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HIA REF: 166

Witness Name: HIA 166

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 166

I, **HIA 166** will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born **HIA 166** on either the [REDACTED] my mother was from [REDACTED] and was sent to Belfast in order to have me. I believe that my mother was in a workhouse in [REDACTED] during her pregnancy. I was born at the city hospital in Belfast.
2. A lady from the [REDACTED] who was a friend of one of the nurses took my mother and me in to live with her and I believe we stayed there for two years before I was put into care in Nazareth House. It was during war time.

St Josephs Baby Home (1944-1946)

3. Records show that I was admitted to Nazareth House on 31/08/1948 but I believe prior to that I was placed in the nursery however the dates may not be exact. I thought I was two or three years old when I was placed initially. I stayed in care until I was eighteen.
4. My memories of being in the nursery are vague as I was so young. I do remember once being put in a tea chest it was wooden and had silver foil on

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the side. I suppose it was similar to a play pen. I remember a similar experience when I worked in the kitchen. When I was older if you were naughty you would be placed in the tea chest to keep you out of the way. You would be thrown in and hit and told to stay there until you behaved yourself. The nuns would slap you about.

Nazareth House (31/08/1948-1960)

5. From the nursery at the age of four or five you would move to the children's department. I believe that records show I was admitted to Nazareth House when I was five years of age. SR66 from the Good Sheperd provided me with this information.
6. I always celebrate my birthday on [REDACTED] because I remember in the home thinking my birthday was [REDACTED] and one of the nuns slapped me and said I was wrong my birthday was [REDACTED]
7. The daily routine in the home was that you got up, went to the bathroom to wash, then you dressed, made your bed and went to mass. The chapel was on site so after mass you would have breakfast and then go to school. The school was for children from the home and also children from the community.
8. I was one of the children that wet the bed on a regular basis. In the morning after I had wet the bed I was made go round the dormitory in my wet nightdress to open the windows while the other children looked on. When I was about eight or nine the nun moved me to the bed beside her cell. She put an object on top of the mattress it was in the shape of a tray and I was to sleep on it. It consisted of a battery attached to wires going along the tray which was connected to an alarm clock in a metal bowl. The tray was covered in foil so as I began to pass water I would get an electric shock which would set off the alarm clock so SR 189 would know I needed to use the toilet. At this stage my bed was at the top of the dormitory so I had to go a long way to get to the bathroom. Every day I would have the stinging sensation from the shocks and a tingling sensation for a few days after it was over.

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9. I recall being taken to the Royal Victoria Hospital because of my bed wetting and they stuck pins in my bum or used an electric shock. I think the purpose of it was to probe the reasons for the bed wetting.
10. The school was on site and there were both teachers and nuns. The teachers were **NHB 43** **NHB 44** and **NHB 45** The nuns were Sister **SR 189** **SR 134** **SR 177** who taught me when I was very young and **SR 112** who taught the higher classes. The education was very basic, there was no such thing as special attention, and rather those with difficulties were ignored or made an example of.
11. I liked school although I wasn't very good at maths I was able to get by at other subjects. I remember them teaching us pounds, shilling and pence and it was known as L.S.D. In the summer holidays we would get six weeks off school. The nuns would find jobs for us to do dependent on our size. I was small so I always had to stay in the lower section and hence I had to scrub the floors.
12. After school if it was a nice day we were allowed to play in the garden it was more akin to a recreation hall. After school we would get tea and jam then we would go to church for our prayers and then we would have to come back to do some cleaning. At about 6pm we had supper.
13. At the weekends particularly on a Saturday we would spend the day cleaning. We would change our beds, sweep and scrub the dormitory, and then we would have to scrub and polish the wooden floors in the recreation hall. All the children in the home had to do the cleaning. From the age of seven or as soon as you could kneel down you'd be scrubbing.
14. There was always someone supervising the cleaning it was either a nun or one of the older girls. If we were not doing the cleaning correctly we would be clipped across the ear or maybe hit with a fist or kick. Both the nuns and the older girls would have hit us.

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15. During the 1940's I remember the food being porridge in the mornings and maybe bacon and sausage on a Sunday but not very often. I always remember kippers on a Friday. Dinner was mostly stew and on a Sunday we might get a cooked dinner. It wasn't a roast but ordinary boiled potatoes, stable vegetable and meat. In general we just ate because we were hungry. I have always bitten my nails until very recently and I think that is due to the fact that I was constantly hungry in the home.
16. We would often be thirsty as well and sometimes when we were out playing in the garden we would be locked out of our department. The only water we could get was water from the toilet cisterns and somebody would climb up with a bottle or a jam jar and we'd all drink from it.
17. A doctor attended the home on a yearly basis. During any examination there was always a nun present so you'd be afraid to tell him anything. We were examined in a room just off the classroom. He would listen to our chests and the nun would be there removing our petticoats slightly off the shoulder. We never complained to the doctor because later the nun would give you a hiding for not telling her first. The first doctor was called Dr [REDACTED] but I have been unable to establish where he practiced. I remember he was replaced by a Dr [REDACTED] who had a practice on the Ormeau Road.
18. The fear of telling the doctor anything came from visits to the pharmacy in the home. There was a nun in charge called [REDACTED] SR 145 she had what was known as the workroom. If you had an ailment you were sent down to see her. All the medicines were kept in a cupboard by the door and there was a basin beside it. If you had a bad tummy you were given Epson salts in boiling water to drink. It had to be drunk before you left the room. Often we had other complaints but were afraid to say for fear you'd get a slap across the ear.
19. I remember on one occasion getting a splinter in my little finger. She would just go at you with a needle without any care her nursing skills were not very gentle. As young girls we got period cramps but we did not understand why

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but nobody ever told us what to expect. When I was fourteen another nun **SR 198** took over she was much nicer but we still had a fear of attending the workroom. The fear that enveloped me as a child continued as I was growing up and I was always apprehensive about visiting any medical services.

20. When I was fourteen I had no family so when I finished school I was put to work in the home. One day I got three splinters in my knee from scrubbing the floors. I tried to get them out but only managed to get two. I continued my cleaning and didn't tell anyone. After about a week my knee became badly inflamed and one morning whilst making the beds in the dormitory I was very sick and the nun sent me down to the pharmacy. I did not tell the nun there about my knee and I was sent to bed. The doctor then came to see me and checked me all over. He saw my knee and I was in bed for about three weeks having it dressed by **SR 198**. I know that I was very ill at times because I remember waking up and the nuns praying around my bed. Finally, after a few weeks the splinter fell out and it felt as if it erupted but I felt great relief. I knew that I was going to get better but I was made stay in bed for two weeks. I never received any physio or aftercare and still have problems with what I call my gammy knee. On reflection I know that we were never brought to the hospital for fear of what questions would be asked about our care.

21. Sometimes after school we would go for a walk, we walked two in a row with nuns at the front in the middle and at the back. We would walk from the Ormeau Road to Ravenhill Road as some of the girls had brothers in Nazareth Lodge and we went down so they could keep in touch. One day when we were walking back up passed an alleyway I saw a man running towards us and I let out a scream. I pushed the girls beside me and one of the nuns came over and hit me a clout saying wait to we get back. I said to the nun "he stole a pig he's got it up his jacket." I thought it was the pig's trotters. We did not know what shape our own bodies were never mind that of a man. When we got back I was taken to another room with the nun and she gave me a thorough beating. She used a stick to beat me and I was bruised. She also preached the gospel to me highlighting the evils of the world meaning that I

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- was basically evil. I didn't realise until later life that the man that I had seen had been down an alley relieving himself and hadn't zipped himself up properly. I didn't know what a man's shape was like and I think the nuns who saw it probably got more of a shock than me that's why she called me evil.
22. On occasion we would have visitors from outside they were called benefactors. They often came in and put on little concerts for us. On those occasions we would get very excited, our meal would be served to us and I recall on one particular day I got ice-cream for the first time. One of the girls brought it down in a cone and I remember putting it on my plate because I thought you had to eat it with a knife and fork. I felt in the home we missed out on a lot of things from outside.
23. I did not have any real visitors until I was about twelve or thirteen. A lady that my mum used to stay with came to see me. It only lasted for about a year. My mother never visited and they didn't talk about our parents, a lot of the children didn't know if they had a mother or father. It was during war times and after the war a lot of children were taken out by their parents.
24. I formed strong relationships with some of the girls I grew up with and we are still in contact today. We only had each other as we were never shown any type of love or affection from those in charge of our care. I believe the nuns didn't know how to show love and affection.
25. I always had a feeling of fear in the home. I felt that we had to know our place and if you looked at the sisters in the wrong way they might slap you. It was like you always had to sit down and behave, the nuns didn't want to hear from you.
26. The dormitories were always cold and we had the old grey army blankets with a band of blue or green across them. Each nun had a cell at the top of the dormitory and there were older girls in our dormitory as well.
27. I remember one morning the girl two beds down from me was crying and I went to see her. She said she was sick and I got her a bucket from the

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bathroom. I was caught getting back into my bed and one of the older girls told the nun I was running round the dormitory waking everybody up. The nun hit me a few times with her bare hands she then picked up my studded shoes hitting me so hard. She caught me with the stud just across the right eye and it split open causing blood to go everywhere. She took me to the bathroom to wash the blood and put a bandage and a plaster on it. I was told if anyone asked what happened I was to say that I had fallen out of the bed and knocked my head of the corner of the bedside locker. I wasn't allowed in the classroom until the swelling had gone down I was hidden away in case any visitors to the home would see me and ask questions. They brought me my work in the recreation hall. I was never treated by a doctor for this injury and still have the scar which I call my third eyebrow.

28. We were bathed twice a week on a Wednesday and Saturday. They used jeyes fluid and when we got out of the bath we would be burning up to our waists because they used so much. The routine was that you would firstly have your hair washed with carbolic soap then rinsed out in a separate bath. We wore a sleeveless shaped shift dress garment while we had a bath so we couldn't see what our bodies looked like. We used a flannel under the dress to wash ourselves.
29. The nuns and the older girls were in charge at bath time. There would be one girl in the bath and then another girl would be getting her feet washed. Then at the corner a girl would be holding up a sheet like a curtain, it wasn't a towel but you were expected to get dried and dressed.
30. One day at bath time **SR 189** the nun in charge said that my neck was still dirty and I had to wash it again. It was a mark and she said that I didn't know how to wash my own neck. She got a floor scrubbing brush and scrubbed my neck until it was red raw and bleeding. It was a mark of sunburn and I was about eight or nine at the time.
31. I worked in the laundry and we had to wash the nun's wimples. They were washed and starched and then pressed by **NHB 35** I was sent to

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deliver the wimples back to the nuns. I fell and the wimples went into the mud, I knew I would get a hiding. I am not sure who was in charge it was either **SR 189** or **SR 134** I dropped the wimples into the nun's quarters and ran. They found out it was me and I was punished for it.

32. On another occasion we were in the recreation hall it must have been too wet or too cold to play outside. We were doing the usual things that children do and in my group of four or five girls we were singing. With us all singing sometimes the noise was very loud.
33. **SR 145** was in charge one day and asked us to Ssh. She called me out and said that I was disrespectful and needed to be taught a lesson. She took me to the workroom which was empty at the time and got a big stick battering me so hard saying I was a child of the devil and my soul would be damned forever. She rained blow after blow on me eventually knocking me to the floor. I tried to scramble away on my hands and knees but she caught me by the ankle continuing to rain blows on my whole body. I tried to get away and she said don't run away while I'm hitting you. She then told me to remain in the room until I stopped crying. All the other children would have known what had happened.
34. At the age of twelve or thirteen I decided I wanted to be a nun but you needed to be fourteen to join. I read my mass missal even the Latin version and said my favourite prayers. I wasn't the nun's favourite but I thought I'd give it ago. One day in church we were saying the usual prayers and the girl behind me stuck a pin in my bum and I let out a scream. **SR 189** dragged me out of the seat taking me to a side room saying don't you ever shout in a house of god. She then started to hit me with a cane she had tucked under her belt at the back of her habit. She said that no holy order would take me in for screaming in the house of the lord. She said that I would be a disgrace for the rest of my life; I'd probably end up in the gutter with no friends, only the lowlife of the world in the devils clutches. This incident put me off becoming a nun. **[REDACTED]**

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35. I left the home at seventeen or eighteen and went to work in the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I was there for a matter of weeks cleaning in the outpatients department before the doctors and patients arrived. I was only there a few weeks and they sent me across the road to a place called [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] The nuns there were not Sisters of Mercy.
36. One night I went to visit another girl who lived on a street around the corner where she worked for a family. I needed to be back for 9pm and this particular night the nuns had locked the doors and I made a racket getting in. I was only a minute or two late and the head nun battered me. She was like a bully, I remember trying to defend myself and then more nuns arrived and joined in. She was telling them I had hit her but at the time I was too frightened of them and wouldn't dare have hit any of them. As a result of the incident I was sent back to Nazareth House because it was an offence to hit a nun.
37. I only remained in Nazareth House for a few months before going to live with a family on the [REDACTED] Road. They owned a chemist shop and I looked after the two children. I had a friend who was working in a factory and I decided that I would like to work there. I was only there a short time and then went on the dole for about a week.
38. On leaving Nazareth House and living independently we had a lot to learn but it taught you how to economise paying rent, food and other bills. There was nobody telling you where you should be. The time was your own, you looked forward to the weekend and going to dances so that was independence.
39. A group of the girls that had been former residents in Nazareth House used to go back and visit on a Sunday afternoon. We were known as the "Situation Girls" that meant you had a job and somewhere to live. It was a get together and we had cups of tea, chatted and listened to records of rock and roll or twist.

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40. On one such Sunday I was talking to a nun and at that stage I was on the dole. She told me that there was a job over in Nazareth House in [REDACTED] looking after children. I left and moved there when I was eighteen or nineteen.

Life after Care

41. I left Belfast and got the boat to [REDACTED]. The nuns paid for my fare and I got a train from [REDACTED]. I was met in [REDACTED] and brought to Nazareth House. I knew that it felt different to the home in Belfast. There was more freedom and it didn't feel so restricted. It was more relaxed and I was there in the capacity as a nanny. I loved looking after children and I think had I been given the right encouragement educationally I would liked to have furthered my passion and studied in that area.
42. I stayed in Nazareth House [REDACTED] for two years and then met my husband. We married and I have five children four girls and a boy. My husband was very bad to me but because I had no support and nowhere to go I had to stay with him. Although the nuns in charge in [REDACTED] knew my difficult position I was never offered any help.
43. The time in the home did not prepare you for life outside and we missed out on a lot of life experience. We constantly lived in fear and that carried through to adult life and my marriage. I never had any support mechanism and did not know how to cope with emotions, relationships or general problems that encompassed my life at that time. I feel the Sisters are responsible for how I was left as it was their duty to care for me and provide me with the family support that I never had. They never showed love or emotion nor did they teach us any life skills and we in return did not know how to adapt to the outside world.

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44. When I told my family about my time in care I underwent a period of counselling in order to help me try and deal with my childhood and the ordeal that I went through.

45. I have lived in [REDACTED] since I left Ireland.

46. I was contacted by the PSNI and then my local police in [REDACTED] came and took a statement from me. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Statement of Truth

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

Signed **HIA 166** _____

Dated 24.7.14 _____

Battery Charge

Most children wet the bed to a certain age. I was one such child and it made my life so uncomfortable.

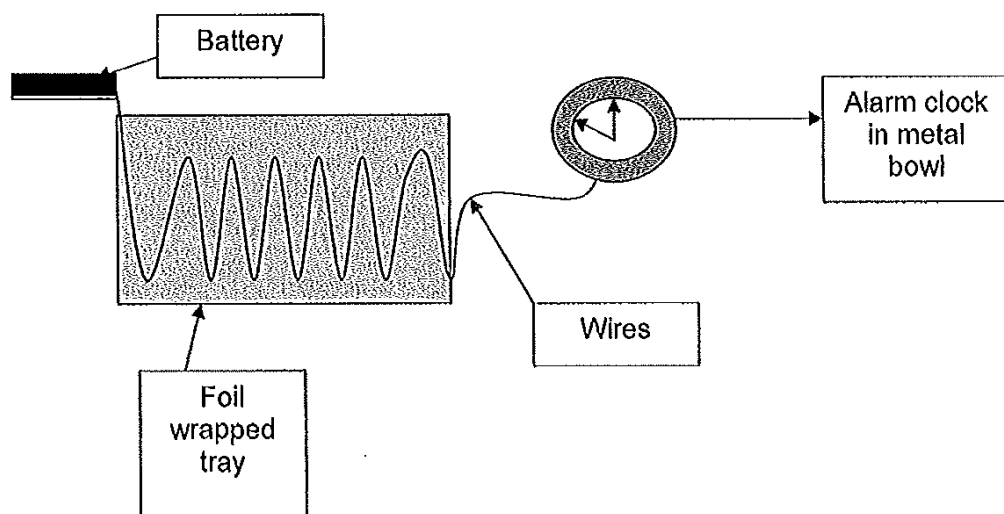
In the morning I was made to go around the dormitory in my wet nightdress to open the windows while other children looked on.

When I was about 8-9 years old, I was sleeping in 3rd bed up in the left middle aisle of the dormitory and SR189 moved me to the bed by her cell. She put an object on top of the mattress and I was to sleep on it.

It was in the shape of a tray, consisting of a battery attached to wires going along the tray connected to an alarm clock which was in a metal bowl. The tray was covered in foil. So when I began to pass water I would get an electric shock which would set the alarm clock off with such clatter that SR189 would know I needed to use the toilet. However my bed was now at the top end of the dormitory so I would have to run down the aisle, along the landing down 3-4 stairs to the bathroom.

This carried on for about 3-4 weeks or maybe longer. I just remember being very tired in the mornings and stinging from the shocks for a long while each day and a tingling sensation for a few days after it was over.

Every time I saw a battery for years after I'd have shivers and wouldn't touch one for a long time.



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