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HIA REF: 261

Witness Name: HIA 261

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 261

I, HIA 261 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]
2. I have six sisters and one brother, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] HIA 14 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and HIA 399 I am the fifth youngest child of the family.
3. In June 1956 my father lost his job at [REDACTED] and we were evicted from our council house in [REDACTED] so my father went to stay with his parents in Dublin to look for work. He left us in [REDACTED] with nothing. When I was about six years old my mother then abandoned us and moved to England. She left us with our father and grandparents and we stayed there for a while during that summer but when it was time to go back to school they could not afford to keep us so they rang the authorities in Dublin and a man from the NSPCC came to collect us. My grandfather said he had no choice but to threaten to put us out on the street. We were sent to the Dublin authorities and stayed temporarily for a few days at St Kevin's Hospital but they did not want us and they returned us to be dealt with by the authorities in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] stayed with my grandparents and my other sisters were taken to Mount St Vincent in Limerick City. HIA 399 and I were placed temporarily in a

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hospital in Limerick and then we were eventually put in a home called St Joseph's in Glin, Co. Limerick.

4. Two years later when I was about eight, my mother came back and took **HIA 399** and I to Belfast to stay in a one room flat in [REDACTED] in the university area. My parents reunited and my father got a job in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] My sisters were relocated to Nazareth House, Ravenhill Road and they came to visit us and would stay overnight or we would go to visit them in the home about once a month. After about nine months in Belfast, things started to go wrong between them again due to my father drinking and being violent with my mother **HIA 399** and I. I recall the police having to call to our house on occasion due to various disturbances. During one incident I heard my mother screaming and I begged my father not to kill her because I could see that her hand was bleeding but in fact she had attacked him with scissors and he was defending himself. We were taken in to care at Nazareth Lodge for a three week period. Within a couple of months, we were just dumped on the State.
5. Although we were taken to Nazareth Lodge initially they said they could not take my brother and I as it was not a short term stay. We were just slightly older than the children in the Lodge. I was nine years old and my brother was three years older than me. The nuns said we would have to go to Rubane House in Kircubbin. The next day, **BR 17** [REDACTED] came to collect my brother and I and brought us to Rubane House, Kircubbin. My three sisters remained in Nazareth House, Belfast at that time.

Rubane House, Kircubbin (16 March 1960 – 2 July 1962)

6. I was placed in Rubane when I was nine years old with my older brother. I stayed there for approximately two years and left in 1962 when I was eleven.
7. My sister [REDACTED] moved to Belfast to live with a friend as she could no longer live with my father. [REDACTED] visited **HIA 399** and I about once a year. I only

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recall my mother visiting us on one occasion with [REDACTED] after she had a new baby, [REDACTED]. My father never visited us whilst we were in care.

8. [REDACTED] **BR 17** was the Principal of Rubane while I was there. The other brothers I remember are [REDACTED] **BR 15** and [REDACTED] **BR 12**. [REDACTED] **BR 15** was a vicious and bad-tempered man though I never saw any signs of sexual abuse from him. When we were queuing up for our meals, if one of the boys even laughed, [REDACTED] **BR 15** would make us all stand in silence for fifteen minutes. He was very controlling. [REDACTED] **BR 12** was the Farm Manager and he was a big, stocky man.
9. We got up at 7.30am and said our prayers. I cannot remember if we had Mass every morning but we attended Mass often. I was an altar boy and I remember during the Confiteor prayer, we would change 'mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maximus culpa' to 'me a cowboy, me a cowboy, me a Mexican cowboy' to amuse ourselves. We had to make our own fun. We used to play football in the evenings. Also, any boy who wanted a plot of ground could have it to have a garden of his own.
10. We slept in dormitories with about ten beds in each. The beds were made from iron and the bedding was just old, grey blankets. My brother [REDACTED] **HIA 399** was in the bed beside mine. There were big iron radiators and I remember being cold at times but I didn't wake up every morning freezing cold. We didn't have great clothes in Rubane. We all wore grey short trousers and knee socks. It wouldn't have been unusual to have holes in our jumpers. Sometimes if we had visitors, the Brothers would pick out better clothes for us to wear. My eldest sister [REDACTED] visited a few times but not that often. That was one of the few times we were allowed into the brothers' sitting room in the main house to have a cup of tea. [REDACTED] **BR 13** and [REDACTED] **BR 15** made us get out of the sitting room on one occasion when we were having tea with visitors even though we had permission to be there.
11. I went to school on site in Rubane. The standard of teaching was not great. I never had any problem with reading or writing. We studied mathematics and

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arithmetic. There was no programme for us to do the Eleven Plus exam. That is where favouritism came into the equation. **BR 17** asked me to study for the Eleven Plus exam and he put me in for it but I failed it. I was the only one in my year put forward to do it. **BR 17** was abusing my brother **HIA 399** around the same time that I sat the Eleven Plus exam and I think he pushed me or treated me like a favourite at times because he was touching up my brother.

12. The food in Rubane was basic. We were fed well enough but the contrast between the Brothers and us was stark. We had our dining room in the cellar just like Oliver Twist while the Brothers' dining room was more akin to a five star hotel. The Brothers had silver service, they had the best of everything, the best food and the best china. We had only basic food. I was not hungry all the time but I ate everything I got. I accepted what we were given as normal.

13. I don't recall any visits from Social Services or anyone else in authority but the nit nurse would come out every now and again. If she found you had nits, your head would be shaved. There was no medical treatment for it in those days, they just shaved our heads. One year **BR 17** sacrificed me to the nit nurse because he didn't want people to think I was getting special treatment. He checked my brother's hair to make sure he had no nits but didn't check mine so I had to get my head shaved. I remember going out into the playground afterwards and the shame I felt was terrible. I felt like I had done something wrong but within half an hour the games changed from 'Cowboys and Indians' to 'Hairys and Baldys'. To me that shows the resilience of the children in the home.

14. We had other health inspections when we would see a doctor or a nurse. These would take place in the brothers' sitting room. The doctor would just give you a quick look over and ask you to cough. I only remember ever seeing a dentist once when I had a bad toothache. I don't think there were regular inspections by dentists. If you were ill, you would just stop in bed for the day and somebody would check on you. That was only if the brothers thought you

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were ill enough to stay in bed. I had a toothache once and I got to stay in bed for the day but then a month later I said I had a toothache again because I just wanted to stay in bed. That plan backfired though because they brought me to a dentist and made me get my tooth out.

15. We had a lot of chores to do in Rubane House. On a Saturday morning, my job was to clean the main staircase. We also had to clean the dormitories and polish the linoleum with heavy wooden buffers. In September we were out picking potatoes from 7.30am for local farmers. We got time off school to do it. The Brothers got paid £1 a day for us and we got a shilling on Sunday. We used to bring field mice home in our pockets and keep them as pets until one day we were told by one of the Brothers that the next person to bring a mouse back would burn in hell. I cannot recall which Brother issued that threat.

16. We were constantly threatened with burning in hell. On one occasion soon after I went in, a priest came to visit from Belfast to give us a lecture on Christianity. I cannot recall the name of this priest. He basically told us there was only one thing keeping us out of hell and that was saying our prayers and if we didn't say our prayers we would burn in hell. He also told us that the only thing that kept us from dying at night was our breathing and if we stopped breathing and died in our sleep without saying our prayers we would go straight to hell. I was only nine years old and this terrified me. That night I couldn't sleep and I lay awake crying. My brother was in the bed next to mine and asked me what was wrong. I said I was frightened to go to sleep in case I stopped breathing. He was three years older than me but he told me not to worry and that he would listen out for my breathing and if I stopped, he would wake me up.

17. There was a lot of brutality in Rubane. I remember on one occasion I wandered into the main house, **BR 12** was there and he asked me what I was doing. I said I was getting something from the locker and he shouted at me to get out and that I shouldn't be in the house at that time of day. He took a swing at me with his arm and hit my head and bounced me off the wall.

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18. Another time we were down at the swimming pool and **BR 15** threw a young boy who couldn't swim into the pool just for fun. I think the boy's name was **DL 269** or **DL 269**. He was about a year younger than me, he was around eight and small for his age. He managed to scramble to the side and was gripping onto the handrail at the side when **BR 15** dragged him off it and threw him in again. The boy was trying to paddle underwater and he was screaming 'please Brother, I can't swim, I'll give you my shilling on Sunday'. **BR 15** just laughed and said 'now you see, you can swim if you want, can't you?'. The boy had to agree but he could not swim and he was terrified.

19. I remember when two boys ran away from Rubane and were brought back by police. We were all gathered in the front school room and the boys who had run away were at the front. We were forced to watch while they were given a beating by **BR 17**. The boys were dressed in just their swimming trunks so they had no protection at all. **BR 17** beat them on their backsides and their thighs with a very brutal stick. The boys were beaten so badly they leapt in the air with pain. **BR 17** had sweat dripping off him he was putting so much effort into the beating. Looking back now, I can see the purpose of this public beating was to terrify the boys and show us what would happen if we had the audacity to run away.

20. I was sexually abused in Rubane by **BR 17**. The first time it happened I was about nine years of age. It was a summer evening and I was coming back from playing football. I went up to the dormitory and **BR 17** **BR 17** was there. I was looking for a headache tablet and he gave me an Alka Seltzer then he put his hand up my shorts and touched my private parts. This happened in his room beside the dorms. I didn't know what to do. He kissed me on the forehead and I walked out of the room. **BR 17** did this to me a few times. I knew it was wrong but I never knew what to do. I decided to tell the priest in confession but he just told me to tell the Principal. I cannot recall the name of the priest but he was the regular priest who said mass and heard confession at Rubane. I blurted out that the Principal knew

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because it was him who was touching me up and the priest said nothing. I left confession feeling more confused than ever. I thought I had committed another sin by saying the wrong thing.

21. There was one occasion when new swimming trunks were ordered for the boys for the summer. When they arrived [REDACTED] BR 17 [REDACTED] picked my brother out and got him to try the trunks on and pick his favourite pair so that he got the best "flashy" swimming trunks. When he brought me in to pick my trunks he brushed up against me then he gave me the worst trunks in the pack. I thought he was trying to even things out because if he gave both [REDACTED] HIA 399 [REDACTED] and I the best then we would stand out as his favourites.

22. I used to sleepwalk when I was in the home. I woke up one night and I had walked in my sleep in to the bedroom of [REDACTED] BR 17 [REDACTED] and I was peeing on his electric heater. He took me to the sink to finish going to the toilet then he put me in his bed and I went to sleep. I woke up feeling his privates in my hand. He tried to have my hands around his private parts and then he put me back to bed. I knew at the time that something was wrong with this behaviour and I avoided him after that and stayed away from one to one situations with him.

23. [REDACTED] BR 17 [REDACTED] never went as far as masturbation with me but I think he took things further with my brother [REDACTED] HIA 399 [REDACTED]. I recall about six or seven incidents of sex abuse with me which I would describe as inappropriate touching and they happened mainly in his room. My brother [REDACTED] HIA 399 [REDACTED] never confided in me regarding his treatment by [REDACTED] BR 17 [REDACTED] but I recall having my suspicions when I was in the home that something was going on as [REDACTED] HIA 399 [REDACTED] received a lot of gifts and cigarettes from [REDACTED] BR 17 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] BR 17 [REDACTED]. He gave him presents on his birthday. In fact [REDACTED] BR 17 [REDACTED] gave him gifts and signed the card from Uncle [REDACTED] in Canada. Another Brother in the home whose name I cannot recall said sarcastically to [REDACTED] HIA 399 [REDACTED] one day, "I see you got another parcel from your Uncle [REDACTED] in Canada – there's no stamp on it!". [REDACTED] HIA 399 [REDACTED] also had the key to the storeroom that held sweets and Tayto crisps. I never resented him for being a favourite but I felt certain

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that if these things were happening to me then they would in all likelihood be happening to **HIA 399**

24. **BR 17** took my brother and I to stay at one point with members of his family in [REDACTED] I recall we stayed there three weeks and even went to school in [REDACTED] It was all unofficial and he told us to tell everyone we were going to visit our parents. I overheard a conversation in the **BR 17** house with his sister and brother in law and it seemed to me that they had planned to adopt us but then their mother took ill. I recall somebody mentioning a shadow on the lung. After a few weeks we were back at Rubane and we were told to tell everyone things hadn't worked out with our parents. This happened half way through our stay at Rubane House.

25. When I was almost twelve years old, my mother took us out of Rubane and we went to live with her, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and the new baby on the [REDACTED] By that stage, my father had moved back to [REDACTED] to live with his parents and my sisters were still in care in Nazareth House.

Life after care

26. Even after I left Rubane, **BR 17** would come to visit us at our home on the [REDACTED] He did good things for us; he would buy us food or give us money when we had nothing. He even bought us an old television because we didn't have one. On one occasion, my father found out where my mother was living and came and broke all the windows. **BR 17** paid to have the windows fixed.

27. During one visit, **BR 17** stayed the night in our house. Somehow, I ended up sleeping in a single bed with him and I woke up in the middle of the night to find him with his hand on my privates. I just turned away. The next morning, I awoke to find him with his hand on my chest and he pulled my underpants down. The next thing I knew he put his head down and put his mouth on my privates. This only lasted about ten seconds and then he went downstairs. I went down shortly after and he was sitting there drinking a cup

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of tea and talking to my family as if everything was normal. Later that day, he brought me to a market in Belfast and bought me a second-hand bicycle that cost £5. I remember feeling really guilty as if I was playing the game. I also recall that [REDACTED] was about sixteen at this time and [REDACTED] BR 17 was taking her out often for meals one on one and HIA 399 told me that he had seen [REDACTED] BR 17 and [REDACTED] kissing.

28. I couldn't tell anybody what [REDACTED] BR 17 was doing because he weaved a web and he had me under his control. He was helping my family and putting food on the table. If I told somebody they might not have believed me and even if they did believe me, I would be responsible for my family going hungry. It would be my fault. It wasn't just the physical aspect of the abuse that affected me; it messed with your mind. I remember thinking I hope when I grow up this isn't compulsory, the way Mass and prayers were compulsory. I was thinking I hope this isn't something all adults do because it doesn't seem right at all.

29. That was the last time I saw [REDACTED] BR 17 Just before my thirteenth birthday, my mother decided to move us all to [REDACTED] I had been doing really well in school in Belfast; I got 100% in Maths in my summer report but once we moved to [REDACTED] I never learned another thing. I was just doing the same thing I had been doing in Belfast. After about a year I was dumped in another home in [REDACTED] just before my fourteenth birthday. All in all, I've been to fourteen different schools and four different homes in my life. I ran away when I was fifteen and I was on the run for three months. I found my mother and went back to stay with her and I informed the police and local authorities of my whereabouts at that stage and I was then sent to a remand home.

30. My time in care affected me deeply. My first marriage was to an alcoholic which didn't go well. I've had long-term depression and psychological problems. I suffer from panic attacks and am on anti-depressants. I've had some bad times where I didn't know if I was going to see the next day but I've just kept going. I've never had a day off work because of depression. Some

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people cannot get out of bed when they have this illness but my method is to just fight my way through it. I have been self employed most of my life and I have worked hard throughout my working life.

31. One of the effects of growing up in care is that I am fiercely independent and I rely on no-one. I do everything for myself and I work for myself. I am grateful for everything that I have and I don't feel like life owes me much because you've got to do it for yourself. I never had much luck when I was a kid therefore I don't think I need much now. You make your own luck in life.

32. I am lucky to have a very strong, happy, stable second marriage. We have been together almost thirty years and married twenty-six. I found someone who wanted to help me rather than fight with me and I am very grateful for that. I am happy and content. I have a roof over my head, enough to eat, a wood burning stove and a lovely wife but the order of priority is not necessarily in that order.

33. My brother **HIA 399** and sister **HIA 14** turned to alcohol to help them cope but I never have. My way of coping is by working hard. I do general maintenance. I am self-employed and I am always working. I need to start saying no to work now as I am so busy.

34. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to the police.

35. I never lodged a civil claim in relation to any of these matters but I was able to avail of the redress system in Southern Ireland due to the time I had spent in Glin in Limerick.

36. I don't think there is anything wrong with religion in itself; it is the bad people who are in it. Having said that, there were some good, empathetic, helpful people in these organisations as well. That should not be forgotten. The church was just too powerful and it abused that power. I don't follow a particular religion but I believe in a higher power. I believe that you are what you think and by being pleasant and nice to people, you bring good things back to you.

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Statement of Truth

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

Signed

HIA 261

Dated

07 March '14.