PRIVATE

HIA REF: 316
Witness Name: HIA 316

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 316

I, HIA 316 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [redacted] in [redacted]

2. My mother had me outside of marriage and she put me in to Nazareth House, Belfast. I always thought my mother kept me until I was five or six but I found out recently I went in to Nazareth House when I was a year and eleven months old.

3. I stayed in Nazareth House until I was sixteen years old. I spent my entire childhood there.

Nazareth House, Belfast (1953 – 1967 approximately)

4. The routine in the home was we got up at about half six in the morning. I remember it was always dark. We slept in big dormitories with about 25 to 30 girls in each one. I think there were three dormitories in total. A nun slept in a partitioned cell off the dormitory.

5. The only nuns whose names I remember are SR 116 and SR 134 I believe SR 116 was the nun in charge of my dormitory. I think SR 134 SR 134 was younger. Every morning the girls who had wet the bed had to line

up in a row outside the nun's cell. I wet the bed a lot. We had to take our sheets and wash them in the bath. If you wet the bed the first night, you got four whacks with a cane. If you wet the bed two nights in a row, you got eight whacks and so on.

6. SR 116 used to shout at me that my mother didn't want me and they were stuck with me and they didn't want me either. I remember the swish of the roly poly bamboo cane as it went through the air. SR 116 would lose control and hit me on the head and the hands. She would always hit me on the knuckles where it hurt the most. We would have to hold out our knuckles, we never got hit on the palm. I used to have black and blue knuckles all the time; they were always swollen.

7. Every morning I woke up terrified my bed would be wet, especially if it was the fifth night in a row. I knew then I would be getting twenty whacks. I used to lie and say I hadn't wet the bed to save myself from a beating. I would just sleep in the wet sheets night after night. We must have smelled terrible when we went out to school. I wet the bed up until I was 13. They got a special device which set off a buzzer if you wet the bed and it must have worked.

8. We went to Mass every morning and we also had to say the Rosary and Benedictions throughout the day. The priests I remember are NHB 84 and [redacted]. I remember one night I woke up in the middle of the night and NHB 84 was standing at the edge of my bed. [redacted] I was about 7 or 8. My nightdress was around my waist. I don't remember anything sexual happening but when I look back as an adult I wonder if I was sexually abused. As soon as I woke up NHB 84 moved away. That is the only time I remember anything like that happening but it has really stuck in my mind. We would never have seen the priest in the dormitory.

9. After Mass we went down for breakfast which was usually porridge. The food wasn't great but it kept us alive. For dinner we would have meatballs, beans

and potatoes. I don't remember ever being starving in the home. We got a fried egg once a year at Christmas and we would be so excited.

10. I went to primary school onsite in Nazareth House. The nuns were the teachers. I remember SR 116 and SR 134 and there were other nuns whose names I can't recall. I was excellent at English and whenever we had to write stories mine would be chosen to go up on the wall. I was always reading books in the library. It wasn't really a library; it was just one large bookshelf. I was terrible at Maths so I never got any qualifications in school.

11. When I was eleven I went to St. Monica's Secondary School on the Ravenhill Road. Getting out to school was a great escape but I never told anyone what was going on in the home. Even though I had friends at St. Monica's I didn't really enjoy it as there was a stigma of being from the home. It was like being from another planet. Other girls would point us out and laugh at us.

12. I went out to a family called the [redacted] in [redacted] for three months every summer. I never told them anything either. They had known my mother growing up but they weren't relatives. They didn't have much – no electricity, toilets or running water but I had happy times there. I was lucky to get out for the whole summer. In the car on the way back to Belfast I would always be sobbing my heart out but nobody ever asked why.

13. My main memories of Nazareth House are being beaten every morning for wetting the bed, scrubbing the floors and being forced to write hundreds of lines as punishment. Another punishment was being made to scrub the corridors on our hands and knees as soon as we got in from school at half 3. It took hours because they were really long corridors. We were also sent to bed without any supper at about 5pm every day for a month as punishment. These punishments were for doing something minor like talking when you shouldn't be or mitching off Mass. I felt like I was picked on because it always seemed like as soon as one month of punishment was over, I was back down on my hands and knees again. I definitely wasn't one of the pets but I would never have answered back. I was quite shy as a child. I remember once being

caught hunched over the radio listening to the Top 20 when I should have been at Mass and I was punished for that.

14. Saturday mornings were spent cleaning the church. We were given an empty biscuit tin with tea leaves in it and we had to sprinkle the tea leaves on the wooden floor. Then we went round with a big broom and the tea leaves took the dust off the floor. On Saturday afternoons after dinner we would be back in the church on our hands and knees polishing the floors and the pews. It was just relentless work. We also worked in the laundry using the scrubbing boards to try to get the black marks off our white socks. The glass rollers would hurt our knuckles. We had to put the big sheets through the big rollers and in to the driers.

15. There was a big hall with a stage in the home and occasionally we would stage a play or a musical. I got the lead role one year because I was a good singer. When it came to the dress rehearsal, I absolutely froze on stage. I was dragged off the stage by my hair and I was beaten black and blue because they would have to find someone else to do it instead of me. I don't remember who it was who beat me. For a month after that I had to go straight to bed after school with no supper as punishment.

16. A woman called [redacted] came in to the home to teach us Irish dancing once a week and we would enter competitions. We were in serious trouble if we didn't come back with medals and cups; it was expected of us. We must have been quite good as I remember winning a lot of medals and cups for Irish dancing. The nuns used to bring us to Ormeau Park the odd time and I remember once we spent a week at the beach in Glenariff.

17. We all wore hand me down clothes in the home. At the start of winter, we would go down to this cubby hole in the basement and the nun would pick out shoes for us. She would say "they look like they would fit you". You would be wearing a pair of shoes somebody else wore the year before. We had one skirt and two jumpers for the winter. Once a fortnight you could change the

jumper but you kept the skirt on for six months. In the summer we only had two dresses which we changed once a fortnight.

18. I never even knew I had a mother until I was ten. One day a nun told me I had a visitor and I had never had visitors. They gave me a bath and dressed me in nice clean clothes. I was taken to the parlour then and my mother was sitting there with a little boy. I had no clue who she was. The boy turned out to be my half brother [redacted] We had about an hour together and then she left for England with my brother. I didn't see her again until I was fifteen when she brought me to England for a two week holiday. She would have written to me once or twice and she sent me parcels at Christmas. I was one o fht elukcy ones because most of the other girls didn't get parcels but I didn't feel lucky at the time. Once or twice, the nuns refused to give me these parcels as punishment.

19. I once secretly wrote to my mother asking her to buy me bell bottom jeans. All our letters were supposed to go through the nuns but I managed to sneak a letter into the post box without the nuns knowing. She must have told them though because I got a bad hiding for it. I was yanked out of bed by my hair and they said "how dare you write to your mother". I don't remember who it was who gave me this beating. It never occurred to me to write to my mother to ask her to take me out of the home. I was a child and I didn't know any different.

20. I don't remember ever seeing any inspectors in the home. Nobody ever asked me how I was getting on and if I liked it there. The only visitors I remember are benefactors. They would come in with boxes of Mars bars and we would crowd around them like vultures to get the chocolate. We never really got sweets like that so it was a real luxury. I remember we did have pocket money for sweets like penny chews. We got about half a crown or two shillings. There was a tuck shop and the nuns would keep a record of what you got.

21. I left school when I was fifteen but I stayed on working for the nuns for a year. That decision was made for me. I was just told this is where you'll be working

and I got on with it. I worked in the old people's part of the home with the old ladies. I used to be on duty on my own from 7-9pm two nights a week and I was terrified. I was only fifteen with no experience. I was petrified of the old ladies dying and I used to lock myself in the bathroom so I wouldn't have to touch them or lay them out. They used to drag me out of the bathroom and make me lay out the dead bodies.

22. One day out of the blue the nuns said I couldn't stay in Nazareth House forever and they had written to my mother in England. They had my ticket booked and told me I would be leaving in two or three days. I left the home in 1967 and I went over to my mother in England.

Life after care

23. When I first arrived in England, I didn't even stay with my mother. She got me a job as a nanny for three boys in [redacted] I worked there for about six months doing the cooking, cleaning and looking after the children. I never got paid any wages. After that I worked in a shop which I loved but I couldn't work out the price per inch of curtains because my Maths was so poor. I left the job rather than admitting I couldn't measure the curtains.

24. My mother is still alive. She is ninety now. I grudgingly go to see every couple of weeks but we are not close. I can't help but resent her for the life I have had. She has never apologised nor explained. I do not have a close relationship with my brother [redacted] We acknowledge each other but we are not close.

25. I have been married twice. I have two children, four stepchildren and lots of grandchildren. My first marriage broke down and I raised the children on my own for about twelve years before I met my second husband. I didn't have a clue about marriage. All we were told by the nuns was not to marry a Protestant. I was that gullible I would have married anyone who showed me a bit of affection. I am still with my second husband but he has dementia and it is very difficult. I love being a mother and I am very protective of my children.

26. I worked in [redacted] hospital for twenty years. I retired two years ago but I still work part-time which enables me to visit my stepdaughter in [redacted] for a month every year. I have a good pension which means I can go on holidays and treat my children.

27. My one regret is that I never stayed in touch with anyone from Nazareth House. It was such a shock being told one day you're leaving. I have lived in England ever since and I have lost touch with everyone I knew in Belfast.

28. Growing up in the home has made me question my faith. These people were supposed to be God's representatives. If they did what they did today they would be sent to prison. I don't understand why nobody did anything about it. We were just supposed to be grateful they put a roof over our heads. I know I am fortunate that I haven't had to go into psychiatric care like some people.

29. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to the police. We never considered it abuse. We didn't know any different.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed [redacted] HIA 316

Dated 12 . 11 . 14

Main Register :

CHRISTIAN NAME	BIRTH PLACE	DATE OF BIRTH	WHERE BAPTISED	PARENT'S NAME	OCCUPATION
HIA316 [redacted]		[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	

WHEN RECEIVED	RECOMMENDED BY	DISMISSED	DECEASED	OBSERVATIONS	No.
23. 3 1953	Nazareth Lodge	1. 7. '67			4440