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HIA REF: 298

Witness Name: HIA 298

THE INQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE 1922 TO 1995

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 298

I, HIA 298 will say as follows:-

Personal details

1. I was born on [REDACTED] in Belfast. My maiden name is [REDACTED]. My father's name on my birth certificate is [REDACTED]. My mother's name was [REDACTED]. I have one sister called HIA 331 who is eighteen months younger than me. When I finally met my mother in 1990 she told me that she was married to [REDACTED] and had three children with him, [REDACTED] who was nine when I was born, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I assume she had a relationship with another man and she gave birth to me and then HIA 331. When her husband found out that we were not his children he threw her out and then took his three older children to live with his sister. My mother was left with HIA 331 and I. She tried to find work and left HIA 331 and I with a family who were not very good to us. One day a friend of hers told her that Nazareth House might be able to help her even though she wasn't a Catholic.

Nazareth House, Belfast (11/05/1947 – 09/03/1953)

2. I was placed with my sister HIA 331 in Nazareth House when I was four years old. I remember going through the big gates. The picture I see in my mind all the time is of me as a little girl and HIA 331 being carried through the big doors. I

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don't recall what happened after that. I think HIA 331 was put somewhere different as she was younger than me.

3. I wasn't allowed to sit with the other children when they were having lessons in Nazareth House because they were Catholics. I had to sit in the corner by myself. When a question came up which I thought I knew the answer to I had to bite my tongue and not say anything. I believe I was treated differently because of my religion.
4. I remember a lady visiting HIA 331 and I about three times. I now know that was my mother as she told me when I finally met her. She brought HIA 331 and I little gifts including a bat with a ball attached on elastic.
5. There was a nun who had a long thick wooden stick. I don't recall her name. I think she used it as a threat. If anyone played up they would have got it however I did not see her hit anyone and she did not hit me.
6. One day I was in the dining room. We were not allowed to leave the table until we had eaten every single thing that was on our plate. I was unfortunate enough to have a big piece of fat which I didn't eat. I was made to sit in the dark in the dining room. There was a little light in the kitchen and when the nun left a lady came out and grabbed the plate and told me to go to bed. I haven't forgotten that act of kindness. I do not know that lady's name but she was a civilian worker in the home.
7. On one occasion I wet my bed. I had never wet my bed before. I think it was after my mother stopped visiting us in the home. If you wet the bed you were not allowed to go to bed until the nun in charge gave you permission. On this particular night the nuns were having some sort of feast and a senior girl who was supervising us said I wasn't allowed to go to bed as I had to wait on the nun to come. I remember standing in a very dark corridor absolutely petrified. I think I was falling asleep standing up when I received a thump on my head and the words 'go to bed you stupid girl' from a nun. When you wet the bed you received

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no assistance. I had to go and get clean sheets and make my own bed at a young age.

8. One morning about 4am **HIA 331** and I were being bathed in cold water. I was about nine years old. The lady who was washing us was a civilian worker called **NHB 33**. I think she may have been in her fifties and she had a [REDACTED]. She abused me. **HIA 331** was at one end of the bath and I was at the other. The woman made me kneel and then she put her fingers into my vagina whilst I was in the bath. I remember the horror of it. I knew what she was doing was wrong but there was nothing I could do about it.
9. Before **HIA 331** and I were sent to Australia we were baptised into the Catholic Church. The nuns took us around the old people's home and they gave us money. I never had money in my life. I had a wallet where I kept the money and when **HIA 331** and I were being taken to the ship for Australia the civilian worker called **NHB 33** said 'I'll hold that for you lovey' and I never saw it again. I believe we received our First Communion at the same time as our baptism. I remember because we got peaches to eat as a treat.
10. No one ever asked me did I want to go to Australia. I do remember that I was going on my own to the doctors about three times. **NHB 33** took me. **HIA 331** then started to come with me on these appointments. I also recall a dental appointment when I got a mould of my teeth taken. I recall being in the playground on a swing one day and **SR 177** said to me 'are you scared about going to Australia?'. I didn't know where Australia was and I replied 'I don't know'. No one explained where Australia was or what was going to happen to us.
11. My Child Migration Form is dated 25th November 1952. The section for parent's or guardian's consent is signed by **SR 99** the Mother Superior of Nazareth House and witnessed by [REDACTED]. My medical examination form is dated 15th December 1952 and it is signed by [REDACTED]. I was called [REDACTED] by the nuns in Nazareth House but my

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birth certificate states that my name is [REDACTED] The signature is not my handwriting.

12. We left Nazareth House on 9th March 1953 and sailed to Australia on 10th March 1953 on the SS Maloja. I had a wonderful time on the ship. I was on the ship with HIA 331 another pair of sisters from Sussex and another girl on her own from Scotland. She was called AU 58 There were about eighteen boys from Nazareth Lodge. There was one woman called [REDACTED] looking after us. The first time I had a meal I chose tapioca and I loved it. Everyone else hated it. When the staff asked did we want sweets I thought great we would be getting lollies but it wasn't lollies it was pudding. On the journey we stopped in Malta and were allowed to go ashore. We arrived in Fremantle on 10th April 1953.
13. One of the hardest things in Nazareth House was being separated from my sister HIA 331 I didn't even know she was my sister. We didn't have any connection as a family. I knew she was my sister before I left for Australia. I found out in Nazareth House because every time she needed help I always had to go and help her. However we didn't have sisterly feelings for one another. It was like she was just another girl in the home.

Nazareth House, Geraldton (11/04/1953 – 09/1959)

14. When we arrived in Fremantle we were taken on a bus to Geraldton. We stopped at Bindoon and we had to get out and HIA 331 and I had to give a concert and sing 'the Wild Colonial Boy'. I was really angry about having to put on a show for the Brothers.
15. When we arrived at Geraldton we were not greeted or told to have a rest or given a cup of tea. It was very cold. There was no warmth or love. We were only young children.

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16. At Nazareth House any hopes of the 'better future' we were promised were immediately obliterated by the harsh regime of the Sisters of Nazareth. The nuns administered harsh punishment. They broke our little hearts.
17. SAU 5 was in charge of the dormitories and she shared responsibility for the school with SAU 9. SAU 5 was a sadistic woman who constantly undermined children with a heavy use of sarcasm and swift recourse to violence.
18. The constant violence both emotional and physical meant we all lived in fear all of the time. If I was not being targeted, some other poor child was. I remember in class one day SAU 5 was reading a story which described a character's face in unflattering terms. She stopped reading and looked at us saying 'who does that remind you of?'. Then she identified one of the girls in our class and she proceeded to victimise her over the coming weeks. It was all about power and control and if you were perceived by SAU 5 as 'bold' meaning speaking the truth or standing up for yourself she was relentless in breaking you down and humiliating you in front of everyone.
19. SAU 5 used the 'red bathroom' as a place of punishment. If you were sent to the red bathroom you had to wait maybe twenty minutes before SAU 5 SAU 5 would come shouting insults. She hit some girls with a thick leather belt but she never belted me.
20. I remember the screams and wailing of girls being beaten in the red bathroom echoing through the corridors. I was on edge as I knew at any time it could be me. I remember one particular girl got such a beating I thought the nun was going to kill her. The nuns punished girls for small things. If you were judged out of line, 'dawdling' on your way to church or if you had a 'look' on your face which the nuns perceived to be disrespectful. The nuns didn't treat us kindly or with any respect.
21. Treatment of the children who wet their beds was so humiliating. Thankfully I didn't wet my bed. SAU 9 would throw the urine soaked sheet over

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their heads and would make them stand at the end of their bed. They would be left in a terrible state for hours.

22. Once a year a visitor from the Child Welfare Department came to inspect. One of the visitors was called [REDACTED] I recall **SAU 5** always picking me to read out a speech every time they came even though I cried throughout the speech.
23. **SAU 16** was another very violent nun. We were all terrified of her. One day she got into a brutal struggle with one of the adolescent girls called **AU 58** **AU 58** who was on the ship with me. She got **AU 58** by the hair and pulled her across the dining room and exposed her naked body for all of us to see. It was one of the most sadistic acts I ever witnessed.
24. **SAU 9** would often grab me under the arm digging her finger nails in to me so my arm would bleed. Other times she would grab me by the ear and twist it. Sometimes in class **SAU 5** would hit me across the knuckles with a ruler. The pain was excruciating.
25. When I was ten years old I had to work in the laundry after school. To get there I had to walk past **AU 86** who did odd jobs around the home. Girls used to say that he exposed himself to them. The laundry was heavy work as the equipment was heavy and dangerous. I also helped out in the scullery. We had to wash stacks of greasy dishes and cauldrons. It was not work for children. I was quite timid back then. Some of the things I witnessed were not very nice but I kept quiet and never said anything.
26. The worst place to work was in the old ladies' home which was upstairs at Nazareth House. There were about fifty old ladies living there in various stages of decline. They were mostly incontinent. My job at fifteen was to strip their beds. This involved removing soiled filthy sheets. It was a terrible job for a young girl. I had to help **SAU 21** give out the meals and feed those who could not feed themselves. On one occasion I had to help her lay out dead bodies. We had to wash them first. It was a terrifying experience. I used to have nightmares about it. **SAU 21** was a lovely nun and kind to me.

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27. HIA 331 and I were selected three times to go away on holiday. The first one was just for a day trip out to a family. The second one was to Morra and the last one was to Dongara. I think we were specially chosen though I don't know why.
28. HIA 331 and I went on holidays to an elderly couple called AU 50 and AU 51 AU 50 AU 50 sexually assaulted me in a particularly disgusting way. He fondled me, touched and sucked my breasts telling me I was a good girl and that I mustn't tell anyone. I was shocked and disgusted. There has been no recovery. The memories of this appalling legacy affected me later in life when I tried to breastfeed my own children. What should have been a nurturing experience only triggered traumatic recall of that awful violation. I later learned that my little sister had been sexually assaulted by the same man. I feel so angry that the nuns sent us there.

Life after care

29. I left Nazareth House when I was fifteen going on sixteen. Despite SAU 5 SAU 5 dubious qualifications as a teacher I managed to do well enough to be sent to Stella Maris College in Geraldton. I still lived in the home and worked in the old people's home during holidays. I received thirty pounds for doing this work. But the stigma of being a Nazareth House girl was so appalling it left me ashamed and unable to take advantage of the opportunity. We were resented by the fee paying students and the nuns who saw us as trash. We were called 'parasites' and 'bastards' by the other girls. The outcome was that I developed an appalling sense of shame and stigma that I have carried most of my life. As a bright young woman I lacked self confidence. I didn't have a soul to encourage me or stand up for me. After two years the nuns wouldn't let me go back to College. They found me a job as a maid for a rich doctor and his family. I took it just to get out of the home. I eventually ended up working in old people's homes.

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30. I met my husband ice skating when I was nineteen and we have been married for fifty years. We have five lovely children and ten grandchildren. I had to ask the Child Welfare Department for permission to marry my husband as I had not reached the age of twenty one. I enjoy a great relationship with my family and we are very close.
31. Initially I was angry that my mother didn't come and find me. I used to say that she gave me up so she is the one that can come and find me. But as you grow older you realise that it is not always that easy. So I started to look for her when I was in my forties. I wrote letters out to various people including the Salvation Army and Sisters of Nazareth. I also contacted the Child Migrants Trust for assistance. In 1990 Margaret Humphries found our mother. We first spoke to her over the phone.
32. My husband gave me some money and HIA 331 and I went over to Ireland and visited our mother in 1990. Margaret Humphries came with us. My mother was seventy five years old and she was living in [REDACTED] in Belfast. My mother had three more children after HIA 331. They didn't know we existed.
33. When I first met my mother it was as if we had known each other for a long time. We got on like a house on fire. However she didn't open up to us as I would have liked. She didn't say that she was sorry for what happened to us. We met our half sisters and it was a lovely meeting. My mother told me she spent a lot of time worrying that we would appear on 'Surprise, Surprise' with Cilla Black trying to find her. She was worrying because her family knew nothing about us.
34. When I met my mother she told me that she came back to Nazareth House to visit and one day when she came she was told by the nuns that there were 'no children here by that name'. They didn't tell her we had been sent to Australia. My mother assumed we had been adopted. I don't know how the nuns could send my sister and I away without telling our mother where we were.
35. On our visit my mother wanted to go back to Nazareth House. We went back and there was a reunion organised and some of the former residents were there including a girl called [REDACTED] who I was in the home with. SR 101

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who I knew as [SR 101] was there. She worked in the home when I was there. I wrote to [SR 183] who was Mother Superior thanking her and she responded in June 1990.

36. In 1993 my mother came over for Christmas and stayed with [HIA 331] and I. I used to write to my mother every month and she wrote back. I also wrote to my half sisters and sent them presents but they didn't reply. I assume they just couldn't be bothered in making an effort with [HIA 331] and I. I was disappointed as our first meeting was lovely.
37. My mother died in 2003/04 from a stroke. Our half sisters didn't tell us she had died. We found out later. I was so hurt. When I returned to Ireland in 2011 with my husband and my eldest son [REDACTED] my half sisters were cold. They made me feel unwelcome, as if I was an inconvenience. After this I gave up trying to have a relationship with them.
38. For years I did not know where my mum had gone or why I had been sent half way across the world. I am sure those that sent us thought they were doing the right thing. The thing I don't understand is how the poor standard of their record keeping. It is terrible how people missed meeting their family because no one kept proper records. If they had sent some information out with the children much heartache would have been avoided. I always knew I had a mother somewhere. Unlike some other child migrants I cannot remember anyone ever telling me I was an orphan. I used to tell people my mother was dead because it was easier than saying I didn't know where she was. It wasn't until I was older and after completing a course in healing that I started to see things a little differently and came to realise that I at least owed it to my mother to tell her side of things.
39. I only received my birth certificate in 1985.
40. I was awarded \$20,000 from the WA Government under the Redress Scheme.
41. This has been a very difficult experience trying to recount my abusive childhood. There are things I have never thought I would have the courage to talk about. I

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have been unable to fulfil my career aspirations despite my academic ability I was labelled as a servant and treated accordingly. I have been unable to speak up until now because I was taught my feelings had no value.

42. We were abandoned by the State Government. They failed in their duty of care and left us with individuals who didn't treat us as children who deserved to be loved and cared for.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed **HIA 298** _____

Dated 18-6-2014

Ref. No.

Group Nomination No.

Commonwealth of Australia

DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION, AUSTRALIA HOUSE, LONDON.

Child Migration.

Sections A and C of this form are to be completed by the approved voluntary organisation in the United Kingdom. Section B to be completed by the parent or guardian of the child.

SECTION A.

- Name in full **HIA 298**
(In block capitals, surname first)
- Full Postal Address **NAZARETH HOUSE, BALLYNAFEIGH, BELFAST.**
(In block capitals)
- Age **9 $\frac{3}{12}$** Date and Year of Birth **[REDACTED]** Place of Birth **Belfast**
- Sex **F** Weight **[REDACTED]** Church Denomination **R. C.**
- Furnish name and address of parent, guardian or next of kin **Robert. Laker. [REDACTED]**
(If father is living his name must be given)
Robert. Laker. Ballynateigh. Belfast.
- Is there any record of mental disease in the child? **no**
- Has he or she at any time been subject to fits? **no**
- Educational standard **III**

Signed **SR 99**
For and on behalf of **[REDACTED]**
(Name of Sponsoring Organisation)
Date **25. 11. 53**

PROVISION OF A COPY OF THIS RECORD HELD BY THE AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES

PARENT'S OR GUARDIAN'S CONSENT (FATHER IF LIVING)

I, **Robert. [REDACTED] SR 99**
(Insert full name, occupation and address)
of **Robert. Laker. Ballynateigh. Belfast. N.I.**
the { father
mother } of **HIA 298**
guardian

hereby consent to my child/ward proceeding to Australia under the Commonwealth Child Migration Scheme.

Dated this **25 November 1953** day of

Signature **SR 99**

*Witness **Cyril [REDACTED]** Qualification **Catholic Priest.**

Address **146A. St. Stephen's House. Westminster. N.W. 1.**

*The witness to the parent's or guardian's consent must be one of the following :—

A Mayor, Magistrate, Provost or Justice of the Peace.

of sponsoring organisation) agree to repay the financial assistance granted in respect of an assisted passage. (name SNB-32856)

Signed

Gyula Hansen
(Representative of Organisation in the United Kingdom.)

Date

26. 11. 52

On completion, this form (in duplicate) should be forwarded with a certified copy of the child's birth certificate to:—

THE CHIEF MIGRATION OFFICER,
AUSTRALIA HOUSE,
STRAND,
LONDON, W.C.2.



PROVISION OF A
COPY OF THIS RECORD
HELD BY
THE AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES
DOES NOT AUTHORISE
ITS PUBLICATION OR
REPRODUCTION

Female, aged 9.

Department of Immigration
London

9/2/52.

Recommended..... *A.*

W.R. Barry Interviewing Officer.

*appears to be an average
little girl.*

Speech: average for age.

Heyesight: appears normal.

Educational: appears average for age.

*Nominated by Catholic
Child Group.*

Medical arranged.

This child is the sister

HIA 331

recommended

A on file 54/25/94.

C. of A.
Department of Immigration
London.

Approved Assisted Passage

Child Migration

for

Chief Selection Officer

2/2/53.

Department of Immigration

MEDICAL EXAMINATION.

Declaration by Applicant.

NAME

HIA 298

Full Name in Block Capitals

ADDRESS

Kegarragh House, Ormeau Road, Belfast

1. Have you ever had any serious accident/illness or surgical operation? If so, please furnish details

no

2. Have you or has any member of your family ever suffered from or been suspected of Tuberculosis?

no

3. Have you ever had Enuresis or any sign of disease of the Genito Urinary Organs? no

4. Have you or has any member of your family ever suffered from mental disease or epilepsy or been treated in an institution of any kind for these Diseases? no

5. What medical attention have you required during the last twelve months? none

I hereby certify that the information supplied by me to the Medical Examiner is correct in every particular:—

Signature of applicant which must be made in the presence of the Medical Referee

HIA 298

Results of Medical Examination.

AGE 10 yrs HEIGHT 4 ft 2 in WEIGHT 55½ lb

A. Heart NORMAL F. Genito Urinary Organs NORMAL

Blood Pressure

B. Lungs (Particularly Tuberculosis) NORMAL

X-Ray report

C. a. Nervous System NORMAL

b. Mental Condition NORMAL

D. Intelligence NORMAL

E. Digestive Organs NORMAL

L. Teeth 12 upper 12 lower

REMARKS (include particulars of any departure from normal conditions not fully set out in above)

Somewhat small for age but apparently normal healthy child

In cases where the Medical Examiner is unable to describe the applicant as being in perfect health, he should state under "REMARKS" the exact nature of the defect which he finds and whether it is of temporary or permanent nature. The presence of Pediculi should be noted.

Any disablement received on Active Service or otherwise should also be noted and commented on, and if a Pension is received the amount of it should be stated.

I certify that I have this day examined the above-named and am of opinion that the applicant is/ is not in good health and of sound constitution, and is/ is not suffering from any mental or bodily defect which would cause inability to earn a living as a house boy

Date 15 DEC 1952

Signature and Qualifications

Address 446 LISBURN ROAD, BELFAST

TO:—

CHIEF MIGRATION OFFICER, AUSTRALIA HOUSE, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.2 33

(FORM K.)

PLEASE TURN OVER.

