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HIA REF: 234

Witness Name: HIA 234

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 234

I, **HIA 234** will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Belfast. My mother was [REDACTED] and my father was [REDACTED]

Nazareth House, Belfast 24th June 1949 - 1970

2. I first went into St Joseph's Baby Home on the Ravenhill Road when I was a baby. I was later moved over to Nazareth House when I was approximately two years of age.
3. My first memory is of being in school. I went to the primary school on the premises of Nazareth House. It was run by the nuns. The teacher, Ms **NHB 44** had put the alphabet up on the board. I wasn't able to copy it down as well as she expected and that was the beginning of the cruelty. She slapped me on the backside and I was embarrassed. She was a very tough person. Primary School was sometimes good and sometimes bad. I just remember being hit all the time and we didn't know why.
4. The nuns that I recall being in Nazareth House were **SR 198** Sister **SR 189** **SR 116** **SR 134** and **SR 31** who took

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over from **SR 189** **SR 198** was very cruel even though she was supposed to be the nurse. **SR 31** was a hard nun. **SR 134** wasn't that bad to me, but could be very cruel to other girls. The only nun I remember that wasn't cruel was **SR 71**. She was a lovely, gentle woman. I believe that she may have been transferred down to Nazareth Lodge after a year of being in Nazareth House. I remember the names of other girls in the home at the same time as me – **NHB 51** **NHB 89** **NHB 89** **NHB 79** and the **HIA 63** **HIA 61** and **HIA 62**

5. I was in **SR 134** group. We first slept in dormitories and then after a few years, the dormitories were divided up into cubicles. We had to go to Mass every day. The Mass on Saturday was supposed to be voluntary but we didn't really have a choice. The nuns would come behind us and nip us on the back of the neck or pull our hair, if we were talking, or not kneeling right. Religion was drilled into us. I was on my knees all the time.
6. We were bathed on Tuesdays and Saturdays. We were bathed in Jeyes fluid. After the bath we were then sent to two tubs, one of which was for washing our hair and the other for rinsing it. There was Jeyes fluid again in one of the tubs, and it would have stung our eyes.
7. The food wasn't up to much. We used to get porridge in the morning. One morning it would be really thick and the next morning it would be really thin. It was always really salty. We were given fish on a Friday for tea, and the head wasn't removed so we had to cut the head and tail off ourselves. It was full of bones. We hardly saw any meat in Nazareth House. I hated the stew because of the bits of fat in it, and I still hate to have fat on my plate. The nuns didn't care. They threw everything at us. If we didn't eat the meal, the nuns would leave it on the table for the next meal.
8. Sometimes I got the blame, and got punished, for things I didn't do. I recall one occasion when **SR 116** had something stolen from her. We were all sent out to search for this item, and because I was the one to find it, she

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accused me of stealing it. **SR 116** put paper on my back saying that I was a thief.

9. One day whilst we were on our way to the bathroom I was pulled out of line. It always seemed to be me that was pulled out. I remember **SR 198** threw me on the stairs, and pulled up my petticoat. She had one hand on the banisters and was hitting me in the stomach repeatedly, as hard as she could, with her fist. I have no idea why she did it. We didn't really have to do anything to get hit. I would only have been aged seven or eight years at the time.
10. I was out in the playground one day playing on the climbing bars. I think I would have been aged around ten or eleven years. There was a nun walking around the garden, saying her prayers. It was spitting rain and my hands gave way. I fell onto the ground and was knocked out. I opened my eyes to see **SR 116** looking down at me. I had a big bump on my head but nothing was done about it. I believe that the medical problems I began to suffer may have started here.
11. The next time I was out playing in the playground, **SR 31** blew her whistle to indicate we had to go in to eat. We all had to go back in, walking in lines. I was pulled out of the line by **SR 31**. There were two other girls with me but they weren't pulled out. She banged my head against the wall. When she was finished with me I was making my way to the dining room and the two girls were waiting on me. **SR 31** came up behind me and cut all my hair off, which I had been wearing in a ponytail. I remember not knowing what I had done to deserve this.
12. I started to suffer headaches all the time, and I remember vomiting a lot. I had continual problems with the sight in my right eye and the odd time I lost the sight in my left eye. At one stage I couldn't see anything in either eye, but the sight in my left eye came back. I generally kept all these problems to myself. I knew I was going blind but I was too afraid to say anything. I would have a sty in my eye, every three or four weeks. **SR 198** would pierce it with a

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darning needle and then just rub it off with a bit of cotton wool. It was very painful. She was supposed to be the nurse but she was very rough and she didn't sterilise the needle.

13. I started at St Monica's Secondary School, after sitting an exam. I was relieved to be going to a school that was outside the Convent and being able to mix with the girls from outside, but it was always the same people in the same class. The girls in my class were [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. We were in the lowest class every year.

14. The nuns and the teachers in St Monica's knew that there was something wrong with me. They caught on during a game of netball. I used to be really unsteady and bump into people. I wasn't even walking straight. At the age of fourteen years, I was sent to a [REDACTED] hospital in [REDACTED] where I was seen by Dr [REDACTED]. He diagnosed a [REDACTED] and I was referred to the Royal Victoria Hospital. I had an operation shortly after and I was in hospital for about a month. The nuns, in particular [REDACTED] SR 191 would have called to see me when I was in hospital. Then I went to [REDACTED] outside [REDACTED] for another month to recuperate. I remember going back to hospital for follow up appointments, and I would have been seen by Dr [REDACTED]. When I got back to the home after being in hospital, the girls would tell me that they were made to pray for me whilst I was in hospital, and I always felt guilty about that.

15. I left school when I was about fifteen or sixteen years of age and I was put into the laundry to work. The laundry was on the grounds of Nazareth House. It was very heavy work and I could hardly do it. The equipment was really old. There was a big roller which was used to iron out sheets and clothes. There was a big wheel we had to turn to lift the roller so we could fit the sheets in. We had to turn all the machines by hand. Another resident called [REDACTED] [REDACTED] worked in the laundry at the same time and would have been about the same age as me. The laundry was run by lay people. I remember one woman whom we called [REDACTED] NHB 35 but I later found out that she

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was called [REDACTED] We were really scared of her because she had gout and had to use a stick, but I liked her once I got to know her. I remember her hitting me on one occasion on the back with a stick because she thought I called [REDACTED] HIA 195 "short arm" but I didn't even know what she was referring to.

16. There were Senior girls and Junior girls in the home. Sometimes the Seniors were made to look after the Juniors, even though they might only have been two or three years older. I had to look after a girl. She lives in [REDACTED] now and would still keep in touch with me.

17. My mother would come and visit me in Nazareth House all the time when I was younger. I recall being in Nazareth Lodge on one occasion, having been brought down to play with the boys. I was brought into the front porch by [REDACTED] SR 189 and my mother was standing there with a baby in her arms. She told me it was my little sister [REDACTED] I wanted to hold her but [REDACTED] SR 189 told me I was too young. I never heard anything about [REDACTED] after that, even though she would have been in St Joseph's Baby Home. The nuns never told me that I had a sister in the home, but I recall being out in the playground, and looking through the railings towards the nursery to try to spot [REDACTED] or in the hope that somebody would call out her name. [REDACTED]

18. Suddenly my mother's visits to the home stopped. On one occasion I was brought by a bigger girl down to the docks to meet my mother. She had been in a psychiatric hospital in England. It turned out that she had suffered a breakdown [REDACTED], and that's why her visits had stopped. She was then sent to [REDACTED] because she took bad again, but when she was feeling up to it, she would have come down from [REDACTED] to see me.

19. On one occasion when my mother was still in [REDACTED] she sent a parcel and a letter down to the home for me. I was supposed to have written a letter back to her but when [REDACTED] SR 134 found out that I hadn't she punished me. She gave me a pen and paper and told me to write the letter, and after I had

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finished it, I handed it in to her in her cell which was in our dormitory. She told me to kneel on the floor as punishment. I saw the light going out in Sister **SR 134** cell so after a while I sneaked into bed. Not long after that, my bed clothes were pulled back and I was made to get out and kneel out in the middle aisle again. I was only allowed in bed for a short time before it was time to get up again. On another occasion I was made to take all my bedclothes out onto the fire escape and sleep there all night. I was being punished for something but I can't remember what. When we were children, we just thought that all children were treated the same way as us.

20. There were big walls all around Nazareth House, and there were bits of broken glass embedded into the top of the walls, as well as barbed wire. I'm not sure if the walls were like that to keep people out or keep us in.

21. I left Nazareth House when I was about seventeen years because I couldn't stick it. I tried to live with my mother but I couldn't. Although she had visited me in Nazareth House over the years, I never really knew her. One night she came in and kissed me and I slapped her and told her not to kiss me again. I couldn't understand her kissing me because I wasn't used to anybody showing me affection.

22. I wasn't out for long before I was back in Nazareth House again. I think the doctors had me put back in because I wasn't well again. This time I was sent to look after the older ladies, instead of working in the laundry. The jobs were easier in the old people's home. I didn't get paid for these jobs as I was getting my board and keep in Nazareth House. I was seventeen at the time. This time I wasn't only having headaches, but I had terribly sore legs as well. I was having serious problems with my balance. I lost my hearing again but it came back.

When I came out of the hospital I went back to Nazareth House, where I stayed until I was approximately twenty three years of age. I wasn't well for a long time.

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Life after care

23. I had to get myself out of Nazareth House so I went to share a house with a friend in [REDACTED] I was not prepared at all for leaving the home. I had nobody to support me and I moved around quite a bit. I had to just make the most of what I had.

24. I met my husband [REDACTED] and we have two children, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] died five years ago. We had a difficult relationship.

25. I have been to see a solicitor about the abuse I suffered whilst at Nazareth House, and I was referred to a psychologist earlier this year. I have reported the abuse I suffered to police.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed [REDACTED] **HIA 234**

Dated 31st July 2014