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HIA REF: 24

Witness Name: HIA 24

## THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

## WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 24

I, HIA 24 will say as follows:-

Personal Details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] Downpatrick.
2. Before I was born, my mother [REDACTED] lived in the [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] Downpatrick. She used to work in the mills. Then she lived in Killyleagh.
3. I never met my father. His name was [REDACTED] and he was a labourer. My mother and he eloped to Belfast to get married in 1932. It was a mixed marriage; she was Catholic and he was Protestant.
4. I have three older siblings [NL 36] [NHB 20] and [NL 38] and five younger siblings [NL 37], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].
5. My younger brother [NL 37] was in Nazareth Lodge at the same time as me but I never saw him because he was four or five years younger than me and we were kept in different groups.
6. My older brother [NL 36] was in Nazareth Lodge before me but not at the same time I was in.

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7. My older sister **NHB 20** was in Nazareth House and then she went to France to \_\_\_\_\_ She has since \_\_\_\_\_ got married and had three daughters and grandchildren.

**Nazareth Lodge, Belfast (21<sup>st</sup> December 1945 – 24<sup>th</sup> September 1953)**

8. I was placed in Nazareth Lodge when I was four years old. I had been living in a caravan in Co. Tyrone with my mother and my older brother **NL 38**. One day, I was out playing with my brother and he told me to run. I saw two policemen chasing me so I ran into the caravan and hid in a blanket box. The policemen found me and lifted me out by the arms. They put me in a car and drove me somewhere to put me in care. I was kicking, screaming and crying. The reason **NL 38** and I were on our own was because my mother was at work in the airport base at the time.
9. The records state that I was placed in Nazareth Lodge in December 1945 but I dispute this as I would not have been playing outside in December. I also remember my brother **NL 37** being brought into the home in February 1946 and at that stage I had been in Nazareth Lodge for much longer than two months – it was closer to nine months or a year.
10. I was never given any explanation for why I was taken to Nazareth Lodge. I have since found out that my records state the NSPCC Belfast recommended my placement. I have written to the NSPCC but they have no record of me. They said they only have records of cases where they gave evidence in court. My mother was on the run from my father at the time as they had a troubled marriage. My father was a violent alcoholic.
11. My older brother **NL 38** did not get taken to Nazareth Lodge with me that day. I never understood that. It was like they were targeting me. **NL 38** remained living with my mother. None of my four youngest siblings after **NL 37** were put in care either.

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12. In Nazareth Lodge, we slept in big dormitories. There were about twenty boys in each dormitory. We were grouped by age but there would be older boys in the dormitory as well. When the nuns would go to evening prayers and evening meals, they would delegate responsibility to the older boys. They were in charge of us more often than not. While we were in bed, the older boys would come round with a big stick and beat us. This went on continuously but nobody ever said anything. A nun would sleep in a small wooden cubicle in the dormitory but it had no windows so the nun never knew what was going on outside. You learned to keep your head under the blanket and not make any noise.
13. Later on at night, your blanket would go back and one of the older boys would take you out of your bed and bring you to his. There were a few older boys who did this to me. I remember one of the boys' names was **DL 104?** but I don't know his first name. Another boy called **NL 39** also used to sexually abuse me in the Lodge. They would make me perform sexual acts on them. They forced me to masturbate them and would try to push my head down to give them oral sex but I resisted that.
14. I would have been about six years old and they would have been up to fourteen. It wasn't until 1951 that older boys were transferred to Rubane so that is why there were boys of fourteen in the Lodge. Sometimes when we were in the toilets, we would get attacked by older boys. They would always try to get you on your own when nobody else was around. They would be trying to rape us and if you weren't quick enough that was bad luck. I was never fully raped but **NL 39** tried to rape me on a couple of occasions.
15. The routine in Nazareth Lodge was we got up at about 7am, got dressed and went down for breakfast which was toast or something. On Fridays you'd get a boiled egg and a little thing of butter. The food was very poor but it was just after the war. After breakfast we went to school which was onsite. The school was very basic. I learned Latin because I was an altar boy. They sent three or four of us to the Ard Scoil on the Falls Road but the younger boys didn't like it and started crying so they took us out again. As an altar boy, I served Mass

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and benedictions and marched at the front of holy parades. I was also in the choir until one day we all had to sing by ourselves and I got thrown out. I think my voice was breaking at the time. This upset me because the choir had been promised sweets at Easter and sweets were a rarity in the Lodge.

16. We wore shorts all the time with an orange jacket. The bedding was just blankets and sheets and I don't think we had pyjamas. It was quite warm in bed because they had central heating with big radiators. After school we would go to a big common room where there was a gramophone and a radio. Outside, there was a big field and when I got older, we had our own gardening section where we grew gooseberries and things like that.

17. On bath nights, we all had to strip naked and get into a queue. There would be two nuns, one on each side of the bath. The nuns I remember are Sister **SR 146** **SR 36** **SR 100** and the Reverend Mother. They would bathe two boys at a time. The nuns washed us with carbolic soap and their hands. If you were messing around in the queue, you would get a good dunking in the bath. I never saw them change the water or add hot water but it was warmish. We would stand and wait to be dried then. We got bathed every Saturday evening for Sunday Mass and we always got a bath before feast days.

18. We used to have to clean the dormitories with this thing they called a bumper. It was extremely heavy and if you weren't getting on well with it, you'd get a dig or a clout from one of the older boys. You were brutalised. As I got older, they started sending the older boys to Rubane, so there wasn't as much of an age gap in the dormitories. They sent the first group of older boys to Rubane in 1951 when I was ten. The older boys were sent to Rubane at twelve so we didn't have it as bad. At least then there weren't fourteen year old boys in the dormitory with six year olds.

19. The nuns were also violent with us sometimes. When I was nine we went for Confirmation. It was the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1951. I was sitting there in the church with the other boys when all of a sudden I was dragged out by the ear. I can't

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remember her name but a nun dragged me down the aisle and slapped me on the back of the head, saying 'you're not baptised'. How was I supposed to know I hadn't been baptised? They were really angry about that though because I had been an altar boy and had received Communion. It upset them to think they had a pagan in the community.

20. They were also angry because this all happened while the Bishop Dr Mageean was there. I ended up getting baptised and confirmed on that same day in March 1951. My records from Nazareth Lodge state that I was baptised in St. Brigid's Church, Belfast but that is wrong – it was Holy Rosary Church on the Ormeau Road. They also got my date of birth wrong on my records.

21. My mother came up to visit me a few times in Nazareth Lodge but not that often because she was living outside Belfast and travelling was difficult in those times. Before these visits, the nuns told me to be careful what I said. I knew what they meant – not to be saying anything derogatory. During the visit, we would just sit out in the field and talk for about an hour. Even though my brother **NL 37** was in the nursery in Nazareth Lodge, he was never brought on these visits with my mother. I never saw him after he was brought in. When he was brought in, they took me over to the nursery and said this is your brother but that was the last I ever saw of him.

22. I never saw anybody from the Welfare or anyone coming to inspect Nazareth Lodge while I was there. The nit-nurse and the dentist used to come out.

23. I was sent out for weekends a few times to different families, I remember one of them was a doctor. I also went out to visit my mother a couple of times. She was living in an army hut on the    Road at that stage.

24. At Christmas we used to go to Mackies for a party. We would get an apple, an orange and a couple of nuts in a bag.

25. When the time came for me to leave Nazareth Lodge, I was just told one day to get on the bus and we were driven to Rubane. All we had was the clothes on our backs.

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Rubane House, Kircubbin (24<sup>th</sup> September 1953 – 9<sup>th</sup> September 1955)

26. I was transferred to Rubane when I was twelve years old in September 1953.

I was sent with a group of boys aged eleven upwards.

27. When we arrived at Rubane, we were just told there's your bed and that was it. We slept in dormitories but they were smaller than at Nazareth Lodge, there was only about six in each dormitory. The age range was from about twelve to fourteen. When I was in Rubane, it was just the big main house.

28. The routine at Rubane was we got up, got dressed and went down for breakfast which was mainly porridge. The Brothers sat separately to us and they got a cooked breakfast every morning. We had to go into the kitchen and fetch their breakfast for them. It was the same at dinnertime. We had potatoes and boiled leeks. The boys called them snots because they were so disgusting looking. The Brothers had a completely different diet to us.

29. We went to school onsite. I learned very little. The Brothers did the teaching themselves. I remember **BR 17** and **BR 56**. **BR 17** was a big tall man with a completely bald head. Brother **BR 18** was the Director and the Farm Manager but we didn't see much of him. He was a smaller man with grey hair and seemed a lot older. In the evening we could read a book or something but during the summer we were mainly working.

30. We worked on the farm picking potatoes and we got sixpence a week for it, which we could spend in the tuck shop onsite. We were taken out on the farm at about 7 in the morning and you stayed until it was done. We were often there until 6 or 7 at night. We worked on different farms bringing in the cows, picking potatoes and bringing in the corn and barley. Some of the farm was owned by the Brothers but other work was done for outside farms. It was hard work but some of the farmers used to make us homemade soup and big floury potatoes with butter which was a treat.

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31. **BR 55** was in charge of us when we were playing in the field out the back. He was really old and if you had to ask his permission for something he would pull you close and make you whisper in his ear. Then he would put his hand up your shorts and fondle you. If you tried to pull away, he'd nip you. He would be sat there with his own hand inside his smock while he was fondling you.
32. The Brothers could be really violent. **BR 17** was my teacher and if you did something wrong he would bring you outside and hit you with thick straps or big belts. If they were really annoyed, the Brothers would arrange a boxing match and put you in with someone much bigger as punishment. **BR 55** never beat me, he just fondled the boys.
33. The facilities at Rubane included a sports hall and a woodwork shop. There was also an orchard and the Brothers used to gather us all at the front of the building and throw apples for us to fight over. The apples were really bitter and sour but they were still apples. The Brothers used to bring us swimming to Strangford Lough three or four times a year.
34. In the evenings, we watched television and then we went to bed at about 9pm. At night, we were just left in the dormitory. There was nobody supervising us. I never knew where the Brothers slept.
35. When I was 14, it was time for me to leave Rubane. I turned 14 in June but they didn't let me out until September so I could help on the farm for the summer. The Brothers just called me over one day and told me to put my uniform on. A man called **DL 367** came to collect me in a car. He was a Welfare Officer. I had never met him before that day. I went to stay with my mother in **[REDACTED]**
36. I never remember any sexual abuse by the boys in Rubane or any homosexuality between the boys. There was only about twenty of us there when I was there. Apart from **BR 55** none of the other Brothers interfered with me or sexually abused me in Rubane.

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Life after care

37. When I left Rubane, **DL 367** got me a job in a motel where I lived in. I would work all day and then they would lock me in at night. I wasn't long out of Rubane at this stage; I was about 14 or 15. One day, there was nobody around and the door was open so I ran away. I started getting my own jobs then. Mostly, I did labouring because I had no skills.

38. I worked in the mills and then I worked in Quarries for three or four years. My cousin **[REDACTED]** got me a job there. He was a reserve in the British Army so I joined up and I did a few stints in North Africa and Germany. I was in the Army for three years from 1960 to 1963. I was medically discharged after I picked up a bug in Tripoli. I moved to England then with a former Army colleague of mine from the Shankill called **[REDACTED]**. He was in the Royal Irish Fusiliers with me.

39. I don't have a close relationship with any of my siblings. The ones that were in the home never really settled and we lost that family link. I never felt like I belonged to a family because a family grows up together. My eldest brother **NL 36** joined the Royal Navy and then the Merchant Navy and stayed in it most of his life. My brother **NL 37** comes over from Belfast to visit now and again.

40. I met my wife **[REDACTED]** in 1967 and we moved to England. We've stayed here ever since. We've been together almost 47 years. We have two grown daughters, **[REDACTED]** and **[REDACTED]**. I have a close relationship with them and my four grandchildren.

41. However, I have never told anyone about the abuse I suffered until the Inquiry. My wife only found out about my background recently and she still doesn't know the extent of the abuse I suffered. My daughter only found all this out when I came to the Inquiry. I kept it all to myself because I didn't want other people to be bothered by it. I love my kids and grandkids but I find it



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hard to show it. My daughter says she knew I loved her growing up but I never said it and I was never affectionate. It's only in the last five years I've started to give them a little cuddle or a peck on the cheek every now and then.

42. My memories of the home have never left me. They're still with me today. Sometimes I go to bed at night and it's still rushing through my head. I have never been for counselling and I don't think I would want to go. My faith has long gone by the wayside. I didn't baptise my kids because of my experiences growing up. I left it to them to decide if they wanted to follow a faith.

43. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to the police. Growing up, you were scared of the police, you were scared of the priests, and you were scared of anyone in authority. You learned to stay clear of them.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

**HIA 24**

Dated 27-2-2014

ITS FUNNY THAT A MOVIE HAS JUST BEEN  
RELEASSED THIS YEAR.

12 YEARS A SLAVE

THIS IS WHAT I THINK OF MY TIME IN  
HOMES

**HIA 24**