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HIA REF: 84

Witness Name: HIA 84

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

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIA 84**

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I, HIA 84 will say as follows:-

**Personal details**

1. I was born on [REDACTED]
2. I was placed in St. Joseph's Baby Home when I was a baby.
3. My birth parents were both alcoholics. My mother was from the [REDACTED] and my father was from the [REDACTED] which was a bad situation to be in back then.
4. I have since found out that I have five brothers – four of whom were adopted and one who stayed with my parents. I never knew about my brothers until about ten years ago when my brother [REDACTED] traced me and called to my door.
5. I have very little recollection of my time in St. Joseph's Baby Home. I was transferred to Nazareth House on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1965 when I was almost three years old.

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Nazareth House, Belfast (22<sup>nd</sup> June 1965 – 28<sup>th</sup> March 1969)

6. I was moved to Nazareth House when I was almost three. The records state that I remained there until I was six when I was adopted but I thought I wasn't adopted until 1970 or 1971.
7. Most of my memories from Nazareth House are from when I was aged between five and six years old. The main person who sticks in my mind is **SR 31**. She was a very cruel nun. I used to tell my adoptive parents she was cruel but I wouldn't tell them why. **SR 31** would beat me for any little thing. I didn't have to do anything wrong; she beat me for no reason. She was a bully. She beat me with her hands or with a cane and she pulled my hair.
8. There was an old people's residential section in Nazareth House and I remember an old resident there called **NHB 49** I can't remember his surname. He used to take me on walks around the grounds on my own. He would put me sitting on his knee and would feel my legs and up round my stomach. He put his hand between my legs as well. At the time I didn't know this was wrong but looking back it should never have happened. I told **SR 31** once about **NHB 49** touching my legs and she trailed me by the hair and locked me in a cupboard as punishment. She said I was telling lies. The cupboard was small and dark and there were brooms and brushes in it. I don't know how long she left me in there for but it was long enough. To this day I am afraid of the dark and have to sleep with a light on.
9. **SR 31** was wicked in her sense of punishment. I remember there was a sewing room and I was down there once when I shouldn't have been. There were wee milk bottles outside it and I fell and split my whole right knee open. I never got any stitches or anything. Instead I got trailed and beaten by **SR 31**. **SR 31** She was so cruel; she had no sympathy whatsoever. I still have a big scar on my knee from this fall.
10. I used to get beatings from **SR 31** for wearing my pants in bed. We weren't supposed to wear our pants to bed but I didn't like not wearing them

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so I always tried to keep them on. There must have been a count done and I was always found out. [SR 31] would trail the pants off me and beat me on my bare bum in front of the whole room. We slept in dormitories with big rows of beds. They were like hospital wards from years ago. Years later I went up to Nazareth House to leave some toys for the children and it had totally changed. It was all smaller rooms; it was nothing like what we grew up in.

11. I remember [SR 31] took me to the chapel after somebody had died and she made me stand beside the coffin for ages. This was a punishment but I can't remember what for. The person who died was one of the people from the old people's part of the home. To this day, I can't look at a dead body as a result of this experience. We used to go to the cinema every other Saturday and as we walked down the Ormeau Road I used to rub my hand along the walls. The skin on my fingers would all come off. I don't know why I did it. [SR 31] would always beat me for doing this.
12. [SR 134] came to Nazareth House while I was there. She was a hard woman as well but I didn't have as much contact with her as with [SR 31]. [SR 31] There was another nun called [SR 122] who was lovely. She worked in the sewing room. [SR 122] took a liking to me and she knew [SR 31] was doing wrong. You could see the sympathy in her eyes but she was powerless because [SR 31] was above her. She wasn't outspoken; she just did as she was told. I always felt safe with [SR 122]. [SR 122] She was an angel; she tried to pamper me. If I was in tears she would try to comfort me.
13. My biological mother came to visit me a couple of times. I remember she was an old lady and she wore a yellow and brown check coat. She was quite old-fashioned and shabby looking. I would be brought into this room to see her and [SR 31] would always be there too. It was a big room and was beautifully furnished. The visits only lasted about five minutes and then she would be gone again. My mother never took me out of the home. She only visited two or three times in the seven years I was there.

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14. When there were visitors for other girls I remember begging to be allowed to bring the tea to them. When you brought the tea in, the visitors would give you a threepence bit and it was like winning the lottery. I don't remember anybody from Social Services or the Welfare ever visiting the home or offering any support.
15. There was a priest in Nazareth House who would take me and other children out in his [REDACTED] car. He would take us in groups of one or two. I can't remember the priest's name. He would give you sweets and hug and kiss you. He was affectionate towards us but we didn't realise it was inappropriate. We thought it was brilliant getting out of the home.
16. At bath time, we had to line up and the older girls took charge of the younger ones. The girl who was in charge of me would trail my hair and check for nits with a fine tooth comb. You nearly got the scalp taken off you. We were bathed once a week with carbolic soap. I can't remember if the water was warm but it was never changed – you just took turns getting in and out. Some of the older girls were treated very badly over the years and then they were bad to us younger ones but they were only repeating what happened to them.
17. I can't really remember the food in Nazareth House except for one occasion when [REDACTED] SR 31 force fed me onions. I wouldn't eat my dinner because there were onions in it so she stuffed them in my mouth and made me violently sick. To this day I won't touch onions because of that memory.
18. I went to school onsite in Nazareth House but I can't really remember much about it.
19. I had friends in the home – [REDACTED] was one of my best friends and [REDACTED] was another close friend. I also remember a girl called [REDACTED] who I heard died of cancer recently.
20. I remember being sent on a train to Dublin once and there was a nun waiting for me at the other end. For some reason though I was sent back to Nazareth

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House. I don't understand what the purpose of that was. I later found out my father's family tried to get me out of the home but they were turned down because they weren't of the Catholic persuasion. I can't remember anyone from my father's family ever visiting me in the home but they say they did. My father's sister [REDACTED] lived in [REDACTED] and she says she tried to visit me and take me out but she wasn't allowed by the nuns.

21. I left Nazareth House on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1969 when I was six and a half years old. I was adopted by a couple called NHB104 and NHB 50 from [REDACTED] who had previously taken me out of the home for visits.

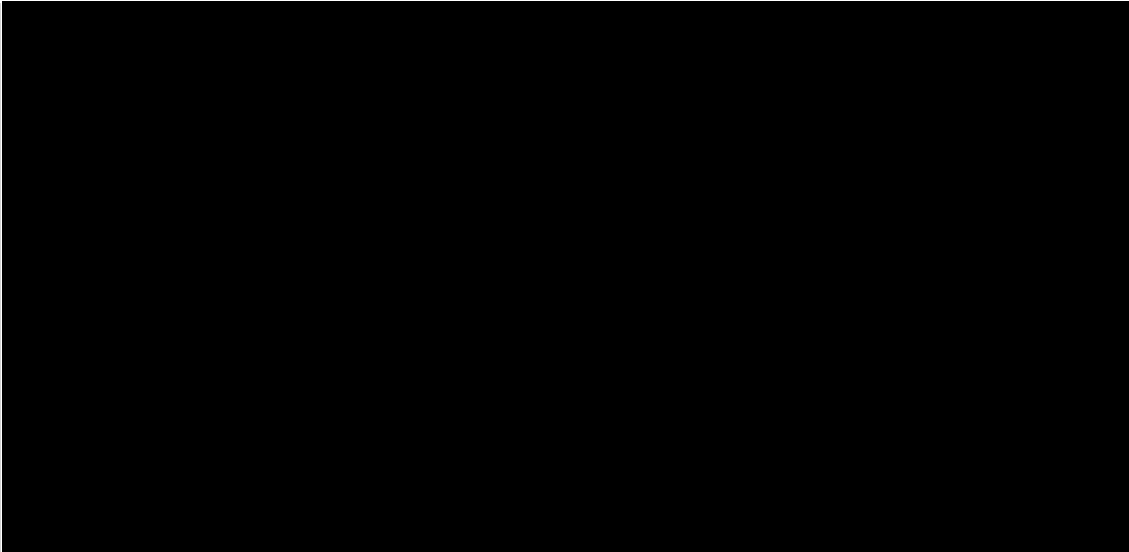
### Life after care

22. I was hard work for my adoptive parents from the start. I was a troubled teenager and I took an overdose once. My adoptive parents were good parents and they persevered with me. My adoptive mother was an alcoholic and she had a lot of problems. She had undergone electric shock treatment at Purdysburn not long before they adopted me. My adoptive father was a great man, he was a pioneer. He was a farmer and he worked very hard.

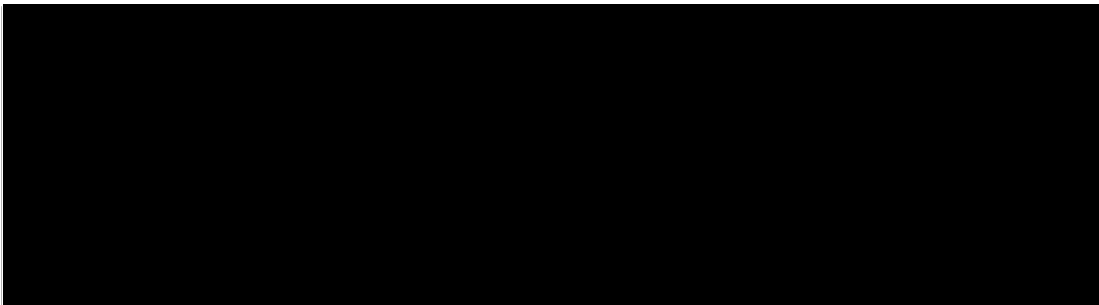
23. My adoptive mother was a teacher in [REDACTED] and I was in her class for a while but I had to be taken out because she beat me in class. She didn't want the other children thinking I was getting preferential treatment. One time she made me kneel in front of the cross for two hours as punishment for copying somebody else's work. My father put me into [REDACTED] Primary School then.

24. I ran away from my adoptive parents' home a few times. One time I even ran back to Nazareth House because I thought it couldn't be any worse than there. My adoptive mother was drinking a lot at this time and I resented her. I could never bring my friends home because she was always drunk. Looking back now I know she wasn't well but I didn't understand that at the time. I got picked up by the police in Belfast when I was about 14 or 15. I was taken to Musgrave Street Police Station and I refused to go home unless my mother stopped drinking. I ended up in St. Joseph's Training School in Armagh.

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27. I went back to school [REDACTED] and completed my O Levels.



29. After that I went to [REDACTED] study nursing and I lived in nurses' accommodation. That wasn't unlike Nazareth House except there was a good atmosphere. I got on well with the other girls even though I was the only one who didn't drink. I've never touched a drop of alcohol. I've worked as a nurse all my life up until I had spinal surgery recently.

30. I met my first husband [REDACTED] and had my son [REDACTED] when I was twenty. My first husband was an alcoholic and he used to beat me. He was a police officer but he was put out of the police. We split up when my son was five. [REDACTED] is 32 now and I have a great relationship with him. He has his own business and has done well for himself. I also have a daughter from my second marriage called [REDACTED] she is 22. I've been married to my second

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husband twenty-five years but we have been separated for about eight years now. We are still very close and he remains a big part of my life. He's a great man. He's never taken a drink and he is easy going and hard working. I haven't told him half of what I've told the Inquiry.

31. My daughter [REDACTED] went off the rails a bit in her teens but she is coming out the other side now. She wasn't far from being an alcoholic at one stage. I am rearing her son [REDACTED] because she didn't want him when he was born. I swore no grandson of mine would go into the care system so he has lived with me since he was a week old. I've had a residence order for him since he was two and a half. He is five now. My daughter went on to have a daughter called [REDACTED] who is two now and who lives with her. [REDACTED] still wants nothing to do with [REDACTED]. He knows [REDACTED] is his mother but he won't stay with her; he won't stay with anyone but me. She is still young and she has a lot of learning to do.

32. My children are what keep me going. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for them. When I was pregnant with my son, I worried about how I would feel when he was born. I was worried I wouldn't want him because the nuns always led me to believe nobody wanted me. Thankfully, I had no such problems and I love my children dearly. I enjoyed having my kids and rearing them.

33. When I was twenty-six I decided I needed to find out more about who I was and where I came from. I first met my mother at a bus stop in Belfast. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] When I looked at her [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] there was nothing there; there was no love. She was a hard woman and she never opened up to me.

34. Soon after that I met my real father who was married to my birth mother and living with her. [REDACTED] he died [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I never got to know him. My birth mother died six months later. I

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went to both their funerals. I remember at my mother's funeral somebody made a speech saying what a great mother she was to [REDACTED] and how good she was to be a childminder all her life. That was difficult to hear but I just let it go. My husband got up to leave but I said no, I wasn't going to let myself down. I buried both my parents but I haven't been to their graves since whereas I always visit my adoptive parents' graves and leave flowers.

35. My biological parents had had a son called [REDACTED] who was just a couple of years younger than me. Of all their children, he was the only one they kept. I haven't heard from [REDACTED] since his parents' funerals. About ten years ago I got a knock on my door and this man asked me if I was [REDACTED]. Nobody knew me as [REDACTED]. He said he was my brother [REDACTED] and he had tracked me down through [REDACTED]. He told me he had been adopted by a family in [REDACTED] along with his [REDACTED] brother. It shocked me how close he had been living to me in [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] remembered being introduced to a young girl called [REDACTED] and being told she was special just like him and his brother. I don't think any of the parents realised we were brother and sister at the time.

36. I have met each of my five brothers but I don't have much contact with them. They have all turned out differently; I suppose from being reared in different families. One of my brothers served [REDACTED] years in prison [REDACTED] and both of them are involved in [REDACTED]. I want nothing to do with that sort of thing. I send them all a birthday card but I've heard nothing back. I would have loved to have had a relationship with some of my brothers because all my life I've felt lonely as my adoptive parents died when I was so young. My brother [REDACTED] is a gentleman; he's worked all his life and is a family man.

37. Growing up in Nazareth House has affected me in many ways. The loneliness has been the hardest thing to deal with over the years. At night I wake up squealing but no sound comes out. I am awake but I'm paralysed – my body won't move. It's like I'm fighting something off. I'm trying to get out of the bed but I can't and I'm choking. This has happened to me ever since I left the home but thankfully it's not as often now as when I was younger. I sometimes



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feel down and I go into my bedroom and have a good cry. It's always in the back of my mind. I try to get past it but it will never go away. You can't blame the rest of the world for what the nuns did though. Life is too short to be angry at everyone.

38. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to the police. It just wasn't something you talked about.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed  HIA 84

Dated 20 / sep / 2014