

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

FBC

Support person present: No

1. My name is FBC My date of birth is 1940. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I think I was born in [REDACTED], England, but I don't remember a thing about my childhood. I know that I was put into a convent as a young child and that I was sent to Australia as a child migrant in 1952, but I was never aware I had any family whatsoever until 1996, when I was contacted by my Uncle [REDACTED]
3. When I got to the age of about sixteen or seventeen, I tried to forget everything that had happened to me as a child. I felt that I'd had to start my life over when I came to Australia, so I pushed it out of my memory.
4. I have since found out that my mother was [REDACTED] and all I know of my father is that he was a New Zealander. None of the family I later spoke to would say much about him at all. My mother and father were not married and I learned that my mother died when I was two years old. I know nothing about whether I had any brothers or sisters.
5. When my mother died, one of my aunts was going to look after me, but she had just had a baby that died. The Catholic priest told her that it would be better if I went into

a home for a little while and then go back to my aunt, but that never happened. I was put in a convent and just went from one convent to the next.

Life in care - United Kingdom

6. I understand that records relating to me show that I was put into Nazareth House in Carlisle at first and then on [REDACTED] 1950 I was transferred to Nazareth House at Lasswade, near Edinburgh.
7. I can't remember a thing about being in either of these convents, or even what they looked like. I can't remember any education whatsoever when I was in Britain and I can't remember seeing any visitors. I remember nothing at all of that time of my life.
8. Apparently Uncle [REDACTED] went looking for me at the convent after the war, when I would have been five or six years old. When he got there the people told him I'd already gone to Australia, although that wouldn't have been the case. I don't know who would have told him that.

Migration

Selection/information

9. The only thing I remember about how kids were selected to go to Australia was a chap came to the convent one day and asked who wanted to go. I don't know where he was from or who he was. To me, at that age, he was just a man.
10. We were all in one room as he spoke to us and I think I was probably the first to put my hand up. I don't know why I was the first, I'd never heard of Australia before.
11. I don't remember getting anything like a health check or what then happened, but the next thing I knew I was on the boat and going to Australia.

Leaving Scotland

12. According to records that the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry have, I left Nazareth House on [REDACTED] 1952. I believe that is correct.
13. I went by train to Tilbury Docks in London, but I'm not sure if anybody went with me. I would imagine there would have been someone, but I don't recall. I had one little bag with me and very little in it.

Journey on RMS Ormonde

14. I remember when we got on the boat, the Ormonde, at Tilbury there were heaps of people waving their families off. There were thirty-nine boys like me all being migrated, but there was nobody there to say goodbye to us.
15. I wasn't aware at the time whether there were any other children from Scotland, other than a boy called [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] who had been in the same convent I had been in. The others were from all around and a lot of them were from London.
16. After a fashion, there were two gentlemen looking after us thirty-nine boys on the boat, but we ran amok. We stopped at every port and apparently they had arranged for us to go for a walk around wherever we were.

Arrival in Australia

17. I am aware that the Inquiry have a copy of the ship's manifest, which shows that we arrived in Fremantle, Western Australia (WA), on [REDACTED] 1952. That sounds about right.
18. Some of the boys in my group got off in Fremantle and the rest of us were going on to Tasmania. I remember when those boys got off and we were told we were going on to Tasmania that I said I wasn't going there, I was going to Australia. I didn't have a clue at the time that Tasmania was part of Australia.

19. Once those passengers that were staying in WA disembarked at Fremantle, the ship carried on to Melbourne. When we arrived a lot of the other boys went straight on to Tasmania, but [REDACTED] and I had to stay in Melbourne and be quarantined for a few days.
20. We had all our clothes taken off us and we had to go through some special liquid to be fumigated. We were given some clothes to wear and then we went through a whole lot of medical tests. Apparently there had been a lot of cattle at the home we had been at in Scotland and they were worried that we might be carrying foot and mouth disease.

Life in care – Australia

John Bosco Boys' Town, Glenorchy, Tasmania

General

21. John Bosco Boys' Town was run by the Salesians Brothers, a Catholic organisation and had only been open since 1945. It was out in the countryside near Hobart, where there was a lot of bush and it was very basic. There was a lot of farmland.
22. We were the first boarders at Boys' Town, although they used to also bring local boys in to the school there. The boys ranged in ages from about nine or ten and apparently I was the oldest one.
23. The staff were all Brothers and Priests and I don't think there was a great lot of them for the amount of boys that were there. Those whose names I remember are Father LHH [REDACTED] Father LHE [REDACTED] Father LHG [REDACTED] and Brother LHF [REDACTED], who was American. Father LHH [REDACTED] was in charge when I first came and then Father LHE [REDACTED] took over.

Routine at John Bosco Boys' Town

First day

24. After four days in Melbourne, [REDACTED] and I got on a boat called the Taroona, which used to sail between Melbourne and Burnie in Tasmania. After we arrived in Burnie, we got the train to Glenorchy and one of the brothers from Boys' Town picked us up from the station there.
25. At that time, the train journey was about six or seven hours long and the two of us were on our own the whole time. That was a really long day, with very little to eat if we had anything.
26. I don't remember much about my first day at Boys' Town, other than when we arrived all the clothes that we had been given in Melbourne were taken off us and we were given a pair of shorts and a t-shirt and thrown a pair of shoes. We were told to put those shoes on whether they fitted us or not.

Daily routine

27. We would get up at six o'clock in the morning and have a wash, go to church, come back and have breakfast. After breakfast we'd go to school and then at lunch we'd have something to eat and a bit of a play in the playground, before going back into class.
28. Sometimes after class in the afternoon we'd go back into church. There was quite a bit of religious instruction. After that, we'd have dinner before going out into the playground again. After that we would have a shower every night and then, around half-past seven or eight o'clock, we were into bed.

29. Every now and again during the night one of the Brothers would come up and ask whoever was asleep to put their hand up. If you put your hand up they'd come around and belt you. You learned pretty quick to only raise your hand once.

Mealtimes/Food

30. The food was pretty poor. Sometimes it was very poor, but we didn't know any better, that was what we were used to eating. We used to get a tremendous amount of mince, three or four times a week, or sausage. There was never a roast or anything like that. We got whatever was the cheapest thing they could buy and if a boy didn't like what he was given or couldn't eat it, that was it. You would just have to take it or leave it and go hungry.

Clothing/uniform

31. Winter or summer we wore shorts and all the time we just had to wear whatever shoes we were given. It didn't matter whether they fitted or not and my shoes were always far too small.

Leisure time

32. We used to play a lot of cricket and soccer in the playground and in the rest of the grounds. I liked sports and I enjoyed that.

Trips and holidays

33. Some of the local businesses used to come to Boys' Town on what was called Regatta Day. They would take us boys down to the show and being kids it was something we looked forward to. We didn't have any money to spend, we would just go and look and they might buy us an ice cream or a drink, but that was it.

School

34. The school was part of the building, but I don't think the Priests and the Brothers were actually teachers. I couldn't read or write when I came to Boys' Town and,

although it wasn't my choice, I wasn't allowed to go to the school. Quite a few of the other boys were in the same position as me.

35. I spent too much time on the farm and in the orchard instead of in the classrooms and when I left school I couldn't even spell my own name.

Healthcare

36. There was no dental care whatsoever. I did have a couple of nights in hospital after my nose was broken when I was accidentally hit with the ball while we were playing cricket. Other than that, I don't recall much about healthcare.

Work

37. Father LHG worked on the farm and I got on very well with him. I spent most of my time on the farm instead of going to school, but I never got paid for it.

Birthdays and Christmas

38. There were no birthday celebrations and very little was done at Christmas in my first year at Boys' Town. Things changed the second year a little bit, in that they used to billet us out to different families in the community for the holidays.
39. I went to people by the name of Breen, who I got on pretty well with. The second time I went at Christmas I really enjoyed it, but a couple of days after Christmas Mrs Breen died suddenly.
40. I went back to Boys' Town and they tried to send me to other people, but I bluntly refused. I had lost my mother and father and now I was just getting to know somebody and I'd lost them too. I was determined I wasn't going to another family no matter what anybody said.

41. I never went again. At Christmas, I just stopped at the school working on the farm, milking the cows and looking after the pigs. Sometimes I was the only boy there with two or three of the Priests.

Visits/Inspections

42. I wasn't aware of any inspectors or anybody official coming to Boys' Town while I was there. I certainly never saw anybody and nor did I speak to anybody.

Support

43. I got on with most of the other boys and for the most part we all stuck together, but there wasn't really anybody that a boy could talk to if they had any emotional problems.

Family contact

44. Not long after we arrived in Tasmania, one of the Priests asked us if we would write to England and find out if we had any family. I still remember as if it was yesterday that I told him "I live in Australia, I don't know anybody in England and I've got no intention of writing to find out".
45. I don't know why I felt like that, but I didn't know anybody in England and I wasn't going back there under any circumstances.

Personal possessions/pocket money

46. We had no possessions we could call our own and we never got any money for anything. They did have what they called a 'lolly shop', which would open once a fortnight. We could go up and they would give us so many lollies, but never any money.

Bed wetting

47. I think quite a few boys had problems with bed wetting, although I did not. The brothers used to deal with it by rubbing the boys' noses in it.

Abuse at John Bosco Boys' Town

48. The Brothers were very strict and punishments were by the strap, which was leather, or the cane. They never used anything else, but you wouldn't want much more. I often saw boys being hit by all the different Brothers.
49. I was only hit twice, although I should have maybe got it more often because I was pretty blunt as a kid. Once I deserved it and another time I consider I didn't. That particular time I got blamed for something I didn't do and Father LHG came up from behind me and whacked me hard.
50. I will never know how Father LHH didn't kill one lad a few weeks after we got to Boys' Town. The lad was a French boy who came over at the same time as us and whose mother didn't even know he had been sent over.
51. This lad always had on a nice thick coat and Father LHH told him several times to take it off. Eventually, in front of everybody, Father LHH beat this lad so badly with his open hand, all over his body, that I was sure he was going to kill him. I don't know how this boy's mother found out, but she did and the boy was sent back.
52. Brother LHF was a real brute of a man. He used to do body building and he picked me up by one hand one day and threw me up against a concrete wall. He had no reason for doing it, he was just that type of bloke. He liked to show his authority and even the other brothers and priests were frightened of him.

53. I wasn't the only one. I reckon that if the thirty-nine boys who came over from Britain were asked, almost all would say they got the same treatment from Brother LHF. I would say he would have a go at somebody at least once a week.
54. I did not see any inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature, although I was aware of it. I was never sexually abused, because I wasn't backwards at coming forwards, but some of the other boys told me that they were. Quite a few of the other boys would talk of different Brothers going into the showers and the toilets with them. I would have known who the Brothers were at the time, but I wouldn't have a clue who they were now.

Reporting of abuse at John Bosco Boys' Town

55. Quite a few boys had to get medical treatment as a result of their being beaten by the Brothers, but nothing ever happened to change the way the Brothers behaved. There was nobody to go to and even if we had, they would just deny it.

Leaving John Bosco Boys' Town

56. When I turned sixteen I had to leave and I was sent up to a farm on the west coast of Tasmania. I was up there for a month working on the farm, but it was just so lonely. I couldn't settle down because I'd been around heaps of other children all my life up till then and up at the farm it was just the farmer and his wife.
57. I left and tried to go back to Boys' Town but they wouldn't take me back. I was put under the social service and they looked after me until I was twenty-one.
58. The social service found me somewhere to board, but it was very poor. I was sports mad and I wanted to play football and cricket and I was in the surf club, but the family weren't interested in sports at all. They tried to stop me from playing and for the twelve months I was in that house I never got one evening meal. I would be out

at football training or something else to do with sport, come back home and by that time I would have missed the evening meal.

59. I got a job as a butcher, but my pay had to go to the social service. They then paid my board and gave me a weekly allowance and if I wanted to buy something I had to go and ask them for money. I had no money of my own, or a bank account, it was all done by them. That finished when I turned twenty-one, but I never got the money that would have been left over.
60. One weekend I went to the surf club and got sunburned pretty badly. I couldn't go to work on the Monday so my boss contacted the social service and a bloke called Mr Warren came to see me. He had a go at me and I answered him back so he threatened to stick his boot up my bum.
61. He never did, but I told him I would come back and see him when I was twenty-one and see if he was still man enough to do it. I went back the day I turned twenty-one and challenged him. I didn't do anything to him, but I wanted him to know I hadn't forgotten.
62. I went to the football club that I was training with and told them my story so they took it up with the social services. A Mr Griffin from social services came to see me and told me to try find another place to board myself. He said that they would then check it out and if they thought it was okay that would be the last I would ever hear from them.
63. The football club got me a place and I think I was there for five or six years, maybe even longer. The woman at this place would do everything for me. Her husband had died and she cooked all my meals, did all my washing and all my ironing. I had to go to work at five o'clock in the morning on a Friday and even then she would be up and she would cook my breakfast. I couldn't have been treated any better.

Life after being in care

64. I continued working five days a week as a butcher and continued playing a lot of sport. In the summer, at six o'clock on a Friday night I'd finish work and go down to the surf club and I'd leave there at six o'clock on a Monday morning to go back to work. In the winter I played football or cricket, or whatever sport was available. I probably did that for ten years.
65. At that stage I wasn't interested in getting married, I was too involved in sport. I always said I wouldn't get married until I was thirty and I was twenty-nine when I married [REDACTED]. We've now been married for fifty years and have one son, [REDACTED].
66. I continued working as a butcher for forty-odd years and then worked for the Commonwealth Bank as a cleaner for nine years or so. I'm retired now.

Impact

67. I didn't know what was going on in the outside world while I was in care. When other boys and I left Boys' Town we didn't have a clue what to do. We'd never been outside the school and they never taught us about life. Once we left that was it, we had to fend for ourselves.
68. I had very little in the way of education both in Britain and at Boys' Town and couldn't even spell my own name when I left. I decided to do something about it and I have had a tutor for the last two or three years. As a result, I have gone from grade 2 level reading and writing to grade 7. Now I manage okay and my wife [REDACTED] helps.
69. I have a lot of problems with my feet now, which is because of having to wear shoes that were too small for me while I was at Boys' Town. Sometimes I could barely get my feet into the shoes I was given. I've had two toes taken off because my toes had been twisted and pushed under one another.

70. I also used to suffer tremendously badly from chilblains. Sometimes my hands were so swollen I couldn't hold anything. We were in shorts winter and summer and winters in Tasmania when I was at Boys' Town were very cold.
71. I've never had any support or counselling for my experiences as a child in care or as a child migrant.

Records and family tracing

72. I have never tried to get a copy of my records from when I was in care or to do with my migration.
73. Sometime during the mid-1990s, about eleven or twelve o'clock at night, I was in bed when the phone rang. My wife [REDACTED] answered and told me it was someone from the Child Migrants Trust (CMT) in England. I wasn't wanting to speak to them at that time, but I did and I was pretty blunt with the woman who phoned. I asked her who had given her permission to look into my background because I'd never asked them to do anything for me. I told her I didn't want them to do anything more and slammed the phone down.
74. Not long after that I got a letter from my Uncle [REDACTED] introducing himself and telling me a few things about my family back in the UK. I think the CMT had contacted me because Uncle [REDACTED] had been trying to trace me.
75. My wife [REDACTED] and I went to England and Scotland in 1996 and stopped for a few weeks. That's when I first met Uncle [REDACTED] and other members of my family and learned a bit more about my background. Some of my aunts and uncles said that they'd had an idea that I'd come to Australia, but that they couldn't find where I was.
76. There's a saying that you can pick your friends, but you can't pick your family and there are some I wouldn't waste my time with again, although others I got on really well with.

77. I still keep in touch with Uncle [REDACTED] daughter, but she's the only one. She came over here to Tasmania in 2000.

Other matters relating to migration/redress

78. Apparently we boys that went on to Tasmania were very lucky because some of the boys that stayed at Fairbridge in WA were treated something shocking.
79. I never raised my experiences as a child migrant with anybody official although I recently received a payment of £20,000 sterling from the British Government.
80. I also received compensation from the Tasmanian Government, which I think was 30,000 Australian dollars. I'm not sure when that was, but it was well before the British payment. The Tasmanian Premier at the time apparently thought we child migrants should receive some compensation for what we'd been through.
81. If I receive further compensation I would accept it. If they decide not to give us anything more, I am not going to carry on about it. I had nothing when [REDACTED] and I first got married. I had no family to help us and we found it pretty hard. Now we are in our own house and we are happy with what we've got, but a little bit more would make a big difference.

Nationality

82. The day I left school I wanted to be a naturalised Australian citizen, but in those days you didn't have to be. When I went to work for the Commonwealth Bank I had to be, so I got my citizenship at that time, on 16 July 1998. I now have the certificate hanging up on the wall. I've always been able to access any benefits, even before I was naturalised.

Letters to the Commons Select Committee

83. I am aware that the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry have a copy of a letter dated 30 May 1998 bearing my name and address at the time, addressed to the British Consulate General in Melbourne.
84. I don't recall sending this letter, but I believe it contains some detail of my migration and outlines some of my experiences. Attached to this letter is another letter, which is addressed to me and is from [REDACTED] Uncle [REDACTED]. It is dated 27 May 1998 and I am aware the Inquiry have a copy of this also.

Lessons to be learned/responses by government

85. I've been asked if I would ever go back to Britain, but my response is to question why I ever would when they threw me out of my country in the first place. That's what annoys me more than anything.
86. Some of the kids that were sent over as child migrants were told that they had no family whatsoever. It was only in later life that those kids found out their mothers and fathers were still alive and that they hadn't been told their children were being shipped off to Australia. I was told by the Priests and the Brothers when I first came to Tasmania that I had nobody.
87. Governments must tell the truth about what happened and admit to the lies that were told. I can't see why they did what they did and I wonder what the benefit was. I just hope that this doesn't happen to anybody else.

Other information

- 88. None of the homes are in existence now and the people are not around today, so where do we go from here?
- 89. Boys' Town has had about four different names over the years and is now called Dominic College and has an old scholars association. For a long time I wouldn't have anything to do with them, but we sent our son [REDACTED] there and I thought I'd get a little bit involved with them. I don't have anything to do with them whatsoever now though.
- 90. The Principal of the school now, Beth Gilligan, has done a tremendous amount of work for the child migrants. She got everyone together for the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of our arrival at Boys' Town and went through all the boys' histories. I don't think there was much for her to look into for me and other than her, nobody was interested whatsoever.
- 91. I went along and met up with a few of the other lads. I've always felt though that I had my own life to live and I was never one for mixing once I left.
- 92. There is a plaque at the school praising what Father LHH [REDACTED] did, but every time I went there I always point out that there are two sides to every story.
- 93. I think coming to Australia was probably the best thing that happened to me, I couldn't possibly live in Britain. I have my own house with plenty room to roam around and I enjoy my life here in Tasmania.
- 94. 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..... FBC [REDACTED]

Dated... 31. 1. 2020: