicked a girl so viciously her life was at risk. One girl **SAU 6** told **SAU 6** that if **SR 132** was not removed she might end up committing murder. **SR 132** either left the Order or was dismissed in 1950.
13. **SAU 8** took over from **SR 132**. She was excessively brutal in her punishments and everyone feared her. I remember being laid across a bench in the red bathroom and stripped and leathered. I was often punished for having soiled underwear and we had to stand to have our underwear inspected. At times of menstruation we were given one pad per day.
14. **SAU 8** would have banged two girls' heads together then box us around the ears. I remember seeing 'stars' after this. It might have been for something as simple as having a stain on our pinafores.
15. I was left handed and I often got punished for this. I was hit across the knuckles with the edge of a ruler ^{of} the leather belt with Rosary beads hanging off it. My knuckles were swollen and bruised following this. Sisters **SR 132** and **SAU 8** were evil. **SAU 7** was mother superior in the 1950s. She had a cruel streak and would assist **SAU 8** in

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punishments. One held you down while the other strapped your stripped body.

1. SAU 9 had a terrible temper. She had outbursts of rage when she would lash out uncontrollably and hit us with either the bamboo stick or strap. She had moments when she calmed down and would give us a boiled lolly.

17. I consider myself bright and intelligent. I wanted to do well academically and I really wanted to become a nurse SAU 5 a teacher at Geraldton was told by Mr McDonald, a government inspector that I must go on to further education. However I was not selected to continue my education. I felt I was perceived as a trouble maker and outspoken.

18. My years in Nazareth House, Geraldton were very unhappy. The Sisters of Nazareth denied me any contact with my family and constantly told me I was an orphan. I pleaded to be allowed to see my brother but I was forbidden to speak of him or Ireland. Trying to deny my memories of my family gave me nightmares. When I did SAU 9 would give me a raw egg mixed with some sugar.

19. In the home I saw a great deal of injustice. If I spoke out against them I was punished for it. I remember one day covering a six year old girl's wet bed to protect her from getting hit with the belt. I got the beating instead for being sneaky and dishonest.

20. When I was twelve or thirteen I was sent out on day visits during my summer holidays with the AU 96 family. Mrs. [redacted] was an invalid and the children of the family were all adults. I was well developed as a girl and I was sexually assaulted by Mr. AU 96. He fondled my breasts and genitals whilst pushing himself against me. This happened on two occasions. I didn't know what to do. On my return to Nazareth House I reported this to SAU 6 and she scolded me for making trouble. I told her I was telling the truth and refused to go back to that family.

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21. A friend of mine was then sent to the AU 96 family during the next summer holidays. She was small for her age and timid and I warned her of what might happen. I still worry about what she was exposed to because SAU 6 did not report the abuse I had told her about.

22. I was sent away from Ireland when I had already formed loving memories with my family. I remembered my family home, the street where I lived and many of my extended family. Most of all I remembered my big brother whom I adored. I wrote letters in my school book pages but I am sure they were never sent.

23. When I was 16 I was effectively bonded as a servant to a prominent Catholic family called the [REDACTED]. I was still under the care and protection of the Nazareth Sisters and I was unhappy with my work conditions. I felt like a leper as I was not allowed to mix with the family. I was ill-treated, overworked and underpaid. I moved on and worked as a kitchen hand at St. Thomas Moore College. I had a caring supervisor and I was much happier there.

24. During my time at the [REDACTED] and St. Thomas Moore College an amount of 10 shillings was paid weekly into a trust account for me. I was meant to be given this when I turned twenty one years of age. I still have never received it.

25. I left Western Australia when I was nineteen years of age determined to escape the harsh regime of the Sisters of Nazareth and the Child Welfare Department. I went to Melbourne but I spent my time there looking over my shoulder terrified of being sent back to Western Australia. I was still Ward of the State until I was twenty one years old.

Life after care

26. After I left care I found a job at [REDACTED] hospital as a kitchen hand. I met my husband [REDACTED] there. When I turned twenty one I wrote to Sisters SAU 6 and

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SAU 7 requesting my birth certificate and the accrued monies in my trust account. I got no reply. I attended a business college and eventually got a good office job. **SAU 7** and I married and had two sons together. These were life affirming events for me but I never gave up hope of finding my brother **AU 97**

27. I wrote to the Child Welfare Department in 1956 and a letter to **SAU 7** Bishop Street, Derry'. My aunt **SAU 7** replied to me in 1957. I learnt that my mother had died in 1946 and I was^v able to make contact with my father. I sought all the help I could to locate my brother. I contacted the **SAU 7** family, Father Owen O'Connor, and the Department of Health and Social Services in the United Kingdom with no success in finding my brother.

28. My mental health was suffering as a consequence and I was treated for an anxiety and nervous disorder. I was prescribed tranquilisers and antidepressants over a long period of time. In 1976 I suffered a serious breakdown and was admitted to Mercy Hospital.

29. In 1978 I contacted **SR 133** in **SAU 7** and begged her to find out what she could about my brother. She gave me a handwritten note which she discovered in Nazareth House. All formal requests to the Sisters of Nazareth and the Church in Ireland for information were not responded to. I attended Sisters of Nazareth's Head Office in London with my husband where I met **SAU 5** who had been at GERALTON. I refused to meet with **SAU 8** **SAU 8** I was told that the Order could not be of any assistance in my search.

30. In 1979 my mental health deteriorated again. I tried the Salvation Army Investigation Unit to help me locate **AU 97** but to no avail. In 1981 I came back to Nazareth House, Derry and had a heated confrontation with one of the Sisters. They refused to help me. My cousins helped me to check every Parish and we approached priests in Derry to assist us but to no avail again. I even contacted Canadian authorities in my search.

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31. I continued to search from 1981 to 1991 and I eventually received a letter from **SR 2** dated 7th February 1992. It gave me my brother's details and where he had gone to find work. I then received a letter from the Bishop of Derry telling me my brother died in 1989. I became unwell again as I realised that the records had been available but prevented me finding my brother before his death.

32. I discovered that my brother had a hard upbringing. He was mistreated by the family he lived with and he was sexually abused while in the care of the church. I am overwhelmed with grief that I did not find my brother before his death. I blame the Sisters of Nazareth entirely for this. I requested information from them in 1956 and I have no explanation as to why there was such a delay in providing this **SR 133** was able to give me some information in 1978 and this indicated that records were available at that time.

33. I cannot accept the denial of contact with my brother. This was clearly with the powers of the Sister of Nazareth and it would have spared my brother and I considerable anguish and suffering.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed **HIA 350**

Dated 2/5/14