

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

BEW

Support person present: No

1. My name is [REDACTED] BEW [REDACTED]. My maiden surname was [REDACTED] and I am known as [REDACTED]. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1958 and I am presently fifty-nine years of age. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Life before going into care

2. All I know about my life before I went into care is from what I've read in my files and from the little bits I was told while I was in care.
3. My dad was [REDACTED] and my mum was [REDACTED]. Mum used to get called [REDACTED]. I don't have any brothers or sisters although my mother brought up a boy who was not her own later on. I never had much contact with my mum for a number of years.
4. I know that I lived in Edinburgh, where my mother's father was, and my records say that I was down in England somewhere. I have no memory of that. Apparently we were travelling all over the countryside and I was getting left with dubious people.
5. I was taken into care when I was one year old because I was neglected. My dad was in and out of jail and living off my mum's immoral earnings, according to my records.

6. At first I was put into Ravelrig House at Balerno and I think somewhere else as well, but I can't remember where. All I remember of being in Ravelrig House is a half-cupboard that was full of toys. I remember opening the doors and all the toys falling out.
7. My father took me out of care at some point because he thought he had the right, but then they came looking for me and I was put back in again.
8. When I was four I was taken to Balcary House in Hawick. I don't remember my first day there, I was so young. My first memory is of Christmas, running down the stairs and knocking on the door to the playroom.

### **Balcary House, Hawick**

9. Balcary is a big house in its own grounds on the outskirts of Hawick. When you walked through the front door, there was a wee room off to the left where we would get our hair checked for nits.
10. There was another door straight ahead which led into the hall. To the left was the dining room and it led onto the kitchen. Past the dining room, also on the left of the hall, were the stairs to the upper floors and under the stairs was a cupboard where our shoes were kept.
11. Opposite the dining room, to the right, was the playroom with a big bay window. In that room was a piano and we used to have singsongs in there. The room was partitioned off and there was a TV room on the other side of the partition. That room was more for people to read or do knitting. Past the playroom and off to the right was the office.
12. Upstairs was all bedrooms. I shared a bedroom with four other girls, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and two sisters called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

██████ was there when I arrived, but the other three came after me. They were all much the same age as me.

13. Next to our room was another room where one of the staff would sleep. To the right was where the boys' rooms were and a door that led to the house parents' little flat. Down a short flight of stairs was a toilet and a sink. There was also a door that led outside to the back yard and the washroom for the laundry.
14. Another flight of stairs led up to the sewing room which had big wardrobes full of clothes for all the children. I remember there was a drawer in that room full of buttons, which I just loved playing with. Also on the top floor was the girls' bathroom.
15. Outside in the grounds were lawns, trees everywhere, a vegetable garden and an orchard.

### **Staff and children**

16. The house mother when I arrived at Balcary was Miss O'Brien. All the kids called her "Mummyji", which is pronounced "Mamma G" and is the Indian for mother. Miss O'Brien left after I'd been there for a couple of years and Joan and Stewart Barron took over. A lot of the older ones didn't accept the Barron's at first because they felt that Miss O'Brien had been pushed out. The younger ones were quite happy to accept the change.
17. Balcary was run by Barnardo's. I think they must have felt they needed to have a couple in because Miss O'Brien was a spinster and was old-fashioned in her ways. She was lovely too though. She was the sort of person you just warmed to and who you could speak to.
18. The Barrons lived in their own little flat with their son ██████ and there was also a couple called Mr and Mrs Wright who were their deputies. The staff included a cook, Ma Summers, and a number of other men and women. I remember at different

times there was Ian Goodyear, [REDACTED] BHR [REDACTED] ladies called Morna, Margaret and Agnes as well as other staff, but I can't remember their names. I think they all had homes elsewhere and would only be sleeping at Balcary when they were on duty.

19. There were maybe about eighteen boys and girls there, ranging in ages from four up to about sixteen. The youngest child I can remember was [REDACTED] who was four.
20. Balcary House is the only place I have ever felt at home. All the former kids that I keep in touch with on "Facebook" say the same. Even now, as soon as I walk through the front door I feel something. It never felt like an institution, it was always my home. There was always happiness and there was always laughter.
21. I think all the kids there came in with their own problems, but Miss O'Brien, Mr and Mrs Barron and the rest of the staff always had time for everybody. Even the townfolk of Hawick were accepting of the kids at Balcary and treated us well.

### **Routine at Balcary House, Hawick**

#### *Mornings and bedtime*

22. We were woken in the morning by whichever member of staff was sleeping in the room next to ours. I can't remember what time that would have been. Most of us had alarm clocks on our bedside cabinets and would often be awake anyway.
23. We would all then go to the bathroom up the stairs, brush our teeth and wash at the sink. In there was a rail with hooks that had our names on and we all hung our own towels on there. After that we'd get ourselves ready for school and go downstairs to the diningroom for breakfast. After breakfast we would all get out coats on and walk to school.

#### *Mealtimes/Food*

24. At all meals we had to say "Our Grace" before we ate. Breakfast was mainly porridge and a choice of cereals. There was also toast and I will always remember the racks of toast. The older children usually had the job of making the toast in the morning. I remember "Marmite" in the morning as well, which I'm not very fond of.
25. We all had designated tables, although the only girl I can remember sitting next to is [REDACTED] who I shared a room with. I think there were four or five children at every table.
26. Lunch was at school and for tea in the evening we got a variety of things. There were mince and tatties, stews or macaroni cheese and then a pudding. Ma Summers, the cook, would make everything and also do home baking like scones. We were fed well.
27. We were grateful for what we were given to eat. If something wasn't eaten it would just be put in the bin or Brucie the dog would get it. Brucie was always under the table. We wouldn't get anything else if we didn't eat it, that would be it.
28. Sunday lunch was always a proper roast of beef, pork or chicken. After we had that we would go for a walk.
29. Often we would creep into the kitchen without the cook Ma Summers noticing us. We would dive into the little hoard of goodies she kept in the larder downstairs.

### *Washing/bathing*

30. On the top floor was the bathroom and I can't remember whether we could have a bath once or twice a week. I don't think you could just go and have a bath when you felt like it, although I can't really remember.

31. There was a rota and there would be girls' nights and boys' nights for having a bath. When we were older we would run the bath ourselves. Only the youngest ones would be supervised, although staff would always be on hand for safety.

### *Clothing/uniform*

32. We were always well clothed. We had a uniform for school, but the rest of the time we just wore our ordinary clothes. Some of the local shops used to donate clothes and shoes. The whole town made sure that we were well provided for. Sometimes we were better dressed than the kids we went to school with.
33. The wardrobes in the sewing room up the stairs were full of clothes for every age and every size. A lady used to be in that room all the time, sewing away and repairing clothes. I can't remember her name.
34. Mr Barron used to check our shoes every week to see what condition they were in, whether they needed heeled or soled and if they still fitted. If they didn't fit we would get a new pair.
35. I remember a dress I had that had cats along the bottom. I loved that dress and I hated it when I grew out of it and it got handed down to somebody else.

### *School*

36. I enjoyed school, it was brilliant. I was knocked down by a car and caravan when I was eleven years old and I still had all the get well cards up until a short time ago. It meant that much to me that all my classmates at school had taken the time to give me them.
37. At first I went to Drumlanrig Primary, which was about a half-hour walk away. The younger ones would be escorted by a member of staff and as we got older we could walk in our own little groups. Agnes, one of the staff, used to meet us at the bottom

of the road on a Tuesday, which was her day off. She would have a packet of sweets with her and would share them with us.

38. We didn't get any sweets to take to school like some of the other children did. I used to stand outside the shop and watch for any children stealing. If I saw someone I would go and tell the lady in the shop so I could get a free bag.
39. The High School was much nearer, just along the road. I wasn't there very long because I left Balcary to stay with my mum. I was having epileptic fits a lot of the time I was at High School and I don't remember it very well. As far as I can remember my time there was fine.

### *Leisure*

40. When we came back from school we would get changed into our play clothes, because our school clothes had to be kept good. After that, I think we had our tea before doing our homework. Homework was either done in the playroom or in the diningroom. The older ones would sometimes take their homework up into their rooms if they were needing more peace and quiet.
41. After we'd done our homework, we would watch a wee bit of telly sometimes, before it was time to get ready for bed.
42. When we had free time, we could pretty much do whatever we wanted and we would get up to whatever mischief we could. Most of the time we would play in the grounds where there were bikes that had been donated. Some of the kids had their own bikes, others just shared.
43. Another thing that we did for anybody that wanted was Mr Barron taught us how to play snooker. Once we learned we all just played against each other. We were also taught dominoes and different card games, we played "Monopoly" and "Kerplunk", which I got for Christmas one year.

44. There was a donkey called Dobbie in a field at the bottom of the gardens and we had rabbits to look after. I think my dad had bought me a rabbit and the other ones were shared by the other children.
45. On a Saturday we would get our pocket money and would always go to the pictures in the town for the matinee. I can remember seeing the "Flash Gordon" series every week. I can't remember how much pocket money we got, but to us it seemed like a fortune and we could spend it how we wanted.
46. Depending what age you were, you could go into town if you wanted. On a Sunday we all went for a walk after church. The older ones could go on their own, but the younger ones had to be supervised. At night we would often have a singsong around the piano.

### *Religion*

47. We went to church every Sunday at St George's West, which was the local Christian church. I don't know if it was Protestant or not, I don't class myself as any particular denomination. I don't think there was a choice, I think we all had to go to church, but I think everybody was quite happy with that.

### *Trips/Holidays*

48. Every summer we would go on holiday to North Berwick and stay in a home there. The staff and the Barron's, including their son [REDACTED] all came along too. I remember the birds in the aviary in the park, going down onto the beach there and climbing North Berwick Law there.
49. Balcary had its own minibus and we would also go for the day to Spittal Beach and other places. As well as those trips, we went on Sunday School picnic trips and I remember going away with the school to Scotch Kershope.

50. We also used to go away up the Yarrow Valley to a couple that stayed at Hyndhope at Easter time. The old lady and gent were gorgeous. They used to hide Easter eggs and we would go on a hunt for them. We would have picnics up there as well.

*Birthdays, Christmas and Celebrations*

51. Quite a fuss was made when it was your birthday. You got a cake and everybody sang "Happy Birthday". We were also allowed to bring two friends from school for tea. We were actually allowed to go to friend's houses at any time for tea, it didn't have to be a special occasion.
52. A few months before Christmas we all used to sit and write our letters to Santa. I don't know how they did it, but we always got what we asked for. It was amazing. I've since learned that the Salvation Army had a lot to do with it.
53. At Christmas there was a massive tree and a big Santa in the hall. We all used to put pillowcases out in the playroom for Santa Claus to fill. We would all come running down the stairs in the morning and bang on the door. Mr Barron would be in the room and we all would shout "We want in". Sometimes we would have to sing a few carols before we actually got in. All our pillowcases had been moved around and it was a joy to try and find where yours was.
54. Later on there would be a proper Christmas dinner and all the staff would help putting the kids' new toys together. We had a great time.
55. At Easter we used to get Easter eggs donated by the people and shops in the town. Every morning for so long afterwards we would have chocolate, so much that I eventually became sick of it.
56. Every year Balcary would have a garden fete that all the townsfolk would come to. A man would set up a little steam train ride for the kids and there were stalls and a dignitary would come to open it. It was a way of raising funds for Balcary and for Barnardo's.

*Personal Possessions*

57. Any presents we got, or anything we might have been given, was ours to keep. Most of the things we got were kept in our bedrooms. My dad made me a jewellery box that was like a chalet and I used to keep it on my bedside cabinet. I remember someone poked a pencil through the window and I was so upset. They were obviously jealous.

*Relations with other children*

58. We were just like brothers and sisters in Balcary and we still think of ourselves in that way. Everybody was treated the same. Even the Barron's son, [REDACTED] was treated just the same as everybody else and included in everything we did. There was no favouritism shown and he got exactly the same as all the other kids.

*Visits/Inspections*

59. Ma Summers, the cook, had three children who used to come up to Balcary. I remember her son [REDACTED] used to sit outside in the pram and we girls would all fight over who was going to shoogie the pram.
60. I think keeping in contact with our families was encouraged. I think the Barrons felt that it was important because we would all have to leave Balcary eventually.
61. My dad was more in contact with me than my mum. He would write letters to me when he was in prison. When he got out he got a little flat in [REDACTED] in Hawick. I would go and visit him there and he would also come up to the school with bags of sweets for me.
62. He also came to Balcary to visit and I think he had a few words with Mr and Mrs Barron because he came up a couple of times with a drink in him. If anyone's family

wanted to come and visit they had to make arrangements. I think my dad was just expecting to arrive and be able to take me away whenever it pleased him.

63. Later on, after I had been in Balcary for a while, Margaret one of the staff was doing my hair and asked me if I wanted to have contact with my mum. I was getting to the age of puberty and I decided that I did. I asked Margaret to get in contact with my mum and eventually she came to visit. I went to visit her in Newcastle as well and things progressed from there.
64. My granddad came to visit me a couple of times and, when I was a bit older, I used to go and visit him at weekends as well. He stayed in [REDACTED] in Edinburgh and I would get the bus up to his on my own. Sometimes I would go and see him every other weekend, sometimes it was once a month. It all depended how I felt, it was up to me.
65. I had two social workers, Silvia Massey and Betty Trembath, who were really good. I had to go to their office in Edinburgh quite a bit to see my dad when he was in jail. I didn't know he was in prison at the time, I was just told the officers escorting him were his two friends. It was never just me and my dad, there would always be somebody in my room.
66. My social workers would come and visit me at Balcary as well. They were easy to talk to and we were always allowed to speak in private.

#### *Healthcare*

67. Dr McAllister was the local GP and used to come to Balcary to check everyone. I have never met a doctor like him, he was absolutely wonderful. He treated everyone in the gentlest way and was someone you could open up to.
68. I have had a hearing problem for all the time I can remember. It's in my files that I was deaf in one ear and I remember getting heated oil put in my ear with a spoon.

69. When I was eleven years old I had a car accident and ended up with a fractured skull and a brain injury. One Sunday I went for a walk with some of the other girls. They had run away in front so I ran to catch them up, but some of the boys from Balcary, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and others, stood in front to stop me. I couldn't get past so instead I went to cross the road to get away and was hit by a car and caravan.
70. I was taken to the cottage hospital and treated by Dr Brogan there. If it wasn't for him I don't think I'd be here today. He patched me up before I was taken up to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. I was unconscious for a fortnight and in hospital in Edinburgh for quite some time.
71. The accident affected my memory and I have had epilepsy ever since. Dr McAllister would always be the one that would come to the home if I had a fit. After I took epilepsy there was always someone with me when I was in the bath in case I took a fit.
72. Our teeth were well looked after as well. We were taken to the dentist in Hawick regularly for check-ups and any treatment.

### *Chores*

73. Everybody had duties to do and there was nothing wrong with that. We had a routine and timetables for what our duties were and everybody knew what they had to do. There was never any fuss and I certainly was never made to do anything I didn't want to do. It was something to keep us occupied and out of trouble.
74. There weren't so many first thing in the morning because we would have school to go to. After we got up in the morning we had to make our bed, put our nightie under the pillow and our slippers at the end of the bed.
75. The chores we did have were helping out washing dishes and putting them away. We all had to clean and polish our own shoes and the girls used to get the task of

loading the washing machines. The older girls sometimes went on to do some ironing and I think the boys helped in the garden.

76. That was about all because there were cleaners who would do the rest and a gardener who would look after the grounds.

*Bed wetting*

77. I was a bed wetter, as were some of the other children. One of the boys actually soiled the bed as well. If someone had wet the bed and once they were a certain age, they to strip the bed themselves. They then had to carry the sheets down the main stairs themselves. We weren't ridiculed or punished, but it was humiliating.

*Discipline*

78. There was discipline, but it was fair. Most of the punishments were getting sent to our rooms or some of our pocket money might be withheld or we might not be allowed to go on a trip we might have had planned. If we were really bad Mr Barron would give a good stern ticking off. It was enough just to get a glare from Mrs Barron. I never saw anyone being physically punished.
79. I remember one time around Christmas, when I was six or seven, I was dangled over the bannister by another girl. I must have been tormenting her. The Barrons hadn't been there long and they went down on her like a ton of bricks.

*Running away*

80. When I was twelve or thirteen, I was getting bullied by one of the older boys in the home, [REDACTED], so I decided to run away. Another of the older boys, [REDACTED] had come home one day and he had said something about my dad being in the jail. [REDACTED] then started saying things and so I told the staff. He would get a ticking off, but he still wouldn't stop. Looking back now, it was just boys being boys and teasing, but I'd had enough.

81. There was no physical bullying at all, it was just words. I think I was a very sensitive child and took things to heart very easily. I think the staff would have been aware, but I think they would probably have thought it was just jesting more than bullying.
82. One of my classmates at school, [REDACTED], gave me the 50 pence I needed to get the bus up to Edinburgh. When I got to Edinburgh my granddad gave me the money for the train to Newcastle, where my mum was living. I got on the train and went to my mother's.
83. I was at an age where I thought I knew everything and I wanted to go and stay with her. I was adamant I wasn't going back, but I was persuaded by my social worker after about a week. By that time I'd spoken to Mrs Barron on the phone as well. They were obviously worried with me taking off like that.
84. When I got back I was spoken to, but I wasn't in trouble. I think they were more keen to find out why I had run away and how they could change the situation. I was never tormented by [REDACTED] again and there were no repercussions.

### **Leaving Balcary House, Hawick**

85. When it was time for anybody to leave, there was never anything like a party to say "Cheerio". One minute they were there and the next minute they weren't. There didn't seem to be any notice given and there was no fuss made. I can't remember saying goodbye to anyone when I left either, apart from the girls in my room.
86. The worst thing I ever did was ask to leave Balcary and move to my mother's in Newcastle. I was fourteen and I wasn't with her very long before she died. I think Mr and Mrs Barron would have had some input into me leaving, along with my social worker. She was my mum though and I wanted to go and live with her and start having a relationship with her.

87. I didn't move in with my mum straight away, I was put into a place in Whitley Bay. I'm not sure what this place was because it wasn't a children's home and it wasn't a hostel either. I stayed there to be near my mum before I actually went to live with her.
88. I was given a social worker down there, Sylvia Carrington, who was based in Newcastle. She was really good and would visit me often and take me out for cups of tea. I know now that was her way of checking up on me and making sure I was okay.
89. I stayed with my mum and her boyfriend until she died when I was fifteen. Mrs Barron actually turned up at the door in Newcastle after my mother's funeral, to check I was alright. That was quite a journey in 1974.
90. After that, I stayed with one of my mum's ex-boyfriends and his partner, before I decided I wanted to return to Hawick.

### **Life after being in care**

91. I was sixteen when I moved back to Hawick and at first I stayed with a friend and her family until I got a flat of my own. The social work in Newcastle had put me in touch with the social work in Hawick and they helped me out. I had nothing so they helped with furnishing the flat.
92. I got a job in the mills and eventually met my husband. We were married when I was twenty and I had my first child when I was twenty-five. We had four kids together and moved out to the country at [REDACTED] near Selkirk.
93. We lived there for a long time and separated a few years ago. I moved back to Hawick after I got a place on my own and got a job back in the mill [REDACTED]

**Impact**

94. We were brought up in Balcary with rules and regulations and I think that has made me someone who likes to be well organised. We were taught values and right from wrong and I have a good work ethic. I think the life I had at Balcary was the best upbringing anybody could have had. It was certainly better than I would have had with my mum and dad.
95. The one thing that was missing was perhaps the love, the kisses and the cuddles that kids would get from their parents. There are limits to what they can do in a care home. I always have a wall in front of me. As much as I might want to cuddle my kids, I can't do it. I think that's because I never got that. That has had an impact on my own children too. They're not that close to me.

**Records**

96. I applied to Barnardo's for my records about a month ago and am disappointed that they're not all there. They're about me and I wanted to know. It was very easy to get them and I was surprised to find out some of the things that were in them.

**Other information**

97. Children were cared for properly in Balcary and a lot could be learned from the way we were looked after. It should be recognised that Miss O'Brien and Mr and Mrs Barron looked after the children well. Barnardo's should be recognised too. All the staff at Balcary cared, it wasn't like it was just a job to them.
98. When I read in the papers that Balcary was going to be part of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry the steam was coming out of my ears. I decided to approach the Inquiry to give my statement because I think it's important that the Inquiry gets the whole story. I know there were children in other homes that were not as lucky and I

really feel for them. Not every home was bad though and Balcary was one of the good ones.

99. Mr Barron, the house father, died just last week. When I heard I put a wee piece up on my Facebook page thanking him for teaching me right from wrong. I wanted to recognise how he and his wife looked after me in my hour of need.

100. 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...  BEW .....

Dated... 24.8.18 .....