

HIA REF: 97

Witness Name: HIA 97

## THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

## WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 97

I, HIA 97 will say as follows:-

**Personal Details**

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Surrey in Guildford. My father was a graduate from [REDACTED] and he had a problem with alcohol. He worked for an English company. He had been a [REDACTED] with the [REDACTED] and he then moved back to Southern Ireland and then to the North of Ireland, just outside [REDACTED]
2. My brother DL 373 is six years younger than me. He was born in Daisyhill hospital. My father went back down to Dublin to get his old job that he had before the war at the [REDACTED]. In those days you got accommodation with the job. However my father died when he was only forty five years old. His death is recorded as being due to diabetes but my father was diabetic and he neglected to take his injections when he was drinking so his death was also drink related. As he died in Dublin my mother only received half of the ordinary state pension and no work pension so we were left homeless. She got a cleaning job in [REDACTED] but the RUC arrested her for not having a proper work permit.
3. I was often truant from school and I was a bit of a handful because I wanted all the things that the other children had and she could not provide them for

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me. She took me to Armagh to see a psychiatrist or a social worker, I think it was someone linked in some way to Social Services. They must have suggested that I be placed in Rubane House, Kircubbin. I was sent there in 1957 when I was [REDACTED]. My brother **DL 373** joined me a year later. He was only 6 years old, coming on 7 at the time he entered the home. He was admitted to Rubane House on 23 June 1958 and discharged on 30 July 1959. There were no other boys his age in the home.

**Rubane House, Kircubbin (29/12/1957 – 30/07/1959)**

4. **BR 17** [REDACTED] was the brother in charge when I arrived. He went on to become the headmaster of a [REDACTED]. He is now deceased. **BR 39** [REDACTED] the brother responsible for setting up the home, had come from [REDACTED] which was a borstal but it has since closed down. I assumed we were all orphans or children from single parent families like myself but they would send lads that were due for release from the borstal in Milltown down to Kircubbin and they mixed them all in with us. It was horrific really.
  
5. We had to work 250 acres of land and we had to do it by hand. The day started very early. You got up at 6am and went to mass every day. You had to clean your dormitories. They split me up from my brother and they put me down to stay in the farmhouse itself. They used to put the lads down there that wet the bed. I think I was wetting myself with fear. **BR 15** [REDACTED] the music teacher, **BR 13** [REDACTED] and **BR 12** [REDACTED] the farm manager, also stayed in the farmhouse. Only three or four boys stayed there. I can recall one boy was called [REDACTED] but I do not recall the others. I only ever saw my brother when he was getting punished. He died due to bowel cancer two years ago in [REDACTED]. He has lived in [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] for over forty years and his wife was [REDACTED]. I visited him there before he died in February 2010 and he told me he had been abused seven times by the Brothers at Rubane House. He did not give me any detail regarding the identity of the

Brothers responsible or the nature of the abuse that took place. It was a taboo subject between us until then.

6. They had him washing dishes and if he broke a dish he lost four shillings which was significant as he only earned twelve old pennies a week. You would also lose certain privileges such as access to the black and white television. They had an old cinema projector and showed a film once a week so this privilege may also have been withdrawn. My brother kept smashing plates and I finally figured out that he did this so he could see me. He would be sent to a cloakroom as a punishment and the Brothers would let me stand there with him every time he was being punished and that went on for a solid year. I think he had been abused previously in Rubane because when my mother died in England he wouldn't get a priest for her and I couldn't figure it out the reason behind his reluctance to call the parish priest. I understood things more clearly after he died but when my mother died I caught him going through her stuff and burning old papers relating to our time in Rubane as he wanted to destroy everything. I tried to stop him but I was only able to salvage some old letters.
7. [REDACTED] BR 17 [REDACTED] was the head principal and he used to sit young boys on his knee whilst watching the television and do inappropriate things to them. I think that is probably what he was doing to my brother. They sent him to teach in [REDACTED] after his time at Rubane House. They would move the brothers around if there was any controversy. They would be sent to the South of Ireland or even to South Africa.
8. I tracked down some of my records from the De La Salle Order via my solicitor at the time, Hugh Leslie of JJ Rice & Co. I also phoned the Order's solicitor, Joe Napier, to get my brother's records. I did this shortly after my brother died. There was nothing in our records about education, school inspectors coming in or anything like that. It was just very basic information. I don't remember any inspectors at the home. [REDACTED] the priest based at Kircubbin in or around the time my brother was getting married, had

the records of my brother being baptised as he needed these in order to get married.

9. We were referred to by numbers in the home. They took our identity away. I have blanked out a lot of what happened to me in the home. I recall working for local farmers and they paid us twelve old pennies. **BR 12** was the farm manager. He was a brutal man. He would lash out at you or kick you with his fist or boot for no reason. He would drive the tractor towards you and push you up against the electric fence. I remember I used to wake up at night after nightmares that he was going to run me down with the tractor.

10. I remember getting beatings for wetting the bed. **BR 15** and **BR 17** **BR 17** both hit me for wetting the bed. They both carried a single and a double strap with lead weights on them which they would use to beat us. One night I was made to kneel the whole night through to the next morning. **BR 15** made me do that. He was a very vicious man and he would hit you with a large bunch of keys. I have to wear a hearing aid in my right ear and I know my hearing difficulties were caused by the Brothers hitting me around my ears so severely. **BR 17** split a cane in four and he often hit me with that. I have a scar remaining on the side of my right hand where he hit me once. It was never stitched and I never received any medical treatment following any of these beatings.

11. I played harmonica in the band at the home and I learned to play a bit of music. That was really my only bit of relief. **BR 15** was in charge of the music. I saw from a brochure produced about Rubane House in later years that they had more musical equipment in the 1970's and 1980's.

12. **BR 25** from County **████████** took the lads for gaelic football and hurling. He never had a hurley stick out of his hand and even when we were in the showers he would be hitting you with it on the ankles and elsewhere. He hit me on the left knee with a hurley stick and I still have a scar there from this injury. He hit me on the head once with a hurley stick and I had to get

stitches in the wound at Newtownards Hospital. At the time the hurley sticks were reinforced with three strips of metal at the head of the stick to strengthen them so it made the impact even more severe. These metal strips are no longer allowed. He was always grabbing me by the testicles when I was in the shower. At the time I made nothing of it but looking back now I know I ended up with a drink problem and a counsellor for twelve years [REDACTED] [REDACTED] due to these experiences. I was an alcoholic but I joined AA and I have been sober for twenty five years now. My counsellor talked about the size of [REDACTED] BR 25 because I was small and he was threatening me with a hurley stick so it obviously had an effect on me in later years. [REDACTED] moved to the South of Ireland and therefore is no longer my counsellor. He now lives in [REDACTED] in County Galway. I now attend a female counsellor called [REDACTED] and she has a counselling and psychotherapy practice in London.

13. [REDACTED] BR 17 was the [REDACTED] before [REDACTED] BR 2. A lot of the Brothers had Southern Irish accents. When I came from England I had an English accent and I got thumped in school for having it and then we returned to England when I was fourteen and I was getting hammered in school for having a Northern Irish accent. [REDACTED] BR 17 split my hand open with a cane that he had cut the end off so that it had four splits at the end and hurt when he hit you. It was never sewn up. I just tied it up. You would pull your hand back when he tried to hit you and the more you pulled it back the more he hit you. I think he got a kick out of it. I never remember a doctor or a nurse in the home.

14. We used to tie dusters on our feet. We had wax on the floor and we would slide up and down. As a punishment when you were cleaning you had to use a toothbrush. [REDACTED] DL 373 even cleaned the cooker at home with a toothbrush and he would use a toothpick to clean out grease long after he had left the institution.

15. I recall **HIA 222** and **[REDACTED]** were two boys in the home with me. I think **[REDACTED]** became a cinema projectionist in Belfast. Unfortunately **HIA 222** became an alcoholic. I tried to visit him in Belfast at one stage. **HIA 43** **HIA 43** came with me to visit him when he was staying at the **[REDACTED]** hostel. My wife went in to the hostel with **HIA 43** and the post had piled high and he was using a bucket in the corner of the room as a toilet. I still keep a photograph of myself and **[REDACTED]** and **HIA 222** from our days in the home.
16. **BR 13** used to take us down to Strangford Lough but I never remember being let into the village of Kircubbin itself. There was no way out of the home. It was in such a position that you had the ocean on one side and you couldn't get out if you tried to run away. They caught a few lads who tried to escape. I cannot recall their identity but when they were caught they shaved their hair off and they got a terrible beating as punishment. It was probably **BR 25** who shaved off their hair as he often cut the hairs of the boys in the home.
17. I don't remember a lot about school. I remember **BR 15** the music teacher, used to make us put on boxing gloves in the classroom and he would act as referee and he would make us box the bigger boys and let them knock the hell out of us. I was younger and smaller than most of the boys and I think it amused him to see me getting hit by the bigger boys. This happened in the school down from the farmyard and opposite the main house.
18. The only person I ever told at the time was **DL 366** when I made my confession to him at Rubane House. He said to keep it between me, him and God. One day he was coming off the soccer field and he started a row with **BR 25** and I often wondered if that was his way of dealing with what I told him in the confession box.
19. I wrote to my mother at Christmas and the letters were censored. I had been down to Thurles in Tipperary and my uncles had given me money. My granddad told me to give it to **BR 15** that they needed it more. I now

have a copy of the first two pages of that letter. It was one of the few pieces of correspondence I was able to salvage from whenever [DL 373] burned my mother's documents after her death.

20. When I was fourteen my mother must have sent for me because they took me to Nutt's Corner and put me on a plane in short pants with my brother. When I arrived at Heathrow I walked past my mother because I didn't know her. She never visited during the two years I was in the home. She must have went to England in/around 1958. She brought me back to London in July 1959.

21. When I came out of the home I was extremely undernourished because all I ate in the morning was watery porridge and in the evening I remember jam on bread. On a Sunday if you weren't in trouble you got soda bread dipped in dripping and you got a sausage. They had a tuck shop where you could buy things but we rarely did because we often lost our pocket money as a result of our punishments. I can remember peeling potatoes for the brothers but I cannot remember eating dinner. When I got to England I had a grumbling appendix and they rushed me to the Royal Northern Hospital which has since been knocked down. They then put me into hospital, I think it was called St Anne's Hospital, because I was under nourished and had bowel difficulties.

22. I was first diagnosed with testicular cancer in 1973. I was operated on that year and had radium treatment for six weeks at St. Bart's Hospital, Smithfield. I attended St Bart's for twenty years thereafter. Approximately twenty three years ago I had treatment at St Mark's hospital (now located at Northwick Park) for bowel cancer and had part of my bowel removed. I attended St Mark's hospital for years with bowel cancer and a Clinical Psychologist that I was referred to at St Mark's asked if I had been traumatised as a child. I didn't know what the word meant.

Life after care

23. I worked in England for a while and then I returned to Ireland and worked in Dublin in 1961. I was earning £3 per week so I had to work overtime to pay for my food and accommodation. I worked on building sites and then I got a job with [REDACTED] and I had a union card and I was doing really well. One morning I went to work and I met [REDACTED] BR 25 [REDACTED] in civilian clothes. I spoke to him but he ran away from me. I heard he had got a job at [REDACTED] so I left my job that day and I left Ireland. I went back to England in the 1960's and I never returned home. I took a drink that day and I had a problem with drink for the next twenty years.

24. I worked at painting and decorating. I struggled on like that until I got cancer. I wouldn't take anything off the State. I went on a government training scheme and they put me back at my trade painting. I married a girl from Tipperary but for two years she struggled to get pregnant and the medics said it was due to the radiotherapy treatment I was having for cancer and also it was due to my drinking and smoking. We had a son and our marriage lasted six years. I was shy and awkward with women. My wife and I split up and I think I had a nervous breakdown. I was admitted to the Waterloo Unit at the Archway Hospital (Whittington, London, N19) in/around 1978.

25. By 1988 all the work had gone so I was just playing music in pubs because that was all I was fit to do. I played the accordion. I sobered up in the end. I never told my family and friends that I had been in a home. I have been married to my second wife [REDACTED] for twenty three years and I did not tell her about my background for years. [REDACTED] was abused by a family member herself and she also had alcohol related problems. I met her at my AA meetings. My history did not come out until after we were married. I had abandonment issues and then I went home to Ireland when I got sober and paid for my mother to come too. I wanted her to see her family and we were able to make amends.



26. I saw an ex resident from the home on television one night [REDACTED] [REDACTED] talking about abuse and it showed a picture of the front gates at Rubane House. I couldn't believe it and that is when I told my wife as she saw me crying in front of the TV in the kitchen. The programme was aired about four years ago.
27. I have trouble sleeping every night. Also, I have not slept with my wife since viewing this documentary. I don't know how she is putting up with me. My brother came over to see me about three years ago, a year before he died, and I put the video on showing Rubane House and he ran out of the room crying. He was a big man over six foot four inches tall and his wife had no idea what was happening but she was horrified when she saw the video. His wife is a language professor and he didn't tell all his affluent friends that he was in a home. He said it was a boarding school and then it all came out. My brother lived in [REDACTED] for forty years.
28. A lot of the boys from Rubane House got bowel cancer. I had cancer and I had part of my bowel and my right testicle removed. I continue to have ongoing problems with my bowel.
29. I went back to visit Rubane House after it had been changed to a bed and breakfast. The archway down to the farm had been bricked up but I went down to the farm and I'm afraid I broke down. The lady who owned the house and her daughter took me in and she gave me tea. She was a nice woman and she allowed me to take some photographs.
30. I wrote a letter to Joe Napier and thanked him for sending me my brother's record. I think he only released it to me because my brother is deceased and therefore won't sue the Order. He told me he would probably send on some other records if he found them which I don't think I'll ever see.
31. My solicitor is Ciaran McAteer.

32. My memory of certain events in the home is now extremely poor. I think I have tried to block out a lot of things about my past and my time in care.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed **HIA 97** \_\_\_\_\_

Dated 6/2/2014 \_\_\_\_\_



Telephone: Kircubbin 261

De La Salle Boys' Home,  
Kircubbin,  
Newtownards,  
Co. Down.

2/5/73

Dear Fr. Kelly,

Thank you for your  
letter re. **DL 373** I contacted

**[REDACTED]** our local Parish Priest and  
sure enough his name was in  
the file for 1958. I have enclosed  
the certificate as requested.

You can tell **DL 373**  
the Home has changed quite a  
bit since he was here - It  
was a rather primitive sort of  
establishment in those days. - Now  
it's more like Butlers.

With best wishes,

**BR 2**

P. T. U.

**BR 12** whom **DL 373** would have known here, died just before Christmas.

**BR 17** who was probably superior when **DL 373** and his brother were here, is now headmaster in Downpatrick.

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