

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

AFO

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is [REDACTED] AFO [REDACTED] My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1949 and I am 68 years of age. My contact details are known to the inquiry.

Background

2. I have been married for 45 years. My wife and I have two daughters aged 41 and 43 and have three grandsons aged 12, 22 and 24. I am now retired but previously worked as a financial advisor for the last 23 years and before that I was a qualified butcher working for a well known supermarket chain. I became a manager at a store based in Newport Shropshire.
3. I am one of seven children. I have three younger brothers and a younger sister. I also have two older brothers from my mother's first marriage. Unfortunately my eldest brother, two younger brothers and my sister have all passed away.
4. I was seven years old, nearly eight, when I went into care in [REDACTED] 1957. My mum came to my school, and took my two elder brothers, [REDACTED] out of the school and told me I was to go home.
5. What had happened was that my father had come out of prison and my mother, who had been seeing someone else, had decided to leave my dad and move to Glasgow to live with her brother and his family. She took my two brothers and I can only

assume that she didn't take any of the rest of us because two children were as much as she could cope with.

6. This meant that, living in the house, were my dad, me and my brothers and sister who were aged six, five, four and eighteen months. However, as well as having a problem with alcohol, my father was epileptic which meant that he couldn't really look after us. In fact we all ended up staying with a neighbour.
7. Within a couple of weeks of my mum leaving, somebody came to the house and we were all taken to our local church. Thereafter Sister [AFY] and another nun took us all to Carstairs by train and from there to Smyllum House by taxi.
8. As the oldest child I knew that we were there because our mum had left us and our dad was just out of prison but wasn't able to look after us. I didn't know all the details about who had decided we were to go to Smyllum.

Smyllum House - Lanark

9. Smyllum House was called an orphanage when we went there but it was basically a children's home that was run by an order of nuns called The Sisters of Charity.
10. The nuns that I recall being there were Sister [EAD] Sister Josephine, Sister [EAA] Sister [AGI] Sister Gerrard and Sister [EAC] There was also [BAC] These people were all involved with the boy's section in one way or another. To my mind they all treated the boys very, very well.
11. That first night was quite traumatic. It was frightening for us because it was so strange and we were so young. I was only seven, though turned eight a few weeks later, and I suppose I felt responsible for my younger brothers and sister. The place

itself felt foreign to us and although we were all kept together in the one room at first then we were split up that night.

12. Me and two of my younger brothers were taken to what was called the wee boys dorm, and my sister and youngest brother were taken to the nursery because they were so young.
13. I think there were between twenty and thirty in our dorm. They were all boys aged between five and eight. I don't recall much about that first night. I stayed in the wee boys dorm for only a few weeks before I was transferred to Sacred Heart dorm which was at first run by Sister BAE and then by Sister EAC

Routine

14. We would get up at about 7:00 am when a nun would come into the dorm clapping her hands telling us it was time to get up. You would then get washed, dressed and make your bed before going for breakfast.
15. After breakfast you would put on your school jacket and go to school. The school was set apart from the main building and had its own play area but was still within the grounds. School started at 9:00 am.
16. At lunchtime you went back into the main building and ate in the dining room. After that it was back to school until about 4:00 pm then it was back to the main building where we got changed out of our school uniform.
17. Tea would be about 5:00 pm and after that we would watch the telly or play in the big room. If the weather was good we would perhaps play outside though still within the grounds. We would go up to bed at about 9.00pm have a wash and brush our teeth say our prayers and go to bed.

18. At the weekends we would play football or play out in the big yard. I remember that we played a lot of football.
19. On Sundays we went to mass. At the age of ten or eleven I became an altar boy which meant that I would have to get up that wee bit earlier and I would take the post to the post office and collect any post to take back to the home and take milk to the sisters in Lanark.

Food

20. On the whole the food was good except for the breakfast. If we had porridge it was always lumpy mainly because I think it was cooked overnight and therefore perhaps not stirred. The food was sufficient and it was certainly better than anything I had got at home.
21. I recall that when I first went to Smyllum I was very pale. Sister Joseph, who worked in the kitchen, called me over and said she was going to try and build me up, I had to call at the kitchen during my morning play time. Every morning she would give me a drink made of milk and a raw egg that she called an egget. She then gave me the same thing almost every day and I have to say that, while I didn't like the taste of it, it certainly improved my health.
22. If you were given food that you didn't like, you would always find somebody else who would eat it for you. I don't recall ever being forced to eat something I didn't want. We were all young active kids using up a lot of energy and there was always somebody who was willing to eat anything extra.

Bed-wetting

23. I never had a problem with bedwetting though I know that others did. The sisters had helpers who were perhaps girls who had grown up in the home. Some of these girls,

I don't think it was the sisters, would sometimes put the wet sheets on the heads of those who had wet their beds. That's the only thing I recall about bedwetting. I think they did it to shame the boys and maybe it was their way of trying to shame the boys into being cured of bedwetting.

Washing

24. We mainly took showers which was every other day in the evening. The main shower area was communal though the showers themselves were individual cubicles with a sluice running through all of them. We always wore our pants when showering. A sister would always be present when we took our showers but that was only to supervise us.

Doctors / Dentist

25. I recall getting my tonsils out when I was about eight. Me and a wee girl were taken to a small infirmary in Lanark. I remember that she went back to the home the same day but I was kept in for about a week because, apparently, my tonsils were really bad.
26. My whole family were given tests about once a year for TB in Carlisle Hospital. This was because one of my brothers had been born with a TB gland on his neck.
27. Any medical help we needed was dealt with and there was a nun who was like a nurse who dealt with the typical cuts and bruises that children of our age would commonly get.
28. I don't recall much about dentists but, in general, my teeth were in good condition, probably because we had to brush our teeth every morning and night.

Clothing

29. The sisters provided us with our clothes and they were sent to the laundry to be washed. We had clothes for playing in and clothes for school. When attending mass on a Sunday we basically wore school uniform but with a white shirt and tie and our Smyllum blazer.

Christmas / birthdays

30. Christmas was very religious. We went to mass. There was a lady in London who wrote to me. I called her Auntie [REDACTED] was her name, she always sent me a Christmas present. We were allowed to keep any presents we got. I don't recall any special dinner for Christmas but I do remember we were bussed to various places where we were treated to parties and given presents.
31. For my birthday I would get a present from Auntie [REDACTED] but that was about it.

Books / toys

32. There were toys, a radio and a record player which were in the room we called the library. It also had a piano along with books and comics which I enjoyed. I don't recall if they were new comics every week but I think they probably were as I don't remember reading the same ones over and over again.

Visits

33. Our mum came to see us two or three times a year. She would be driven there by her boyfriend who had a van. Visits were on a Sunday and lasted about an hour or an hour and a half. We would meet in the big room at the front of the house or, if the weather was nice, we would go outside.

34. My dad visited twice. On both occasions he was with two men who he told us were his business partners. It turned out they were prison officers.
35. I only saw a welfare officer once and that was when Smyllum was, what I suppose you would call, downsizing in 1964. They were trying to move some of the children back with their families and tried to get some adopted.
36. A welfare officer asked me if I wanted to be adopted. I don't know if they had discussed it with my parents. I told them I didn't want to be adopted. I was thirteen or fourteen by this time and felt, if we were adopted, that me and my brothers and sister would be separated and sent to different places and not keep in contact. I didn't want that.

Trips

37. Once a year we went to summer camp which was nice and where we did lots of activities. They were in West or East Linton, Meikle in Perthshire and Aberfoyle. The camp was for about two weeks and everybody went.
38. We would also be taken out by people from Catholic parishes. We would go out to individual families who would take us out for the day. We also went to Celtic Park a few times and I remember Celtic organised a Christmas lunch for us which I think was in St Mungo's hall in Glasgow.

Schooling

39. I enjoyed school. We started off in the primary. There were four separate classes. My only regret about school was not passing my 11+ exam. I actually came second in the class but even the boy who came first didn't pass.
40. If we had passed we would have gone to Our Lady's High School in Motherwell. Instead we went to St Mary's in Lanark which was a junior secondary school. I don't recall what the difference was. As I say, I enjoyed school.

41. We didn't get homework while at primary. The homework we got when at secondary was done before and after tea. We were always encouraged to do our homework.

Religion

42. The school was very religious. We went to mass every Sunday and Feast Days. We would also have retreats at Easter when sometimes an Irish priest would come in and give us talks. We also attended a benediction service on a Sunday evening at 6pm.
43. We also said our prayers in the morning and at night and said grace before lunch. We studied the catechism in school. For me the religious side of the school was just part and parcel of being at a Catholic school. It wasn't something that was rammed down your throat.

Discipline

44. Discipline was quite strict in the home and, at times, it had to be. In my opinion it was done in a fair manner and no different than any other school in Scotland at that time. Boys will be boys and sometimes they had to be kept in line.
45. Discipline could involve you being sent to your dorm on your own or, maybe if you were caught fighting, the nuns would maybe tug your ear and tell you off.
46. For more serious matters you had to go to Sister **EAD** who would perhaps give you the belt, the Lochgelly tawse, on the hand. She was head of the boy's section. It was only one or two strokes as I recall. It didn't happen to me all that often.
47. There were boys who got the belt more often than others but I don't think it was excessive for their behaviour. It was the accepted way of punishment in schools all over Scotland at the time. In my view the discipline was not excessive.

My Experience in Smyllum

48. My overall experience of being in Smyllum was a positive one, I had a good time and learned a lot. Looking back I think it could be likened to a public school environment with the education and the discipline being similar I don't know what would have happened to me if I hadn't gone there.
49. I know there are boys who are making accusations of nuns being violent and are making allegations against [BAC] I saw nothing like that.
50. [BAC] when I was there, [BAC] he was fantastic with us. He was like a father figure to most of the boys. He would take us out on walks, he taught us how to play football, badminton, cricket and how to box. I remember none of the other schools could beat us at football.
51. [BAC] also taught us how to play brass instruments. I learned to play the coronet and was in the band that played in a festival in Lanark called Lanimer's Day a year after starting to learn to play.
52. Through playing in the band, and [BAC] influence, I later went on to join The Gloucester's Regimental Band serving with them for three years. I also spent 33 years with my local Brass Band. I thoroughly enjoyed that and it was all thanks to [BAC]
53. I have read that somebody claims [BAC] killed a boy called Francis McColl by hitting him with a golf club. That is nonsense and I should know as I was there when it happened.

54. I remember we were at a summer camp in Aberfoyle and BAC was showing us how to play golf. He constantly warned us about looking round before we took a shot to make sure we didn't hit anybody with the club as we swung it.
55. There was a boy called [REDACTED] who was about to swing the club and he turned round and told a boy called Francis to stand back a bit. However, Francis was hard of hearing and didn't hear the warning. [REDACTED] then swung the club and hit Francis in the temple with it.
56. Francis died about a week later but, as I said, it certainly wasn't BAC who hit him. We all attended a requiem mass in St Mary's for him.
57. There is also a write-up about one of the nuns kicking Sammy Carr and pulling his hair. I didn't see any of that and I would be surprised if it was true. Sammy was four or five when he came over to the big boys dorm and BAC took him under his wing.
58. BAC told us that Sammy had a terminal illness and encouraged the rest of us to look after him and get him involved when we were playing football and doing other things. Given his illness and the way BAC looked after him I just don't see Sammy being attacked by any of the nuns.
59. The thing I really liked about Smyllum was the company of the other boys. We were like a family and all in the same boat.
60. As far as I am concerned I witnessed no abuse at Smyllum.

Leaving Institution

61. In November 1964 a welfare officer came round and asked me if I wanted to be adopted. As I said earlier, part of Smyllum was closing down and a lot of the boys were being farmed out elsewhere.

62. After I told them that I didn't want us to be adopted the welfare officer must have spoken to my mum as a few weeks later me and my brothers and sister moved in with my mum and her boyfriend in to their flat in Germiston in Glasgow.
63. It was only a two bedroom flat and since mum's boyfriend also had his three children living there, there wasn't a lot of space.
64. The move made a massive change to our lives which weren't helped by the fact that my mother had a drink problem which I suppose we just learned to live with. I also had problems settling in at my new school which was St Roch's, in fact somebody attacked me on my first day.
65. Moving to Glasgow meant I had to learn a different way of living. I got Saturday jobs and when I left school at fifteen got a job as a waiter. Just before I turned sixteen I went to work in a hotel in North Berwick before going to stay with my granny.
66. I eventually moved to London and I met my wife when I was 21 and we married fifteen months later. By this time I was working as a butcher. After that my life was what it was. I had various jobs and always stayed in touch with my brothers and sisters.

Impact

67. If being in Smyllum had an impact on me then it was a positive one. In fact I sometimes wish we had stayed at Smyllum or maybe even let ourselves be adopted. I think either of these options would have been better than us all moving into such a small flat with my mum and her boyfriend.
68. As far as my time in Smyllum went I did not see or experience any sort of abuse and I believe that my time in Smyllum enabled me to go on to have a successful career and a happy life.

Final Thoughts

69. My hopes for the Inquiry are that it's fair. Fair to the nuns and fair to [BAC]
[BAC]
70. The reason I have come forward to speak to the Inquiry is that I have read what people are saying about Smyllum, the nuns and about [BAC] It seems to be all negative and, especially in the case of [BAC] some of it simply isn't true.
71. [BAC] is no longer with us having died several years ago. I think it is so unfair that people seem to be able to say what they like about him but he can't speak up to defend himself. I can speak up for [BAC] and I will. He was a wonderful man who taught me so much and was like a father figure to me and many, many others who all have a lot to thank him for.
72. With regards to the nuns I have to say that they treated me with nothing but kindness. Yes there was discipline but it wasn't excessive and I certainly wouldn't describe it as abuse. I certainly never saw any of the things that are being described by others and find it really difficult to believe that it actually happened given the many years I was at Smyllum.
73. Another thing I would like to say is how disappointed I am that the press have been allowed to sensationalise things. I read in the news that 400 children had died at the home over the years and been buried in a mass unmarked grave.
74. First of all I would point out that this was over the course of a great many years and many of those years were times when poverty and ill-health were rife. It is inevitable that many children of such times would die young.
75. I really do not believe that such children would have been buried in unmarked graves and am sure there would have been little wooden crosses or something with their names on it. Perhaps they were vandalised or perhaps fell victim to the weather over the decades.

76. Also, if the grave appears to be a mass grave is it not possible that the bodies were all buried close together but, over the years, soil erosion has turned numerous individual graves into one big mass grave?

77. 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.

AFO
[Redacted Signature]

Signed.....

Dated 29th December 2017.....

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