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HIA REF: 408

Witness Name: HIA 408

**THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 408**

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I, HIA 408, will say as follows:-

**Personal details**

1. I was born HIA 408 on the [REDACTED] in Derry. I believe my mother was unable to read or write and both parents would have been out drinking a lot.
2. I do not know the reason why I was placed in care or why I was sent to Belfast rather than to a convent in Derry. I understand that five of the children from my family, including me, were placed in care. My two brothers NL 142 and [REDACTED] were placed in Nazareth Lodge along with me. I think my sisters [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were brought up in Nazareth House. As far as I know they were all older than me. My parents went on to have more children and in total they had sixteen children.

**Nazareth Lodge, Belfast (11/08/1932 – 18/08/1937)**

3. I understand that the Nazareth Lodge admission records show that I was placed in care on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1932 along with my two older brothers NL 142 and [REDACTED] and we left Nazareth Lodge on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1937. However, I believe that I was in Nazareth Lodge for longer. When I visited Nazareth Care Village four years ago a nun, who turned out to be the Mother Superior, told

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me that according to their records I was in the home from I was two days old. I also remember being in Nazareth Lodge during the war and hearing the bombs falling on Belfast. I also remember being in the nursery part of Nazareth Lodge and being fed bread and sugar when I was less than a year old.

4. I remember being in the junior dormitory and **SR 118** was in charge. In the home each boy had a number and my number was 123. That number was on every item of clothing. I was also called by my number during roll call and sometimes in school. I was known by my Christian name at all other times.
5. We wore shorts all year round regardless of the season. We were given a pair of boots with no laces or socks and sent out into the fields to play. In the winter I used to stay in the outside toilet as it had a roof but the rest was all opened and the wind would blow on my feet it was so cold.
6. The routine in the convent was that you got up at 6am, made your bed, got washed, scrubbed the floors, went to mass and then went for breakfast. Two or three times a week there was benediction In the evening. We went to bed at 6pm because they wanted to get rid of us. In bed you had to fold your arms across your chest. **SR 118** would check before she left and if you did not have your arms crossed she would hot you. **SR 118** would say goodnight, not goodnight children and leave. We were all expected to say goodnight Sister to her. After she left the dormitory two or three older boys were in charge and they would have sweeping up brushes. One night one of them called **HIA 408** I think he was called **NL 120** I pretended I was asleep so he whacked me for not answering. The next night when he said my name I thought I'd better answer, he then hit me right on the backbone and said that's for not being asleep. The pain I felt was terrible but we could not tell the nuns. I was hit most nights. **SR 118** never came back to check on us during the night.

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7. In the dormitory there were beds down both sides and also down the middle. All of the beds had a big red rubber mackintosh underneath the sheet in case you wet the bed. They were warm in the summer and cold in the winter.
8. The boys who wet the bed were treated very badly by **SR 118**. All the boys in the dormitory were brought to the bathroom to watch the bed wetter's get punished. They were placed in a cold bath, regardless of whether it was winter or summer. There would be an older boy who poured buckets of cold water over the boy's head. It was so cold the boy in the bath would be unable to breathe. **SR 118** would then get the boy out of the bath and put him on the red tiled floor. She would hit him on the behind and it would sting because he was cold. If he turned over she would put her foot in his groin and hit him again. I never wet the bed so I was never punished in this way but I was made to watch the same four or five boys being punished in this way nearly every morning.
9. At school if you made any mistakes you had to go up in front of the class and the teacher would make you hold out your hand and she would hit you so hard that your knuckles would swell up. I was regularly hit on the knuckles.
10. In the dining room if you didn't finish your food a nun would bang her finger which had a thimble on it on the table and tell us to eat up. I think it was Sister **SR 100**. The food was smelly and bad. The potatoes were especially bad as they were steamed not boiled. We were so hungry we used to go round the back of the kitchen most days and eat the apple and orange skins from the dustbin. Breakfast was porridge with salt and sour milk. At eleven we got half a cup of hot milk and half a slice of bread and dripping. We would be hungry but we got over it and to this day I still don't have a big appetite.
11. At Christmas time we got a special outing to the cinema to see Mickey Mouse. I enjoyed seeing the big red curtains more than Mickey Mouse. The lights shining down on them fascinated me. On Christmas Eve we would be woken at 11pm for midnight mass. Then we would go down into the refectory and

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have a cup of cocoa. On Christmas Day we got an orange, an apple and three sweets. I loved that because they were mine.

12. When I was six or seven years old an older boy called **NL 80** who worked in the sewing room made me masturbate him. He beckoned me to following him as I was leaving church, which was on the second floor, one day. He took me to the sewing room on the top floor. I was so young I didn't know what was going on and he said to me when he had finished "that's milk you know". I was terrified of him and any time I was in that area again I ran away. I had nightmares for years afterwards and it still upsets me terribly when I think about it. A few weeks after that incident he took me into the toilet cubicle in the shower room, took all my clothes off me, put me on the floor and beat the hell out of me with a sally rod. I wasn't big enough to stop him.
13. My brother **NL 142** who was about six years older than me worked in the kitchens. He was never sent to school and could not read or write. When he left the home he joined the Merchant Navy during the war and he used to visit me every now and again. One day he visited and gave me four half pennies but you couldn't spend it in the convent. I told **NL 142** that I was getting beaten. I didn't tell him the full story but the interference stopped. **NL 142** must have given him a hiding or something.
14. I do not remember ever seeing a doctor even though I had recurring problems with my feet. We wore shoes without socks that did not fit and I always had bad blisters. My feet would swell and I had to go to bed but I never received any treatment. As a result of the badly fitting shoes my toes curled and have never been right since and I suffer from bad circulation in my feet. I remember a dentist coming to the home because one of the boys bit his finger and got beaten by **SR 118**. I never remember us getting colds or flu's but I suppose we were living in an isolated community.
15. When I was about nine or ten years old I was attacked with a razor blade by a boy called **NL 81**. I bled profusely. I never told the nuns nor did I get a bandage. I still have a scar on my left wrist.

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16. In the convent everything we did was because we were told to do it. Prior to going to Church or Benediction we would be told to stand in a line and then go to the toilet. If you needed to use the toilet during the service you weren't allowed to leave and if you did leave you got a hiding and if you wet your trousers you got a hiding. The nuns used to check so either way you were beaten. It was mostly **SR 118** who did the beating.
17. The nuns said a lot of words in Latin but they never explained to us as children what the words meant.
18. When I was nine years old I ran away from the home. I remember a policeman asking me where I was from and I said I didn't know. When he asked me my name I told him and he said I was from the convent. I told him that I wasn't but I ended up being taken back there. When I was returned to the home **SR 186** asked **SR 118** what she was going to do with me. **SR 186** was my favourite nun and she was my choir teacher. **SR 118** said that I would get the usual: a cold bath and a strapping on the tiled floor. **SR 186** asked her not to do that because I was in the choir and one of her favourite singers. She said she still had to give me punishment so she made me kneel on the red tiled floor on the passageway for the best part of a night with an older boy standing over me. If I fell asleep he would hit me.

#### Outside of Nazareth Lodge

19. When I was about twelve years old I was taken to a farm in **[REDACTED]** owned by the **NL 82 / 83** Mr and Mrs **NL 82 / 83** came to the convent and picked me out of a line up of boys. I do not think that the **NL 82 / 83** were assessed in any way to ascertain if they were suitable to look after a child. **NL 82** worked and lived on the farm but **NL 83** lived in **[REDACTED]** and worked as a midwife. I believe that the **NL 82 / 83** gave the nuns money for me.

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20. I worked on the farm for nearly two years. I was paid no money and worked seven days a week from six in the morning until ten or eleven at night. There was no running water, no electric, no newspapers or books. I recall one Christmas in particular when the NL 82 /83 son came down from Belfast. They all sat in the front room listening to a radio and I was left in the kitchen on my own.
21. NL 82 would hit me occasionally for things like not doing the work properly or calling NL 83 ' instead of "madam". As I got older I started to retaliate when NL 82 hit me. One day he was going to hit me with a stick so I grabbed it and hit him over the head, removing his hat. I then ran all the way to Cookstown to find NL 83 I was taken back to Nazareth Lodge and sent to work on another farm. That family paid me 7s6d per week to work for them. I also worked for a family in Fermanagh. The daughter married a man from London and moved there. I then ended up going over to London to live with her and her husband when I was sixteen. I worked in a fire wood factory.

### Life after Care

22. When I lived in London the husband tried to abuse me but I was old enough to fend him off. There was a dairy parlour next to the house and a lovely lady who had two daughter worked there. I went to live with them and stayed for quite a while.
23. When I was eighteen I received a letter from my father who was working in Nottingham. I made my way up to see him and he took me round all the pubs even though I wasn't a drinker. I paid for our boat trip back to Ireland. We then got a train to Derry and went to the family home. I wasn't even welcomed by my mother. I gave my mother two hundred pounds but I think it was spent on cigarettes and alcohol. I started receiving the dole and my father would demand it be spent in the pub. I realised that all the years I was in the convent neither my mother or my father visited me. The only visitor I remember was a

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lady called [REDACTED] who I believe was my godmother. She was very good to me and I asked her could I leave the home and go home with her but this wasn't allowed. The nuns never told me about my mother and father or that I had other brothers and sisters and never told me how to contact them. I didn't even know that I was from Derry until my father got in touch with me.

24. Tensions were high between my family and I and the IRA were prevalent in Derry at that time. I went to live with my uncle [REDACTED] and his house was magic. He gave me the money to go back to England and when I had earned enough I sent it back to him.

25. I met my wife in England and we married in 1958. We had two children. We divorced and she passed away in 1978. We went on a holiday to Ireland once in 1960 and visited my father who was dying. I later met a man in England who told me my father had died. I was also told that my two sisters married two American men. I remarried in 1984

26. My time in care really knocked my confidence and we received a very poor standard of education. I am lucky that I can read and write because it came naturally to me.

27. I believe that the victims of institutional abuse deserve an apology from the Sisters and the State and compensation.

### Statement of Truth

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

Signed

**HIA 408**

Dated

18/7/14