

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

ABJ

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is [REDACTED] ABJ [REDACTED] My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1966 and I am presently 51 years of age. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I think I was about five years old when I was put into care at Smyllum Orphanage in Lanark with my sister [REDACTED] who is one-and-a-half years older than me. My mum and dad split up and I think my dad put us in there while he got his home set up. He had been going to Mass and I think he must have approached the Catholic Church.
3. About the time they split up, my mum became pregnant with my younger sister, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
4. We stayed in Govan at that time and I remember my dad being violent. I've still got a scar from when my dad came in from work and flung something at my mum. It missed her, smashed a vase and a bit of the vase hit me.
5. I have memories of that time but for some reason I don't remember much about my time in care. I think I've maybe blanked a fair bit out.

Smyllum Orphanage, Lanark

Routine at Smyllum Orphanage, Lanark

First day

6. I remember arriving at the home, a car dropping us off and going up a flight of stairs to the front door. The place seemed massive to me. We were met by nuns and taken to our dormitories. [REDACTED] was taken to a different dormitory to me. I don't remember what was said to us.

Mornings and bedtime

7. I slept in a dormitory with eight or ten beds in it. There were four or five beds on one side and four or five on the other. At each bed was a locker where we kept our clothes and stuff. It was all boys from my age up to early teens. My recollection is not that good because I was so young and I'm not sure if there was anyone in charge of the dormitory.
8. We went to bed very early, maybe seven or half-seven. I remember it being light for hours after. The nuns got us up very early in the morning too, maybe six-thirty or seven o'clock. I think we had to wash and brush our teeth, get dressed and then we went for breakfast.

Food

9. We all ate in a big dining room. In the morning they would slop this salty porridge on a plate and I hated it. I would be made to eat it by one of the nuns who would be standing over me. I would be boking and she would slap me on the back of the head. Sometimes I would sneak into the kitchen where there were big bags of "Rice

Crispies” and I would steal a handful. I was so hungry sometimes. I never remember being given “Rice Crispies” instead of the porridge, maybe we were.

10. I don't remember much about lunch or evening meal other than we got rice pudding a lot. I think it was traditional food, meat and vegetables. I was always hungry.

Washing and bathing

11. I remember being very clean and getting bathed by the nuns, possibly every day, although I'm not sure. My eyes would sting when carbolic soap got in them. Everyone got bathed at the same time, we would queue up and all had to share the same water.

Clothing

12. We wore shorts most of the time, which I think were provided by the home.

School

13. The school was behind the main building. I remember going up loads of stairs into it. I don't remember much about the school other than it was a big class. I don't remember my sister being there.

Leisure time

14. We got to watch television on a Saturday afternoon in the TV room. There wasn't enough chairs to go round so we would sit on the floor. That was when I could chat to [REDACTED] The nuns were there too and we got about two hours to watch the TV.
15. There were toys for us to play with, a castle and soldiers and other things. I think they were kept in the TV room, which is where we were allowed to play. Outside there were loads of fields and we were allowed out in the summertime. We were always supervised by the nuns.

Religious Instruction

16. We constantly got religion shoved into us. I think there was Mass every single day, although I can't remember if it was before school or during. I don't remember going anywhere else to church, I think it was always within Smyllum.

Work

17. I think I was too young to be given any chores to do, but I remember other people scrubbing floors.

Trips and holidays

18. The nuns would take us out in a minibus for field trips and for walks. I remember one trip in particular when we went to a harbour somewhere. We also went away for a couple of days somewhere, but I can't remember where. I just remember sleeping in dormitories somewhere else.

Birthdays and Christmas

19. I can't remember if birthdays were celebrated or not. I do remember opening presents at Christmas and having a selection box. I don't know where they came from, maybe my father had brought them in.

Visits/Inspections

20. I don't remember whether there were any inspections while I was there, I was too young. I don't remember speaking to the social work department or any officials at any time.

Healthcare

21. I never saw a doctor or a dentist while I was at Smyllum. I think all healthcare was dealt with in-house.

Contact with family

22. Smyllum was all segregated and I think the only time I saw my sister [REDACTED] was on a Saturday in the TV room.
23. I never saw my mum for years, she never came near me when I was in Smyllum. My father came a few times, though very seldom. Nobody else came.

Bed wetting

24. The dormitory constantly smelled of urine and carbolic soap. If someone had wet the bed, the nuns would give them a beating in front of you. They would then be escorted off to the bath and the sheets would be changed. I saw this loads of times and lived in constant fear. Fortunately I never wet the bed.

Discipline

25. The nuns would hit you for the slightest wee thing. There were some good nuns too though, who would give you cuddles sometimes. I think they would feel sorry for you for what they'd witnessed. They weren't in the same bad mould as some of the others and would give a bit of comfort.

Abuse at Smyllum Orphanage, Lanark

26. The nuns would hit you on the back of the head or the backside with a wooden paddle, or something like that. They used to keep it in a pocket in their habits. You had to take your shorts down and you got whacked. As I got older and thought

about it, I think they were trying to hit you in places that wouldn't mark you. If we were away somewhere the nuns would hide it, they wouldn't hit you in public.

27. When we went on the trip to the harbour, I had been given some money and had a coin in my hand along with bit of bread. I flung the bread into the water for the birds and accidentally chucked the coin in with it. I remember the nun laughing at the time, but when I got back to Smyllum she gave me a beating for it. It was as if she was saying money was special and I needed to be taught a lesson. I don't remember anything about what this nun looked like.
28. There was a man employed at Smyllum as a [REDACTED] or something. He was older, maybe in his forties, although I'm not sure. I can't describe him any more than that, but he was always there, seven days a week. There is hardly a day goes by that I don't think about what he did to me.
29. Our beds were always made up really tight and he would come into the dormitory right from when I first went there. He would sit at the top of the bed and push me under the bedclothes. He would get other boys, older ones, to sit around the bed and hold the covers down so I couldn't get out. I felt I was trapped and suffocating and almost passing out. He would only get up when I stopped wriggling. This happened almost every single night for months.
30. It was like a ritual and I was scared to go to bed, knowing that it was probably going to happen again. It happened to other boys in the dormitory too and is probably why they would wet the bed. Everyone knew they were getting it and everyone was afraid.
31. I don't know why he did it, whether it was to hurt us or whether he was getting some sort of kick out of it. I remember him laughing when I would come back up from under the sheets.
32. I also have another memory of being very young and my shorts being at my ankles. I'm not sure if this even happened at Smyllum, but I was standing with an erection,

wondering what was going on. There was a man there too, but I can't remember what he looked like or if it was [REDACTED]

Leaving Smyllum Orphanage, Lanark

33. I left Smyllum after about a year and was fostered out to a couple of places. I remember being in an attic room with my sister in a big house somewhere. I think it was organised by the Catholic Church and was somewhere in Bearsden. They were really lovely people, it was good being there.
34. We only stayed there for a couple of months and then went to another foster home somewhere. After that we stayed with different aunts and uncles for a couple of years before my dad got a house set up in Cumbernauld.

Reporting of abuse at Smyllum Orphanage, Lanark

35. I never told anybody what had happened to me in Smyllum. My father would just have brushed it off, he was that kind of man.

Life after being in care

36. When [REDACTED] and I moved back in with our dad the beatings started again. One time, when I was about eight, I had to play dead. He punched me and I fell down a flight of stairs, but he just picked me up and started punching me again. The first stability I had was when my dad met a girl called [REDACTED] who became my step-mum. That was the first time I saw my dad not getting angry. The anger came out again eventually though and that relationship split up as well.
37. My dad and [REDACTED] had a daughter together, my half-sister. She committed suicide through mental illness, which was a result of the abuse my dad gave her.

38. I went to ten different primary schools and was totally dyslexic up to the age of about fourteen.
39. I ended up going back and living with my mum when I was in my early teens. She was so scared of my dad I had to arrange to meet her without him knowing. My mum died five years ago. My dad is still going strong, but I have no contact with him.
40. I was married for fourteen months, but that ended because of my behaviour. After a couple of years I met [REDACTED] and we have been together since. We have [REDACTED] daughters, one now nineteen and the other fourteen.
41. I've not looked back since meeting [REDACTED] she has always encouraged and pushed me forward. I used to just scrape by doing manual labour on minimum wage, but I moved up to [REDACTED] and got a lucky break. I got a job and was put through university where I got a degree in metallurgy.
42. We stayed there for about ten years and then moved [REDACTED] where I worked for the [REDACTED] I then got a job with an organisation called [REDACTED] which was set up to help people who couldn't get a job. They sent me to [REDACTED] to try and help the boys there find jobs.
43. I've always had jobs working with people, helping them. I now work in [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Impact

44. For years after I left Smyllum, I used to hide away a lot. I wore a "snorkel" jacket, a parka with the hood zipped up round my face. I was frightened of everybody. I still sleep with a pillow on either side of me, so that the bedding is not too tight.

45. I ended up abusing alcohol and took a few drugs when I was younger. I am certain that was because of what happened to me in Smyllum. The alcohol was me hiding from everything. It was the only relief I got from my thoughts of what that guy did to me.
46. I was a bit depressed a few years ago and went to an NHS counsellor, but I got nothing out of it. It was just like they were ticking boxes.

Records

47. I've never tried to get my records, but I would like to see them.

Other information

48. [REDACTED] and I went back to Smyllum about fifteen or twenty years ago, but it was all shut up. I asked someone in the grounds where the nuns were [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
49. When I found them, I asked the nuns about the [REDACTED] I was looking to get a wee bit of understanding about why he did what he did to me, but they just told me what a lovely man he was. I got nothing out of them. They seemed to remember me, but I couldn't remember them. They actually showed me an old black and white photograph of me there.
50. Unfortunately my sister [REDACTED] and I are estranged just now. We've not talked for about five years. I wish I could get her involved, because I know things happened to her as well. We used to talk about our time in Smyllum and she told me what happened to her. She ended up being an alcoholic.

- 51. I have recently been getting some help from a counsellor through Future Pathways, who has been absolutely fabulous.

- 52. I think there should be regular meetings with children in care by the social work department. I'm not saying there should be physical examinations, but children should be closely monitored. Care establishments should be open to scrutiny and monitoring. It is amazing how much abuse hurts people.

- 53. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed..... 

Dated..... 17.11.17